

**Sociology 621 Lecture 1. January 18, 2017. Marxism as an Emancipatory Social Science
OUTLINE**

I. Prologue: What this course is about

1. The history of the course
2. The Marxist Tradition versus *Marxism*.
3. My own relationship to the material.
4. Many Marxisms.
5. Learning the Language of Marxism.

II. Critical + Emancipatory + Social + Science

1. Foundations:

Foundational claim of *critical* social science: *Many forms of human suffering and many deficits in human flourishing are the result of existing institutions and social structures.*

Foundational claim of *emancipatory* social science: *Transforming those institutions and structures has the potential to reduce human suffering and expand the possibilities for human flourishing.*

Marxian Variant

Foundational critical thesis: *Many forms of human suffering and many deficits in human flourishing in the world today are the result of the class structure and dynamics of capitalism.*

Foundational emancipatory Thesis: *Transcending capitalism by creating a democratic-egalitarian political economy has the potential to reduce human suffering and expand the possibilities for human flourishing.*

2. Goals of Emancipatory Social Science

3. Reflexivity

4. Science: a special problem for Marxism

5. Summing up:

The “emancipatory” in emancipatory social science → *choice of questions to ask*

The “social science” in emancipatory social science → *a methodology for producing answers*

III. What kind of Critical Emancipatory theory is Marxism?

1. Emancipatory social transformation is possible.
2. Agents for such transformation come from within the game
3. Transformation comes through struggle
4. Punchline: Oppressed people can transform the conditions of their own oppression through struggle. BUT
5. Constraints: They do so under constraints “not of their choosing” which can thwart their efforts
6. Knowledge: Therefore: *to effectively transform the world in an emancipatory way we must understand the nature of the constraints themselves and how to transform them.*

IV. Four tasks of Emancipatory Social Science: (1) Normative foundations; (2) diagnosis and critique of the world as it exists; (3) envisioning viable alternatives; and, (4) a theory of transformation

Task #1: Normative Foundations

1. Interests versus Justice: what is the point?

2. Three Principles

1. Equality/Fairness: *In a just society all persons would have broadly equal access to the material and social means necessary to live a flourishing life.*
2. Democracy/Freedom: *In a fully democratic society, all people would have broadly equal access to the necessary means to participate meaningfully in decisions about things which affect their lives.*
3. Community/Solidarity: *People should cooperate with each other not simply because what they personally get out of it, but also out of a commitment to the wellbeing of others and a sense of moral obligation that this is the right thing to.*

Task #2. Diagnosis & Critique of capitalism

Task #3. Alternatives

- Limits of possibility different from natural limits
- Alternatives that emerge endogenously and prefigure future possibilities: immanent future
- Evaluation triplet: desirability, viability, achievability

Task #4. Transformation – lecture 4