MARX'S CRITICAL THEORY OF SOCIETY: CRITIQUES OF HEGELIAN PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

CommESoc/Soc 622: Advanced Topics in Critical Sociology Spring 2011

Jess Gilbert 340B Agriculture Hall 332.6766 Office Hours: T, 2.30-3.30; W, 5.15-6.15; & by app't. gilbert@ssc.wisc.edu

"...Hegel turned economist, Ricardo turned socialist."--description of young Marx.

"When Marxism developed, knowledge of what Marx wrote was inadequate....We have today a galaxy of different Marxisms, within which the place of Marx's own thought is ambiguous."

--Paul Thomas, The Cambridge Companion to Marx, 1991.

"What weight, for example, should be given to [Marx's] early works as against later, the humanist Marx of the 1844 Manuscripts as against the scientific Marx of Capital...? How are we to balance the always difficult, sometimes confused, but often brilliant Grundrisse against the polished masterpiece of world literature that is volume 1 of Capital?"

--Derek Sayer, Readings from Karl Marx, 1989.

In this course, we shall read and discuss most of Karl Marx's major theoretical writings. The two overall emphases are Marx's critique of Hegelian philosophy and his critique of political economy. Both of these critiques involve detailed analysis of capitalist society. One bright thread connecting them is the many-sided concept of human labor, which will occupy some of our attention. Another theme will be the debate over continuity or discontinuity in Marx's thought.

We shall proceed chronologically through Marx's work--after an overview of Hegel's deep influence. The first part of the semester is devoted to Marx's early philosophical writings, from 1843 to 1846. These years were a period of intense self-clarification for Marx, who was struggling to create a new, historical theory of society. Throughout the 1850s, he further developed his theory as a (somewhat Hegelian) critique of the main social science of the time, political economy. In the second half of the course, we read substantial parts of Marx's Grundrisse (foundations) along with Volume One of Capital (1867). The former exemplifies his method of investigation while the latter presented his theory to the world. This course offers an opportunity for a close study and exploration of Marx's critical theory of society.

"All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and humans at last are forced to face with sober senses the real conditions of their life and their relations with their kind."

--Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto, 1848.

"There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits."--Marx, <u>Capital</u>, Vol. 1, Preface to the French edition, 1872.

The following required books by Karl Marx are available at Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative (426 E. Gilman, 257-6050):

Early Writings. NY: Penguin/Vintage, 1975.

The German Ideology, Part 1 (with F. Engels). NY: International Publishers, 1970.

Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy. NY: Penguin/Vintage, 1973.

<u>Capital: A Critique of Political Economy</u>, Volume 1. NY: Penguin/Vintage, 1976. (Any other edition of Capital, Vol. 1, is okay although this is the best translation.)

* In addition, a required course packet is available from Bob s Pack & Ship (616 University Ave., 257-4536). It contains the first readings so *get it now*!

Course Requirements:

- 1. Close reading of the assigned texts.
- 2. Participation in class discussions.
- 3. Weekly written comments on the readings. These responses are intended (1) to show your engagement with the text, and (2) to help you prepare for class discussion. The content can be questions raised by the reading, criticisms, remarks, or extensions (e.g., how it relates to a special interest of yours)--or you can address issues raised in class. As the semester progresses, comparative comments on earlier readings may be useful. You may choose to pick one or two concepts to focus on over the term. Some possibilities include labor, idealism/materialism, Hegelianism, democracy, freedom, history, alienation, capital, science, ideology, theory, method, or dialectics, among others. Aim your comments to be 200-300 words per week, posted to the course at Learn@UW, every *Monday by 6 p. m.* If you are interested in doing a term paper, we can discuss this option after midterm.
- 4. Leading class discussion of a text. This includes a brief overview of the reading and raising provocative questions about it. [If you can't make your chosen date, call me!]

Grading: Each of the last three course requirements (#2 - #4) will account for one-third of your grade.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

I. The Power of Negative Thinking

"But the line from Hegel to Marx remains in many ways the most clear and intellectuallystructured theory of liberation of the modern world."

--Ch. Taylor, "Feuerbach and Roots of Materialism," Political Studies, 1978.

- 1/18 Introduction and Overview
- 1/25 Terrell Carver, "Reading Marx: Life and Works." Pp. 1-17 in T. Carver (ed.), <u>The Cambridge Companion to Marx</u> (NY: CUP, 1991).

Paul Thomas, "Critical Reception: Marx Then and Now." Ibid., pp. 23-54.

- Louis Dupre, "The Development of Hegel's Social Theory" and "Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*." Pp. 3-65 in <u>The Philosophical Foundations of Marxism</u> (NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966).
- Richard J. Bernstein, "Marx and the Hegelian Background: '*Geist*' and 'The Hegelian Origins of *Praxis*." Pp. 13-41 in *Praxis* and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity (Philadelphia: Univ. of Penn. Press, 1971).
- G. W. F. Hegel, "Lordship and Bondage" [1807]. Pp. 29-36 in John O Neill (ed.), Hegel's Dialectic of Desire and Recognition (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996).

II. Marx's First Critiques of Hegelian Philosophy (and Political Economy)

"I criticized the mystifying side of the Hegelian dialectic nearly thirty years ago, when it was still the fashion....In its rational form, [the dialectic] is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie..., being in its very essence critical and revolutionary."

--Marx, Capital, Vol. 1, Afterword to the 2nd edition, 1873.

Louis Dupre, "The Formation of Marx's Philosophy." Pp. 67-87 in <u>The Philosophical Foundations of Marxism</u> (NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966).

<u>Early Writings</u> [EW], *Suggested:* pp. 7-56 [editor's introduction], 199-209 [letters], 433-35[bio];

Required: pp. 429-32 [glossary].

"On the Jewish Question," 1843 [EW, pp. 211-41].

"A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," 1843/4 [EW, pp. 243-57]; *and:*

- <u>Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State</u>, 1843 [<u>EW</u>, pp. 57-58, 61-66, 72-73, 78-91, 98-102, 105-11, 118-20, 124-27, 137-50, 158, 164-69, 176-80, 185-92].
- 2/8 <u>Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts</u>, 1844 [<u>EW</u>, pp. 279-341]. Read also <u>EW</u>, pp. 259, 265-66, 277.5-78.
- 2/15 <u>Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts</u>, 1844 [EW, pp. 341-400].
- 2/22 "Theses on Feuerbach," 1845 [EW, pp. 421-23; also in The German Ideology, 121-3].

III. Marx's Critique of Political Economy (and Hegelian Philosophy)

The German Ideology, 1846, pp. 35-95. Strongly suggested: pp.1-34 [editor's intro].

"Of course, the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyze its different forms of development and to track down their inner connections. Only after this work has been done can the real movement be appropriately presented. If this is done successfully, if the life of the subject matter is now reflected back in the ideas, then it may appear as if we have before us an <u>a priori</u> construction." --Marx, <u>Capital</u>, Vol. 1, Afterword to the 2nd edition, 1873.

3/1 <u>Grundrisse</u>, *Strongly suggested:* pp. 7-80 [translator's foreword and analytical contents].

Required:

Pp. 81-111 [the 1857 Introduction; cf. transl. in our <u>The German Ideology</u>, pp. 124-51], 471-515 [appeared in 1964 as *Pre-Capitalist Social Formations*, ed. E. Hobsbawm], 450-71, 604-05, 610-14, 749-50, 533-43, 690-712, 735-36, 767-71, 776-79.

3/8 <u>Grundrisse</u>, pp. 143-51, 156-65, 171-73, 196-98, 221-26, 238-99, 304-11, 321-26, 359-64, 398-416, 585-95, 649-52, 831-32, 881-82. *Mardi Gras*!

Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, 1859 [EW, pp. 424-28].

Spring Break

3/22 <u>Capital</u>, *Strongly suggested*: pp. 11-88 [editor's introduction and translator's preface].

Required:

Capital, All Prefaces and Postfaces - Chap. 1 (reread Chap. 1, sections 1, 2, 4).

3/29 Capital, Chap. 2 - Chap. 3 (sections 1, 2a, 3; skim rest).

- 4/5 <u>Capital</u>, Chap. 4 Chap. 6.
- 4/12 <u>Capital</u>, Chap. 7 Chap. 10 (sections 1, 2, 7; skim rest).
- 4/19 <u>Capital</u>, Chap. 12 Chap. 14 (sections 1, 4, 5), and Chap. 15 (sections 1, 3a, 4, 10).
- 4/26 <u>Capital</u>, Chap. 16, Chap. 19, Chap. 23 Chap. 25 (sections 1- 4).
- 5/3 <u>Capital</u>, Chap. 26 Chap. 33.

Wrap-up and evaluation.

"The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living." --Marx, The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, 1852.