

A. Introduction

In the last lesson, the student considered the general secular Darwinian context in which Marxian communism arose. This time the student will consider the man, Marx, and his thought directly. The course goal is **to evaluate Soviet Communism**.

B. The People

Karl Marx, with his capitalist friend Friedrich Engels, published the famous Communist Manifesto in 1848 and Das Kapital in 1867. The slogan for Marx was: "Proletariats (urban workers) of the world, unite!" This slogan was implemented by various Internationales. Just before publishing Das Kapital, Marx founded the first Socialist International at London, which lasted eight¹ years. Twenty years later, at the International Congress of Paris, the disciples of Marx (now more professional) founded the Second Socialist International still in existence, having its headquarters at London. The Soviets, masters of Russia since 1919, have a parallel organization, the Third International, at Moscow.

C. Theory

Marxist historians like to portray Marxism-Leninism as a science, whereas Marxism-Leninism is an ideology. Science works by strength of reason, ideology by strength of force.² The anti-religious and atheistic precepts of Marxism-Leninism are related to the ruthless institutions of Soviet society. It is a mistake to identify Marxism itself as a religion.³

Das Kapital was intended as a work on economics, rather than philosophy. Degree of civilization was measured by material wealth. It was not nurture that determined nature, but it was nature that determined nurture. Economic position determined disposition, not vice versa. The central intuition for Marx was that economic life realized the law of becoming, with the three periods of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis proposed by Hegel.

The dialectic forms the core of Marxist thought. For Marx himself, as well as for Lenin and Chinese premier, Mao Zedong (1893-1976), historical materialism constituted the dialectic of action. For Engels and Stalin, historical materialism remained a dialectical materialism, a dialectic of nature, rather than a dialectic of action. As a dialectic of action, Marxism was both a method of social analysis and a guide to further human action. This Stalinist interpretation of Marx is a part of radical-political historiography and a challenge to traditional academic historiography, viz. that, according to Stalin, there is no dialogue within the dialectic itself.⁴

The seduction of Marx, as found in Kapital, may be found in four main propositions: the true value (Valerie) of all merchandise is equal to the quantity of labor incorporated into it. Capital is a continuous theft (Thelma) of work of the proletariat class by the capitalist class. Machinery (Madge) heightens the conflict. The means (Minnie) of production will become the collective property of all. Dr. Jirran is suggesting that this view may best be remembered as a prostitution (Valerie, Thelma, Madge, and Minnie) of reality.

Marx left his memory in philosophy and history. Marx wrestled with one of the perennial problems of human nature, the conflict between human freedom and natural necessity, between becoming and being. Kant tried and failed, as did Hegel, both before Marx. Hegel thought that the human goal was ever-increasing human freedom.⁵ Both Kant and Hegel were theists. The atheists, Nietzsche⁶ and Heidegger, reached past Marx and found a way to resolve the issue by proclaiming that nothing made sense, i.e., nihilism. With Marx, change took precedence.

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D. Practical Difficulties

Marx thought that the working people of Europe would think of themselves as an army in battle. Marx was wrong. Christianity remained, as did national loyalties. What Marx missed was that socialism and class-consciousness are contingent and fragile achievements of political struggle that Marx regarded as necessary and automatic products of the development of capitalism.⁷

Marx had a problem with recognizing the middle classes. For Marx, there were only two classes, capitalist and proletariat; dominant and dominated. The middle class was artificial because the middle class held no definable and essential relationship to the means of production. The middle class had no potential for either coherence or self-consciousness.⁸

The contemporary hypocrisy of Soviet Communism stands out starkly in the 1956 invasion of Hungary and elsewhere in the world and in history. The U.S. thinker, Max Eastman, pointed out that once Marxism itself can be analyzed as an ideology, even radical self-consciousness may be seen as an objective illusion. By reducing the self to objective illusion, Marx reduced his philosophical framework to absurdity. When Marxian philosophy reduces ideas to motives or the rationalization of a wish, the philosophy itself tends to self-destruct.⁹ Marx is fundamentally absurd, yet scholars have accepted him to the point where silence in the lecture would be a disservice to the students.

E. Conclusion

Marx had the insight into the nature of his and our times. While he was effective in pointing out certain injustices, he was not as effective in pointing out how to remedy them, although scholars are using these theories more and more toward that purpose.

Supplement

F. Introduction

What follows are some comments on Historical Problems, which extend through Capital, Urbanization and Slavery.

G. Historical Problems

Marxist Historians focus on five main eras: (1) The Protestant revolt, (2) the foreign policy of Frederick the Great, (3) the revolutions of 1848, (4) the development of the Social Democratic party among the Soviets, and (5) the National Socialist seizure of power in Germany. Marxist historians have difficulty dealing with the conventionally political structure of German history—Middle Ages, Reformation and Thirty Years' War, absolutism, liberation, Second Empire, Weimar Republic, and Nazism.¹⁰

H. Feminism

There is a danger to a "gender oriented approach to the past that ignores women as members of social classes, national, or racial groups."¹¹ Class orientation explains why socialist proletarian women and middle-class bourgeois feminists have found it difficult to cooperate.

I. Capital

The descriptions offered in the lecture proper are designed to cope with some of the good ideas of Marx. Whereas the Enlightenment regarded society and property as natural, Rousseau cast

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society and property into artificial modes. Marx also thought that society and property relations were human in nature.¹²

As the Russian serfs used to put it, "I belong to my lord, but the land belongs to me." This means that private property has historically meant bourgeois property, rather than feudal property. The idea of feudal property contained diverse claims to the same property. There is far more of an absolutist character to the meaning of property in a capitalist system.¹³

The great historian Braudel contributes to the understanding of capital.

Capital is a tangible reality, a congeries of easily identifiable financial resources, constantly at work; a capitalist is a man who presides or attempts to preside over the insertion of capital into the ceaseless process of production to which every society is destined; and capitalism is, roughly (but only roughly) speaking, the manner in which this constant activity is carried on, generally for not very altruistic reasons.¹⁴

Marx may have been correct for ridiculing the great historian Theodor Mommsen for insisting that capitalism existed in the ancient world. Whereas others had regarded capital as a thing, Marx demonstrated that more precisely capital was a social relation between the buyers and sellers of labor. According to Marx, the slave did not fit the capitalist mode because the slave was not paid wages for his labor.¹⁵

J. Urbanization

The city is the source of liberty for the common people because, in the city, the common people cannot be monitored. What may have been really at issue may not have been a clash between the classes, but rather better communication among the masses. In this way, the French Revolution was about raising the commoners against the aristocracy. Militarily, this was what happened. The commoners could be brought together effectively because there were sufficient numbers of them in Paris to begin an army.¹⁶

Capitalism was the guide to life in the city for employer and employee alike. The Genoveses observe that "pre-1789 France was a society of estates, whereas post-1815 France was a society of classes."¹⁷ The professor is unimpressed with this observation. Self-recognition is not a prerequisite for social stratification. Here the Genoveses seem to be forcing the facts into their preconceived notions.

The Genoveses have developed some effective long-term analyses of business cycles. The accomplishments of merchant capital from the tenth to the fifteenth century included the wool trade between England and the Netherlands; the growth of Florentine cloth production; the development of Venice; the establishment of plantations in the Azores; Sicily under Frederick II; the shipping of Genoa; the growing splendor of the Papal courts. The more modest trading of inland Europe bound isolated agricultural regions more tightly upon themselves. The Genoveses maintain that "Only the most intrepid would, in the face of the most commonsensical evidence, speak of a European market or even of national markets."¹⁸ The Genoveses seem unaware of the work of Pirenne and the functions of the Champagne market, even during the Middle Ages.

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The Genoveses do better in Early Modern Times. As early as 1670-1690 overproduction lowered the prices of sugar in the Caribbean and Brazil to a point of economic disaster. In the 140 years following 1570, nonetheless, sugar production in Brazil rose by 450 percent. According to capitalist theory, this is supposed to mean that inefficient modes of production were forced out of business and that is apparently, what happened.¹⁹

Sugar production required heavy capital investment, which neither tobacco nor cotton did. Gradually political and economic forces shifted the refining process to Europe. When Portugal tried to help her colony, Brazil, by forbidding sugar refining in Lisbon, it was to no avail because Amsterdam and Hamburg took up the task. Later, similar phenomena also took place in the cotton industry.

K. Slavery

Current Marxist historians like to look at capitalism, slavery, and republican values prior to the U.S. Civil War. Economic meaning gave moral meaning to all of these institutions.²⁰ Marx, on the one hand, thought that slavery existed at the heart of the property relation itself.²¹ A favorite conceit of American cultural history, on the other hand, regards Calvinism as a spent force in the U.S. before the Civil War.²² To the contrary, the Professor thinks Marxists and non-Marxists have something to offer each other in interpreting history.

The truth of the matter is that by the turn of the Twentieth Century, the remaining Calvinists offered the most coherent and convincing rebuttal available against the onrushing secularism. The problem was that the Calvinists erred in mistrusting non-WASPs so that the Calvinists were unable to work in harmony with others of like mind, such as the Roman Catholics. This inability to work together left room for secular humanism in both the schools and society at large. As a result, Marxist thinking was able to move along effectively unchallenged by institutional religion.

Marxists, like the Genoveses, are able to smirk that "the first emancipation did not arise from the parliamentary niceties in London, but from the conjuncture of the Jacobin ascendancy in revolutionary Paris with the greatest slave revolt in world history, in Saint-Domingue."²³ The Genoveses rightly point to

. . . the critical participation of Black peoples in the making of the modern world . . . in the swelling worldwide movement for democracy and social justice. . . . Without the slave revolts and Black participation in national liberation and reform movements, reaction would have scored greater triumphs than it did and might have rolled back those forces for change which have shaped the Twentieth Century. . . . The revolutionary and even reformist movements among the slaves, like the great peasant revolts of Europe and elsewhere, played an indispensable role in launching the worldwide democratic movement that culminated in the rise of socialism.²⁴

The Genoveses report that the Civil War was a clash between the bourgeoisie North and the yet feudal South. In this way, the North, rather than the South, required absolute control over people and things. The 1990 movie, "Glory" helps focus the claim of the Genoveses. While Colonel Shaw of the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Regiment may have been bourgeois, his Black regiment was not. Shaw died to free people, not further enslave them. The Professor thinks that the Genoveses over-simplify North-South similarities and differences.

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Comments on the Seventh Edition of Chambers, pages 881-883

In the opinion of the professor, Chambers is the most scholarly textbook on the market. Chambers well represents mainstream thinking in the history profession. The professor, however, disagrees in many significant ways with mainstream thinking. Some of these disagreements are set forth above and others in the following comments.

Page	Column	Paragraph	Line	
882	1	2	9	The dialectic ...

See page 282, column 2, paragraph 2, lines 3-5 where dialectic is defined as “the art of analyzing the logical relationships among propositions in a dialogue or discourse.”

Endnotes

¹ The February 5, 1990 edition of the lecture had four years, but the 1974 first edition of Chambers, on page 909 as well as the 1991 fifth edition on page 1027, the 1995 sixth edition on page 848; and the 1999 seventh edition on page 919. all have eight

² Dennis J. Dunn, review of Scientific Atheism' and the Study of Religion and Atheism in the USSR. (Religion and Reason, number 25.) in The American Historical Review, 89 (June 1984): 817-8.

³ Martin J. De Nys, review of David McLellan, Marxism and Religion. A Description and Assessment of the Marxist Critique of Christianity in The Catholic Historical Review, 75 (February 1989): 122.

⁴ See David M. Lowe, review of Norman Levine, Dialogue within Dialectic, in The American Historical Review, 90, (February 1985): 106.

⁵ Thomas B. Alexander, review of Allen Kaufman, Capitalism, Slavery, and Republican Values: Antebellum Political Economists, 1819-1848 in The American Historical Review, 89, (April 1984): 520.

⁶See, for example, Roderick Stackelberg, review of Peter Bergmann, Nietzsche, "The Last Antipolitical German" in The American Historical Review, Vol. 93 No. 3 (June 1988), pages 724-725.

⁷ William H. Sewell, Jr., "Uneven Development, the Autonomy of Politics, and the Dockworkers of Nineteenth-Century Marseille," The American Historical Review, Vol. 93 No. 2 (June 1988), page 637.

⁸ The American Historical Review, 90, (April 1985), p. 303.

⁹ Loren R. Graham, "Science and Values: The Eugenics Movement in Germany and Russia in the 1920's," The American Historical Review, 82, (December 1977): 1133-1164.

¹⁰ Thomas A. Brady, Jr. and Roger P. Chickering, review of Andreas Dorpalen, German History in Marxist Perspective: The East German Approach in The American Historical Review, 93 (February 198): 166.

¹¹ Richard J. Evans, Comrades and Sisters: Feminism, Socialism, and Pacifism in Europe, 1870-1945, page 71 as cited in the review by Marie Marmo Mullaney in The American Historical Review, Vol. 94 No. 1 (February 1989), page 125.

¹² Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), page 296.

¹³ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), page 345.

¹⁴ Braudel footnote 3, page 428, *Afterthoughts on Material Civilization and Capitalism* (Baltimore, 1977), in text on page 47, as cited in Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), page 191.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), page 20-21.

¹⁶ The ideas for this paragraph are a spin-off from Gunther Barth, review of David Harvey, The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization and Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization in The American Historical Review, 92 (February or April 1987): 386-7.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), page 230.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), page 90.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), page 45.

²⁰ Alexander, review of Kaufman, p. 520.

²¹ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), page 297.

²² Paul A. Carter, review of Gary Scott Smith, The Seeds of Secularization: Calvinism, Culture, and Pluralism in America, 1870-1915, in The American Historical Review, 90, (December 1985), 1280.

²³ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), page 404. A careful development of the freeing of the French slaves is found in David Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession during the Constituent Assembly," The American Historical Review, 94 (December 1989): 1290-1308.

²⁴ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), page 410-411.