

Political Economy, *Criminally* Condensed

MARXISM

The fundamental “thing” in human history is the productive powers of society and their tendency to grow. A given set of productive powers favors certain “material relations of production” – forms of human cooperation or division of labor – which are not directly part of them, but facilitate their employment. They thereby also favor certain “social relations of production,” systems of social roles relating to the control of production process and the disposition of its fruits. The “economic structure of society” forms the “real basis” of social life, conditioning the superstructures, such as the political state and the ideological forms of consciousness found in religion, philosophy, morality, and art.

.....AND THE MASS MEDIA!!

Labour and the means of production provide the economic **base** which influences or determines the political and ideological **superstructure** (politics, law, morality, religion, art). teleology

Past and present social structure and social change can be explained in terms of economic factors. Society has evolved through stages – ancient, feudal, capitalist – which are characterized by differences in control and ownership of the means of production. Imbalances inherent in these systems leads to class struggle and, eventually, social change.

Dialectic: discussion in which progress toward the truth is made by critical examination

Kant: the method of showing that any attempt to speculate beyond the limits of possible experience leads to contradictions.

Hegel: the interaction of concepts such that one idea (the thesis) comes into contradiction with another (the antithesis), out of which a third idea (the synthesis) arises, which is more complete and closer to the truth than either of the two original ideas

Marx: Contradictions are class conflicts that are inherent in the economic conditions of one system and give rise to the emergence of another, more inclusive system. For every system of production there is an appropriate organization of class and property. While economic forces continually develop production systems, the class and property structure remains unchanged, causing tension between economic forces and social relations, which continues until the ultimate rational socialist society evolves.

“The **ideas of the ruling class** are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The 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 ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relations grasped as ideas; hence of the relations which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.” (39)

“...each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to present its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and present them as the only rational, universally valid ones.” (40) – “**the rule of ideas,**” **naturalization**

GRAMSCI

Gramsci was a founder-member of the Italian Communist Party; was imprisoned by Mussolini; while in jail, where he remained until his death, he wrote the *Prison Notebooks*.

Modified orthodox historical materialism (class conflict leading to revolution) to give an independent role of human consciousness and to the superstructure relative to the economic base.

Ideology: an aspect of “sensationalism” → “science of ideas” → “analysis of the origin of ideas” → a specific “system of ideas”

“...the meaning which the term ‘ideology’ has assumed in Marxist philosophy implicitly contains a negative value judgment...” (45) → **false consciousness**

“...the name ideology is given both to the necessary superstructure of a particular structure and to the arbitrary elucubrations (a writing produced by long, hard labor) of particular individuals” (45)

Errors: “ideology is defined as distinct from the structure, and it is asserted that it is not ideology that changes the structures but vice versa; it is asserted that a given political solution is ‘ideological’ – i.e., that it is not sufficient to change the structure, although it thinks it can do so...”; “...the assertion that every ideology is ‘pure’ appearance, useless, stupid, etc.” (45)

“a popular conviction often has the same energy as a material force of something of the kind...” (45-6, paraphrasing Marx)

The most prominent force in maintaining, defending, and developing the theoretical and ideological “front” – the “ideological structure of a dominant class” – is **the press** (46)

Hegemony: a politically dominant class maintains its position not simply by force, or the threat of force (social hegemony), but also by **consent** (cultural hegemony: producing ways of thinking and seeing, eliminating alternative views to reinforce the status quo). That consent is achieved by making compromises with other social and political forces, which are linked and which consent to a certain social order under the intellectual and moral leadership of the dominant class. Hegemony is produced and reproduces through a network of institutions, social relations, and ideas that are outside the directly political sphere (see Althusser’s ideological state apparatuses). The ruling class represents its interests as being everyone’s interests.

“the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as ‘domination’ and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership’” (Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks)

Hegemony is accepted and works because it grants concessions to subordinate groups (subaltern groups) that do not pose a serious threat to the dominant framework.

Hegemony is dynamic; it is a “contested and shifting set of ideas by means of which dominant groups strive to secure the consent of subordinate groups to their leadership, rather than as a consistent and functional ideology working in the interests of a ruling class by indoctrinating subordinate groups” (Dominic Strinati, An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture, 171)

One must overthrow the sources of hegemonic power – churches, school, the media, etc. – in order to overthrow the state.

Subaltern: Some believe that Gramsci used this term in place of “proletariat” to evade prison censors. Subaltern classes, or “groups,” are those that are subordinated by hegemony. There is a debate within “subaltern studies” regarding whether or not the subaltern, despite their disorganization and lack of class consciousness, can “speak,” can represent themselves, and perhaps break away from subordination.

FRANKFURT SCHOOL

A school of philosophy associated with the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research; involved in a reappraisal of Marxism, particularly in light of modern industrial society’s culture and aesthetics; key figures included Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse, who, in 1934, emigrated to New York and established the New School for Social Research.

Critique of Marxism: sought to get away from pure economic determinism, sought to address the importance of culture, rejected possibility of a working class revolution

Critical Theory: Regarded theory itself as subject to critique, since theory and its concepts are, like other aspects of culture, products of social processes; claimed that only a radical change in theory and practice can cure the ills of modern society – chief of which is unbridled technology

Critique of Enlightenment: “the total effect of the culture industry is one of anti-enlightenment, in which, as Horkheimer and I have noted, enlightenment, that is the progressive technical domination, becomes mass deception and is turned into a means of fettering consciousness. It impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves...while obstructing the emancipation for which human beings are as ripe as the productive forces of the epoch permit” (Adorno, The Culture Industry)

Enlightenment as Mass Deception

The Culture Industry transforms all cultural forms into commodities; these cultural commodities are **fetishized** – that is, valued primarily for their exchange value (as opposed to their use value), e.g., the price one pays for the concert ticket

“The commodities produced by the culture industry are governed by the need to realize their value on the market. The profit motive determines the nature of cultural forms. Industrially, cultural production is a process of **standardization** whereby produces / acquire the form common to all commodities....” And stamped onto these identical commodities is the **illusion of individuality**. (Dominic Strinati, An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture, 63)

“Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they / deliberately produce. They call themselves industries....” (71-2)

“The culture industry deals in falsehoods not truths, in false needs and false solutions, rather than real needs and real solutions.... In doing this, it takes over the consciousness of the masses. These masses, in Adorno’s eyes, become completely powerless. Power lies with the culture industry. Its products

encourage **conformity and consensus** which ensure obedience to authority, and the stability of the capitalist system.” (Strinati 64)

- Remind you of mass culture theory?

“The triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them.” (101)

- Recall Gramsci’s notion of “consent”

LOUIS ALTHUSSER

Reinterpreted traditional Marxism in light of structuralist theories

	RSA s	ISA s
Examples	Government, administration, army, police, courts, prisons	Religious ISAs (churches), education ISAs (public and private schools), family ISA, legal ISA, political ISA (parties, etc.), trade-union ISAs, communication ISAs, cultural ISAs (literature, arts, sports)
Number	One	Plurality
Orientation/Location/Organization	Unified, belongs to public domain “Constitutes and organized whole whose different parts are centralized beneath a commanding unity”	Dispersed, private domain “Multiple, distinct, ‘relatively autonomous’ and capable of providing an objective field to contradictions which express...the effects of clashes (class struggle)”
Unity	Secured by its unified and centralized organization under leadership of representatives of classes in power	Despite its diversity and contradictions, the unity of the ISAs is secured by ruling ideology
Means of Functioning	Functions “massively and predominantly by repression”; functions secondarily by ideology Secure political conditions for reproduction of relations of production either by force or by exploitation; contributes to its own reproduction; secures repression of the political conditions for the actions of ISAs (149-50)	ISAs function primarily by ideology, secondarily by repression All ISAs contribute to the same result: “the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e., of capitalist relations of exploitation” (p. 154)
		“no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses” (p. 146)
		Both the stake and site of class struggle (p. 147) “...the battle for state power is constantly fought within the ideological state apparatuses. Thus the practice, the structure, of ideology can itself be changed, is itself a human creation, within human (through not individual) power” (Roger Bellin)

Ideology is a ‘representation’ of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence (52)

“What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live” (52)

“all ideology hails or **interpellates** concrete individuals as concrete subjects” (55)

“the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology”; “the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of ‘constituting’ concrete individuals as subjects” (54)

the individual is hailed – “Hey, you there!” – the hailed individual will turn around, and, in so doing, “he becomes a subject” because “he has recognized that the hail was ‘really’ addressed to him, and that ‘it was *really him* who was hailed”” (55)

“You and I are *always already* subjects, and as such constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects” (55)

“It is indeed a peculiarity of ideology that it imposes (without appearing to do so, since these are ‘obviousnesses’) obviousnesses and obviousnesses, which we cannot fail to recognize and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out...: ‘That’s obvious! That’s right! That’s true!’” (54)

“the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection ‘all by himself’” (57)

“...the vast majority of (good) subjects work all right ‘all by themselves’, i.e. by ideology” (57)

JURGEN HABERMAS

Public Sphere: “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body.... Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions – about matters of general interest. In a large public body, this kind of communication requires **specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it.**” (102)

“...public opinion can by definition come into existence only when a reasoning public is presupposed. Public discussions about the exercise of political power which are both critical in intent and institutionally guaranteed have not always existed – they **grew out of a specific phase of bourgeois society** and could enter into the order of the bourgeois constitutional state only as a result of a particular constellation of interests.” (103)

The bourgeois public sphere, Habermas’s ideal type, depends on the existence of **new media forms and new meeting spaces** where social classes can congregate and engage in **rational-critical debate.**

Habermas acknowledges the role of the press in publicizing news and leading public opinion, in mediating and intensifying public discussion. He argues that, with the rise of the mass media and the influx of private interests, the public sphere is transformed. The public sphere... "becomes a field for the competition of interests.... With the interweaving of the public and private realms, not only do the political authorities assume certain functions in the sphere of commodity exchange and social labor, but, conversely, social powers now assume political functions. This leads to a kind of 'refeudalization' of the public sphere" (106). The political sphere becomes less critical, and "publicity" is reduced to "public relations." H. assumes that electronic media prohibit the development of rational public opinions. Some charge that Habermas's theory of the "public sphere" is based on a nostalgic view of 18th century publics – one defined by bourgeois hegemony and elite reading publics. He presents the "commodity" status of media as its eventual "undoing" – the free market is taken over by monopoly, and information loses its public character – yet he does not address the role of ownership in 18th century print culture, or the specific technologies of communication of the 18th and 21st centuries.

Furthermore, Habermas glosses over the inherently fragmented and contested nature of any public sphere. Can there be multiple discourses contending for supremacy? How does the nation figure into the public sphere? How do linguistic and dialectical difference factor into the public sphere?

Habermas's Contributions:

- Developed audience-oriented subjectivities; reading privately cultivated critical-rational sensibilities
- Conceived of a political dimension to all activities in society
- Addressed how the interaction of media and markets create new spaces for individual assertion, and what the political consequences are