

**Sociological Marxism**  
*Volume I: Analytical Foundations*

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## OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

### Chapter 1. Why Sociological Marxism?

This chapter situates the project of reconstructing Marxism as the basis for a social critique of capitalism. The pivot of the chapter is an initial statement of what it means to have a distinctively social – as opposed to economic or political – critique of capitalism. The chapter also maps out the four broad agendas facing a robust sociological Marxism.

### Chapter 2. Taking the Social in socialism seriously

This chapter proposes a way to think about the broad contours of the emancipatory alternative to capitalism. The central idea here is not to give any specific principles of institutional and social structural design for the alternative, but rather to explain the central principle which that design – whatever it might be – would attempt to establish. This involves an explication of the idea that different forms of society can be thought of as articulations of three primary forms or mechanisms of social cooperation: cooperation through authoritative regulation (the state), cooperation through the production and exchange of goods and services (the economy), and cooperation through voluntary association for collective purposes (civil society). All contemporary social systems involve all three of these; they coexist and interpenetrate in various forms and relations. In these terms, we propose the following definitions: *capitalism* is a social order within which the economy dominates both state and civil society; *statism* is a social order within which the state dominates both civil society and the economy; and *socialism* is a social order within which civil society dominates both state and economy. These are ideal types. We can also think of these articulations as variables: a society can be said to be capitalist to the extent that the economy dominates the other spheres; a society is socialist to the extent that civil society is dominant; and a society is statist to the extent that the state is dominant.

#### *Agenda 1*

#### *The conditions for and Obstacles to Human Flourishing*

### Chapter 2. Human Flourishing

This chapter has two major parts: Part One defines the concept of human flourishing and defends its importance as a normative anchor for a critique of capitalism. The central idea here is that “flourishing” is a way of thinking about the *realization of human potentials*: to say that people flourish is to say that they live in a context in which their potentials can develop robustly. This has both an *individual* and *social* dimension: the development of individual talents and capacities; and the development of the quality of the social relations within which people live.

Part Two elaborates three theses about the conditions for human flourishing. The idea here is to specify conditions in an institution-free manner – that is, without specifying any institutional or social structural details. This sets the stage for the specific analysis of capitalism with respect to

these conditions.

*Thesis 1. Micro-conditions for individual flourishing.* This thesis elaborates up a series of conditions in the immediate lives of people that are conducive to individual flourishing:

- the *basic needs condition*: this is the core of the elimination of material deprivations, suffering.
- *freedom from toil*: in order to develop talents/capacities people need time that is not directed simply at necessities, but at cultivation of capacities. This is a lifelong need, not just in childhood.
- *autonomy* conditions: Individuals need some measure of meaningful control over their activities to fully develop their capacities.

These are all conditions for individual flourishing.

*Thesis 2. Macro-conditions for social flourishing.* This thesis examines the macro conditions for social flourishing – i.e. for the development of robust reciprocities and universalistic solidarities. The conditions here are:

- *egalitarian distribution* of income: class divisions generate conflicts of material interests that fracture solidarities and reciprocities. Muted economic inequalities are conducive to a wider conception of shared interests and thus disposition for reciprocity. Egalitarianism is also crucial for satisfying the basic needs and freedom from toil condition for individual flourishing.
- *democracy* conditions: the process of deliberation and consensus formation is necessary for extending reciprocity and sustaining the egalitarianism.
- *cultural inclusiveness*:

*Thesis 3. Material possibility.* This argues for the basic idea that development of the forces of production makes it easier to satisfy the micro-conditions for flourishing.

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### Chapter 3. The Diagnosis and Critique of Capitalism

This chapter explores the relationship between capitalism and the conditions for human flourishing as elaborated in chapter 2. Three theses are advanced:

*Thesis 4. Capitalism's Progressiveness thesis.* This thesis explores the various ways in which capitalist development contributes to enlarging the potential for human flourishing. Of particular importance here is the impact of capitalism on the development of the forces of production. But there are also important ways in which capitalism creates conditions for democracy and for the kind of universalistic community conducive to extended flourishing.

*Thesis 5. The Capitalist Obstruction thesis.* Here the issue is the ways in which capitalism blocks the universalization of conditions for flourishing. The exposition here will link capitalism to each of the conditions specified in thesis 1 and 3 in chapter 2. The

elaborations of this thesis occupies a very large place in the Marxist tradition of social scientific research. Analyses of the ways in which capitalism generates inequalities, perpetuates toil, degrades skills, reduces autonomy, undermines democracy, fractures community, etc. all constitute empirical investigations of the capitalist obstruction thesis.

*Thesis 6. Anticapitalism thesis.* This is the basic punchline of Agenda 1: if the prior claims are convincing, then the conclusion is that enhancing human flourishing requires challenging capitalism.

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## *Agenda 2*

### *The obstacles to transforming capitalism*

The three chapters in this section explore in different ways why it is so difficult to transform capitalism in ways required by the previous discussion. This chapter will have a more didactic quality than the previous ones. Here we distill and organize some of the most durable and interesting ideas of neo-Marxist thinking from the 1960s early 1980's.

#### **Chapter 4. Capitalist Dynamics and Robust Reproduction**

This chapter will focus on the ways in which capitalism is reproduced through its economic logic – both in terms of the dynamics of development and in terms of the organization of daily life. I am not sure that this section can be distilled as a series of focused theses as in chapter 2 and 3, but perhaps it can. The issues I see as especially relevant here include:

- labor process discussion: ideas from manufacturing consent and related issues – for example, our discussion of contested exchange and consent in production.
- class structure: from polarization to complexity; lives, structures, and social reproduction
- commodification, extended reproduction: reductions in the space available for alternative practices
- capital accumulation as a self-perpetuating process
- consumerism and its logic of incorporation

#### **Chapter 5. Specialized Institutions of Capitalist Reproduction: state, ideology**

This chapter offers the opportunity to engage the base/superstructure reasoning of classical Marxism and discuss the functional logic of the state and ideology. This is the domain on which so much interesting work was done in the 1970s and early 1980s, and this could be a place where we would try to distill what we feel is the best in this. If we include this chapter it would be, basically, a chapter distillation of the guts of what I do in my class on Marxism (Sociology 621).

class, State and Ideology). Topics I would discuss here include:

- Offe & Therborn on the idea of negative selection, limits of possibility
- Przeworski on democratic integration, transition costs
- Moufeef on ideology and articulation of elements
- Elster on the microfoundations of ideology

## **Chapter 6. Hegemony and Class Compromise**

This concluding chapter in this block explains the idea of hegemony and class compromise as a general way of thinking about durable reproduction and obstacles to more radical change.

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### *Agenda 3*

#### *The possibilities for emancipatory transformation*

## **Chapter 7. The Classical Marxist Argument: the destiny and demise of capitalism**

This chapter tells the story of classical historical materialism and its logic of capitalist self-destruction. I like the formulation of this as the five theses that we had elaborated in earlier discussions:

*Thesis 7. The long-term nonsustainability of capitalism thesis.* In the long-run capitalism is an unsustainable social order. Its internal dynamics (laws of motion) will eventually destroy the conditions of its own reproducibility.

*Thesis 8. The intensification of anticapitalist class struggle thesis.* The dynamics of capitalist development systematically tend to: (1) increase the proportion of the population – the working class – whose interests are pervasively hurt by capitalism, while at the same time (2) increase the collective capacity of the working class to challenge capitalism. The result is an intensification of class struggle directed against capitalism.

*Thesis 9. The revolutionary transformation thesis.* Since capitalism becomes increasingly unsustainable (thesis 7) while the class forces arrayed against capitalism become increasingly numerous and capable of challenging capitalism (thesis 8), eventually the social forces arrayed against capitalism will be sufficiently strong and capitalism itself sufficiently weak that capitalism can be overthrown.

*Thesis 10. The transition to socialism thesis.* Given the ultimate nonsustainability of capitalism (thesis 7), and the interests and capacities of the social actors arrayed against capitalism (thesis 8), in the aftermath of the destruction of capitalism through intensified class struggle (thesis 9), socialism, defined as a society in which the working class collectively controls the system of production, is its most likely successor (or in an even stronger version of the thesis: its *inevitable* successor).

*Thesis 11. The Communism Destination Thesis.* The dynamics of socialist development tendentially leads to a strengthening of community solidarity and a progressive erosion of material inequalities so that eventually classes and the state will “wither away”, resulting in the emergence of a communist society governed by the distributional principle “to each according to need, from each according to ability”

## **Chapter 8. Ruptural transformation vs metamorphosis.**

This chapter sets up the contrast between ruptural and nonruptural ways of thinking about fundamental transformation. This discussion basically revisits the age old contrast between revolution vs reformism. One of the central ideas here is to reject the view that a radical vision of emancipatory change implies a ruptural approach to strategies and processes of change.

## **Chapter 9. Contradictory reproduction**

This chapter is the pivotal theoretical chapter that sets up the envisioning real utopias discussion. It is the complement to the robust reproduction idea – the idea that reproduction is not a coherent, totalizing, integrative process, that there are contradictions and incoherences that open up spaces for anti-systemic practices. We had developed a series of theses for this set of problems, and we may still want to use them, but I am not sure. In any case, they are:

*Thesis 12. The social reproduction of capitalism thesis.* By virtue of (a) the exploitative conflict-generating character of capitalist class relations, and (b) the negative social and economic externalities of capitalist market competition, capitalism is an inherently unstable form of social relations and thus requires active institutional arrangements for its reproduction.

*Thesis 13. The contradictions of capitalism thesis.* By virtue of the dynamics of capitalist society, the institutional solutions to the problems of social reproduction of capitalism at any point in time have a systematic tendency to erode and become less functional over time.

*Thesis 14. Institutional Crisis and Renovation thesis.* Because of the continual need for institutions of social reproduction (thesis 13) and the tendency for the reproductive capacity of given institutional arrangements to erode over time (thesis 14), institutions of social reproduction in capitalist societies will tend to be periodically renovated in the face of social disruption and crisis.

*Thesis 15. Non-inevitability of Functional Optimality thesis.* The institutions of social reproduction that are constructed out of contradictions and crises need not be optimal for the functioning of capitalism or the interests of capital. The actual form of these institutional solutions and the extent to which they intensify or mute the inegalitarian, exploitative and oppressive logics of capitalism depends upon the balance of class (and other) social forces

There are a range of specific discussions which will be subsumed under various groups of these theses:

- Problems of “Frankenstein effects”: how capitalism fosters institutions which need autonomous powers to be effective, but whose autonomy can contradict capitalist interests. This is especially relevant to the problem of regulation and the state.
  - liberal freedoms and rights open up spaces for collective organization/association
  - perhaps my class compromise and workers power argument
  - race and gender struggles as opened up by capitalist development but difficult to accommodate fully.
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#### *Agenda 4* *Envisioning Real Utopias*

### **Chapter 10. The idea of Real Utopias**

This chapter returns to the themes of chapter 2, but reorients it towards the problem of institutional design. This includes a discussion of the problem of unintended consequences and difficulty in predicting new institutional equilibria in the face of radical shifts in the parameters of social reproduction. One response to this is the Hayek claim about the impossibility of coherent radical change. The alternative is a perspective on pragmatic democratic experimentalism in which incrementalism is oriented towards fundamental reordering of social dynamics. The question, then, is what institutional innovations open up such possibilities – possibilities for virtuous cycles of democratic feedback. In line with the arguments of chapter two, the concrete implementation of this perspective involves the problem of social-izing democracy and social-izing the market and production.

### **Chapter 11. Civil society and the economy**

The first set of institutional proposals we examine centers on empowering civil society with respect to economic institutions. Here we look at three proposals: Basic Income, market socialism, and pension socialism.

### **Chapter 12. Civil society and the state**

The second cluster of proposals concerns the civil society/state relation. Here we will look at associative democracy and empowered participatory governance.

### **Chapter 13. Conclusion**