

Sociology 621. Lecture 1 Outline

Setting the Agenda: the goals of Emancipatory Social Theory? September 3, 2003

I. Prologue: What this course is about

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

II. Critical Emancipatory Social Science

1. Marxism as a “Critical” Theory?

Two broad kinds of theoretical enterprises in social sciences:

#1. Attempts to describe and explain social phenomena in terms of the *actual variations which occur empirically* in the world. = “empiricism”

#2. Attempts to describe and explain social phenomena in terms of *variation beyond the limits of what has actually occurred in the world*. = “critical theory”. Slogan: “Another World is Possible”

2. Emancipatory Social Science: a way of thinking about content alternatives

3. Reflexivity

4. Three forms of Critical Theory: how the emancipatory alternative is understood

Can strictly *moral* terms (utopian critical theory).

Can terms of *feasible*, but not necessarily likely, alternatives.

Can terms of *immanent* alternatives, alternatives that are actively being posed by the causal forces at work in the existing world.

5. Science: tension between Marxism as revolutionary ideology and Marxism as critical social science

6. Summing up:

The “**Critical**” in critical social science → choice of questions to ask = analysis of the present from the point of view of emancipatory futures

The “**social science**” → a methodology for producing answers = specification of mechanisms, production of causal explanations, systematic use of evidence, etc.