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# Modern Sociological Theory

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# Varieties of Neo-Marxian Theory

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## Chapter Outline

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Hegelian Marxism

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In this chapter we deal with a variety of theories that are better reflections of Marx's ideas than are the conflict theories discussed at the close of the preceding chapter. Although each of the theories discussed here is derived from Marx's theory, there are many important differences among them.

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## Economic Determinism

Marx often sounded like an economic determinist; that is, he seemed to consider the economic system of paramount importance and to argue that it determined all other sectors of society—politics, religion, idea systems, and so forth. Although Marx did see the economic sector as preeminent, at least in capitalist society, as a dialectician he could not have taken a deterministic position, because the dialectic is characterized by the notion that there is continual feedback and mutual interaction among the various sectors of society. Politics, religion, and so on, cannot be reduced to epiphenomena determined by the economy, because they affect the economy just as they are affected by it. Despite the nature of the dialectic, Marx still is interpreted as an economic determinist. Although some aspects of Marx's work would lead to this conclusion, adopting it means ignoring the overall dialectical thrust of his theory.

Agger (1978) argued that economic determinism reached its peak as an interpretation of Marxian theory during the period of the Second Communist International, between 1889 and 1914. This historical period often is seen as the apex of early market capitalism, and its booms and busts led to many predictions about its imminent

demise. Those Marxists who believed in economic determinism saw the breakdown of capitalism as inevitable. In their view, Marxism was capable of producing a scientific theory of this breakdown (as well as other aspects of capitalist society) with the predictive reliability of the physical and natural sciences. All an analyst had to do was examine the structures of capitalism, especially the economic structures. Built into those structures was a series of processes that inevitably would bring down capitalism, and so it was up to the economic determinist to discover how these processes worked.

Friedrich Engels, Marx's collaborator and benefactor, led the way in this interpretation of Marxian theory, as did Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein. Kautsky, for example, discussed the inevitable decline of capitalism as

unavoidable in the sense that the inventors improve technic and the capitalists in their desire for profit revolutionize the whole economic life, as it is also inevitable that the workers aim for shorter hours of labor and higher wages, that they organize themselves, that they fight the capitalist class and its state, as it is inevitable that they aim for the conquest of political power and the overthrow of capitalist rule. Socialism is inevitable because the class struggle and the victory of the proletariat is inevitable.

(Kautsky, cited in Agger, 1978:94)

The imagery here is of actors impelled by the structures of capitalism into taking a series of actions.

It was this imagery that led to the major criticism of scientifically oriented economic determinism—that it was untrue to the dialectical thrust of Marx's theory. Specifically, the theory seemed to short-circuit the dialectic by making individual thought and action insignificant. The economic structures of capitalism that determined individual thought and action were the crucial element. This interpretation also led to political quietism and therefore was inconsistent with Marx's thinking (Guilhot, 2002). Why should individuals act if the capitalist system was going to crumble under its own structural contradictions? Clearly, given Marx's desire to integrate theory and practice, a perspective that omits action and even reduces it to insignificance would not be in the tradition of his thinking.

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## Hegelian Marxism

As a result of the criticisms just discussed, economic determinism began to fade in importance, and a number of theorists developed other varieties of Marxian theory. One group of Marxists returned to the Hegelian roots of Marx's theory in search of a subjective orientation to complement the strength of the early Marxists at the objective, material level. The early Hegelian Marxists sought to restore the dialectic between the subjective and the objective aspects of social life. Their interest in subjective factors laid the basis for the later development of critical theory, which came to focus almost exclusively on subjective factors. A number of thinkers (for example, Karl Korsch) could be taken as illustrative of Hegelian Marxism, but we will focus on the work of one who has gained great prominence, Georg Lukács

(Aronowitz, 2001; Markus, 2005), especially his book *History and Class Consciousness* (1922/1968). We also pay brief attention to the ideas of Antonio Gramsci.

## Georg Lukács

The attention of Marxian scholars of the early twentieth century was limited mainly to Marx's later, largely economic works, such as *Capital* (1867/1967). The early work, especially *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (1932/1964), which was more heavily influenced by Hegelian subjectivism, was largely unknown to Marxian thinkers. The rediscovery of the *Manuscripts* and their publication in 1932 was a major turning point. However, by the 1920s Lukács already had written his major work, in which he emphasized the subjective side of Marxian theory. As Martin Jay puts it, "*History and Class Consciousness* anticipated in several fundamental ways the philosophical implications of Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*, whose publication it antedated by almost a decade" (1984:102). Lukács's major contribution to Marxian theory lies in his work on two major ideas—reification (Dahms, 1998) and class consciousness.

### *Reification*

Lukács made it clear from the beginning that he was not totally rejecting the work of the economic Marxists on reification, but simply seeking to broaden and extend their ideas. Lukács commenced with the Marxian concept of commodities, which he characterized as "the central, structural problem of capitalist society" (1922/1968:83). A *commodity* is at base a relation among people that, they come to believe, takes on the character of a thing and develops an objective form. People in their interaction with nature in capitalist society produce various products, or commodities (for example, bread, automobiles, motion pictures). However, people tend to lose sight of the fact that they produce these commodities and give them their value. Value comes to be seen as being produced by a market that is independent of the actors. The *fetishism of commodities* is the process by which commodities and the market for them are granted independent objective existence by the actors in capitalist society. Marx's concept of the fetishism of commodities was the basis for Lukács's concept of reification.

The crucial difference between the fetishism of commodities and reification lies in the extensiveness of the two concepts. Whereas the former is restricted to the economic institution, the latter is applied by Lukács to all of society—the state, the law, and the economic sector. The same dynamic applies in all sectors of capitalist society: people come to believe that social structures have a life of their own, and as a result those structures do come to have an objective character. Lukács delineated this process:

Man in capitalist society confronts a reality "made" by himself (as a class) which appears to him to be a natural phenomenon alien to himself; he is wholly at the mercy of its "laws"; his activity is confined to the exploitation of the inexorable fulfillment of certain individual laws for his own (egoistic) interests. But even while "acting" he remains, in the nature of the case, the object and not the subject of events.

(Lukács, 1922/1968:135)

In developing his ideas on reification, Lukács integrated insights from Weber and Simmel. However, because reification was embedded in Marxian theory, it was seen as a problem limited to capitalism and not, as it was to Weber and Simmel, the inevitable fate of humankind.

### ***Class and False Consciousness***

*Class consciousness* refers to the belief systems shared by those who occupy the same class position within society. Lukács made it clear that class consciousness is neither the sum nor the average of individual consciousnesses; rather, it is a property of a group of people who share a similar place in the productive system. This view leads to a focus on the class consciousness of the bourgeoisie and especially of the proletariat. In Lukács's work, there is a clear link between objective economic position, class consciousness, and the "real, psychological thoughts of men about their lives" (1922/1968:51).

The concept of class consciousness necessarily implies, at least in capitalism, the prior state of *false consciousness*. That is, classes in capitalism generally do not have a clear sense of their true class interests. For example, until the revolutionary stage, members of the proletariat do not fully realize the nature and extent of their exploitation in capitalism. The falsity of class consciousness is derived from the class's position within the economic structure of society: "Class consciousness implies a class-conditioned *unconsciousness* of one's own socio-historical and economic condition. . . . The 'falseness,' the illusion implicit in this situation, is in no sense arbitrary" (Lukács, 1922/1968:52; Starks and Junisbai, 2007). Most social classes throughout history have been unable to overcome false consciousness and thereby achieve class consciousness. The structural position of the proletariat within capitalism, however, gives it the unique ability to achieve class consciousness.

The ability to achieve class consciousness is peculiar to capitalist societies. In precapitalist societies, a variety of factors prevented the development of class consciousness. For one thing, the state, independent of the economy, affected social strata; for another, status (prestige) consciousness tended to mask class (economic) consciousness. As a result, Lukács concluded, "There is therefore no possible position within such a society from which the economic basis of all social relations could be made conscious" (1922/1968:57). In contrast, the economic base of capitalism is clearer and simpler. People may not be conscious of its effects, but they are at least unconsciously aware of them. As a result, "class consciousness arrived at the point where it could become conscious" (Lukács, 1922/1968:59). At this stage, society turns into an ideological battleground in which those who seek to conceal the class character of society are pitted against those who seek to expose it.

Lukács compared the various classes in capitalism on the issue of class consciousness. He argued that the petty bourgeoisie and the peasants cannot develop class consciousness because of the ambiguity of their structural position within capitalism. Because these two classes represent vestiges of society in the feudal era, they are not able to develop a clear sense of the nature of capitalism. The bourgeoisie can develop class consciousness, but at best it understands the development of

capitalism as something external, subject to objective laws, that it can experience only passively.

The proletariat has the capacity to develop true class consciousness, and as it does, the bourgeoisie is thrown on the defensive. Lukács refused to see the proletariat as simply driven by external forces but viewed it instead as an active creator of its own fate. In the confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the former class has all the intellectual and organizational weapons, whereas all the latter has, at least at first, is the ability to see society for what it is. As the battle proceeds, the proletariat moves from being a “class in itself,” that is, a structurally created entity, to a “class for itself,” a class conscious of its position and mission (Bottero, 2007). In other words, “the class struggle must be raised from the level of economic necessity to the level of conscious aim and effective class consciousness” (Lukács, 1922/1968:76). When the struggle reaches this point, the proletariat is capable of the action that can overthrow the capitalist system.

Lukács had a rich sociological theory, although it is embedded in Marxian terms. He was concerned with the dialectical relationship among the structures (primarily economic) of capitalism, the idea systems (especially class consciousness), individual thought, and, ultimately, individual action. His theoretical perspective provides an important bridge between the economic determinists and more modern Marxists.

## Antonio Gramsci

The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci also played a key role in the transition from economic determinism to more modern Marxian positions (Davidson, 2007; Beilharz, 2005b; Salamini, 1981). Gramsci was critical of Marxists who are “deterministic, fatalistic and mechanistic” (1971:336). In fact, he wrote an essay entitled “The Revolution against ‘*Capital*’” (Gramsci, 1917/1977) in which he celebrated “the resurrection of political will against the economic determinism of those who reduced Marxism to the historical laws of Marx’s best-known work [*Capital*]” (Jay, 1984:155). Although he recognized that there were historical regularities, he rejected the idea of automatic or inevitable historical developments. Thus, the masses had to act in order to bring about a social revolution. But to act, the masses had to become conscious of their situation and the nature of the system in which they lived. Thus, although Gramsci recognized the importance of structural factors, especially the economy, he did not believe that these structural factors led the masses to revolt. The masses needed to develop a revolutionary ideology, but they could not do that on their own. Gramsci operated with a rather elitist conception in which ideas were generated by intellectuals and then extended to the masses and put into practice by them. The masses could not generate such ideas, and they could experience them, once in existence, only on faith. The masses could not become self-conscious on their own; they needed the help of social elites. However, once the masses had been influenced by these ideas, they would take the actions that lead to social revolution. Gramsci, like Lukács, focused on collective ideas rather than on social structures like the economy, and both operated within traditional Marxian theory.

Gramsci's central concept, one that reflects his Hegelianism, is hegemony (for a contemporary use of the concept of hegemony, see the discussion of the work of Laclau and Mouffe later in this chapter; Abrahamsen, 1997). According to Gramsci, "the essential ingredient of the most modern philosophy of praxis [the linking of thought and action] is the historical-philosophical concept of 'hegemony'" (1932/1975:235). *Hegemony* is defined by Gramsci as cultural leadership exercised by the ruling class. He contrasts hegemony to coercion that is "exercised by legislative or executive powers, or expressed through police intervention" (Gramsci, 1932/1975:235). Whereas economic Marxists tended to emphasize the economy and the coercive aspects of state domination, Gramsci emphasized "'hegemony' and cultural leadership" (1932/1975:235). In an analysis of capitalism, Gramsci wanted to know how some intellectuals, working on behalf of the capitalists, achieved cultural leadership and the assent of the masses.

Not only does the concept of hegemony help us understand domination within capitalism, but it also serves to orient Gramsci's thoughts on revolution. That is, through revolution, it is not enough to gain control of the economy and the state apparatus; it is also necessary to gain cultural leadership over the rest of society. It is here that Gramsci sees a key role for communist intellectuals and a communist party.

We turn now to critical theory, which grew out of the work of Hegelian Marxists such as Lukács and Gramsci and has moved even farther from the traditional Marxian roots of economic determinism.

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## Critical Theory

*Critical theory* is the product of a group of German neo-Marxists who were dissatisfied with the state of Marxian theory (J. M. Bernstein, 1995; Kellner, 2005a, 1993; for a broader view of critical theory, see Agger, 1998), particularly its tendency toward economic determinism. The organization associated with critical theory, the Institute of Social Research, was officially founded in Frankfurt, Germany, on February 23, 1923 (Wiggershaus, 1994). Critical theory has spread beyond the confines of the Frankfurt school (Langman, 2007; Kellner, 2005c; Calhoun and Karaganis, 2001; *Telos*, 1989–1990). Critical theory was and is largely a European orientation, although its influence in American sociology has grown (Marcus, 1999; van den Berg, 1980).

## The Major Critiques of Social and Intellectual Life

Critical theory is composed largely of criticisms of various aspects of social and intellectual life, but its ultimate goal is to reveal more accurately the nature of society (Bleich, 1977).

### *Criticisms of Marxian Theory*

Critical theory takes as its starting point a critique of Marxian theories. The critical theorists are most disturbed by the economic determinists—the mechanistic, or

mechanical, Marxists (Antonio, 1981; Schroyer, 1973; Sewart, 1978). Some (for example, Habermas, 1971) criticize the determinism implicit in parts of Marx's original work, but most focus their criticisms on the neo-Marxists, primarily because they had interpreted Marx's work too mechanistically. The critical theorists do not say that economic determinists were wrong in focusing on the economic realm but that they should have been concerned with other aspects of social life as well. As we will see, the critical school seeks to rectify this imbalance by focusing its attention on the cultural realm (Fuery, 2000; Schroyer, 1973:33). In addition to attacking other Marxian theories, the critical school critiqued societies, such as the former Soviet Union, built ostensibly on Marxian theory (Marcuse, 1958).

### *Criticisms of Positivism*

Critical theorists also focus on the philosophical underpinnings of scientific inquiry, especially positivism (Fuller, 2007a; Bottomore, 1984; Halfpenny, 2005; 2001; Morrow, 1994). The criticism of positivism is related, at least in part, to the criticism of economic determinism, because some of those who were determinists accepted part or all of the positivistic theory of knowledge. Positivism is depicted as accepting the idea that a single scientific method is applicable to all fields of study. It takes the physical sciences as the standard of certainty and exactness for all disciplines. Positivists believe that knowledge is inherently neutral. They feel that they can keep human values out of their work. This belief, in turn, leads to the view that science is not in the position of advocating any specific form of social action. (See Chapter 1 for more discussion of positivism.)

Positivism is opposed by the critical school on various grounds (Sewart, 1978). For one thing, positivism tends to reify the social world and see it as a natural process. The critical theorists prefer to focus on human activity as well as on the ways in which such activity affects larger social structures. In short, positivism loses sight of the actors (Habermas, 1971), reducing them to passive entities determined by "natural forces." Given their belief in the distinctiveness of the actor, the critical theorists would not accept the idea that the general laws of science can be applied without question to human action. Positivism is assailed for being content to judge the adequacy of means toward given ends and for not making a similar judgment about ends. This critique leads to the view that positivism is inherently conservative, incapable of challenging the existing system. As Martin Jay says of positivism, "The result was the absolutizing of 'facts' and the reification of the existing order" (1973:62). Positivism leads the actor and the social scientist to passivity. Few Marxists of any type would support a perspective that does not relate theory and practice. Despite these criticisms of positivism, some Marxists (for example, some structuralists, analytic Marxists) espouse positivism, and Marx himself was often guilty of being overly positivistic (Habermas, 1971).

### *Criticisms of Sociology*

Sociology is attacked for its "scientism," that is, for making the scientific method an end in itself. In addition, sociology is accused of accepting the status quo. The critical



school maintains that sociology does not seriously criticize society or seek to transcend the contemporary social structure. Sociology, the critical school contends, has surrendered its obligation to help people oppressed by contemporary society.

Members of this school are critical of sociologists' focus on society as a whole rather than on individuals in society; sociologists are accused of ignoring the interaction of the individual and society. Although most sociological perspectives are *not* guilty of ignoring this interaction, this view is a cornerstone of the critical school's attacks on sociologists. Because they ignore the individual, sociologists are seen as being unable to say anything meaningful about political changes that could lead to a "just and humane society" (Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, 1973:46). As Zoltan Tar put it, sociology becomes "an integral part of the existing society instead of being a means of critique and a ferment of renewal" (1977:x).

### *Critique of Modern Society*

Most of the critical school's work is aimed at a critique of modern society and a variety of its components. Whereas much of early Marxian theory aimed specifically at the economy, the critical school shifted its orientation to the cultural level in light of what it considers the realities of modern capitalist society. That is, the locus of domination in the modern world shifted from the economy to the cultural realm. Still, the critical school retains its interest in domination,<sup>1</sup> although in the modern world it is likely to be domination by cultural rather than economic elements. The critical school thus seeks to focus on the cultural repression of the individual in modern society.

The critical thinkers have been shaped not only by Marxian theory but also by Weberian theory, as reflected in their focus on rationality as the dominant development in the modern world. In fact, supporters of this approach often are labeled "Weberian Marxists" (Dahms, 1997; Lowy, 1996). As Trent Schroyer (1970) made clear, the view of the critical school is that in modern society the repression produced by rationality has replaced economic exploitation as the dominant social problem. The critical school clearly has adopted Weber's differentiation between *formal rationality* and *substantive rationality*, or what the critical theorists think of as *reason*. To the critical theorists, formal rationality is concerned unreflectively with the question of the most effective means for achieving any given purpose (Tar, 1977). This is viewed as "technocratic thinking," in which the objective is to serve the forces of domination, not to emancipate people from domination. The goal is simply to find the most efficient means to whatever ends are defined as important by those in power. Technocratic thinking is contrasted to reason, which is, in the minds of critical theorists, the hope for society. Reason involves the assessment of means in terms of the ultimate human values of justice, peace, and happiness. Critical theorists identified Nazism in general, and its concentration camps more specifically, as examples of formal rationality in mortal combat with reason. Thus, as George Friedman puts it,

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<sup>1</sup> This is made abundantly clear by Trent Schroyer (1973), who entitled his book on the critical school *The Critique of Domination*.

“Auschwitz was a rational place, but it was not a reasonable one” (1981:15; see also Chapter II and the discussion of Bauman, 1989).

Despite the seeming rationality of modern life, the critical school views the modern world as rife with irrationality (Crook, 1995). This idea can be labeled the “irrationality of rationality” or, more specifically, the irrationality of formal rationality. In Herbert Marcuse’s view, although it appears to be the embodiment of rationality, “this society is irrational as a whole” (1964:ix; see also Farganis, 1975). It is irrational that the rational world is destructive of individuals and their needs and abilities, that peace is maintained through a constant threat of war, and that despite the existence of sufficient means, people remain impoverished, repressed, exploited, and unable to fulfill themselves.

The critical school focuses primarily on one form of formal rationality—modern technology (Feenberg, 1996). Marcuse (1964), for example, was a severe critic of modern technology, at least as it is employed in capitalism. He saw technology in modern capitalist society as leading to totalitarianism. In fact, he viewed it as leading to new, more effective, and even more “pleasant” methods of external control over individuals. The prime example is the use of television to socialize and pacify the population (other examples are mass sports and pervasive exploitation of sex). Marcuse rejected the idea that technology is neutral in the modern world and saw it instead as a means to dominate people. It is effective because it is made to seem neutral when it is in fact enslaving. It serves to suppress individuality. The actor’s inner freedom has been “invaded and whittled down” by modern technology. The result is what Marcuse called “one-dimensional society,” in which individuals lose the ability to think critically and negatively about society. Marcuse did not see technology per se as the enemy, but rather technology as it is employed in modern capitalist society: “Technology, no matter how ‘pure,’ sustains and streamlines the continuum of domination. This fatal link can be cut only by a revolution which makes technology and technique subservient to the needs and goals of free men” (1969:56). Marcuse retained Marx’s original view that technology is not inherently a problem and that it can be used to develop a “better” society.

### *Critique of Culture*

The critical theorists level significant criticisms at what they call the “culture industry” (Kellner and Lewis, 2007), the rationalized, bureaucratized structures (for example, the television networks) that control modern culture. Interest in the culture industry reflects their concern with the Marxian concept of “superstructure” rather than with the economic base (Beamish, 2007e). The *culture industry*, producing what is conventionally called “mass culture,” is defined as the “administered . . . nonspontaneous, reified, phony culture rather than the real thing” (Jay, 1973:216).<sup>2</sup> Two things worry the critical thinkers most about this industry. First, they are concerned about its falseness. They think of it as a prepackaged set of ideas mass-produced and disseminated to the masses by the media. Second, the critical theorists are disturbed by its pacifying,

<sup>2</sup> In recent work (Garnham, 2007), this has been broadened to the idea of “culture industries” to include various “industries” (entertainment, knowledge, etc.) as well as the fact that there are differences among them.

repressive, and stupefying effect on people (D. Cook, 1996; G. Friedman, 1981; Tar, 1977:83; Zipes, 1994).

Douglas Kellner (1990) has self-consciously offered a critical theory of television. While he embeds his work in the cultural concerns of the Frankfurt school, Kellner draws on other Marxian traditions to present a more rounded conception of the television industry. He critiques the critical school because it “neglects detailed analysis of the political economy of the media, conceptualizing mass culture merely as an instrument of capitalist ideology” (Kellner, 1990:14). Thus, in addition to looking at television as part of the culture industry, Kellner connects it to both corporate capitalism and the political system. Furthermore, Kellner does not see television as monolithic or as controlled by coherent corporate forces but rather as a “highly conflictual mass medium in which competing economic, political, social and cultural forces intersect” (1990:14). Thus, while working within the tradition of critical theory, Kellner rejects the view that capitalism is a totally administered world. Nevertheless, Kellner sees television as a threat to democracy, individuality, and freedom and offers suggestions (for example, more democratic accountability, greater citizen access and participation, greater diversity on television) to deal with the threat. Thus, Kellner goes beyond a mere critique to offer proposals for dealing with the dangers posed by television.

The critical school is also interested in and critical of what it calls the “knowledge industry,” which refers to entities concerned with knowledge production (for example, universities and research institutes) that have become autonomous structures in our society. Their autonomy has allowed them to extend themselves beyond their original mandate (Schroyer, 1970). They have become oppressive structures interested in expanding their influence throughout society.

Marx’s critical analysis of capitalism led him to have hope for the future, but many critical theorists have come to a position of despair and hopelessness. They see the problems of the modern world not as specific to capitalism but as endemic to a rationalized world. They see the future, in Weberian terms, as an “iron cage” of increasingly rational structures from which hope for escape lessens all the time.

Much of critical theory (like the bulk of Marx’s original formulation) is in the form of critical analyses. Even though the critical theorists also have a number of positive interests, one of the basic criticisms made of critical theory is that it offers more criticisms than it does positive contributions. This incessant negativity galls many scholars, and for this reason they feel that critical theory has little to offer to sociological theory.

## The Major Contributions

### *Subjectivity*

The great contribution of the critical school has been its effort to reorient Marxian theory in a subjective direction. Although this constitutes a critique of Marx’s materialism and his dogged focus on economic structures, it also represents a strong contribution to our understanding of the subjective elements of social life at both the individual and the cultural levels.

The Hegelian roots of Marxian theory are the major source of interest in subjectivity. Many of the critical thinkers see themselves as returning to those roots, as expressed in Marx's early works. In doing so, they are following up on the work of the early-twentieth-century Marxian revisionists, such as Georg Lukács, who sought not to focus on subjectivity but simply to integrate such an interest with the traditional Marxian concern with objective structures (Agger, 1978). Lukács did not seek a fundamental restructuring of Marxian theory, although the later critical theorists do have this broader and more ambitious objective.

We begin with the critical school's interest in culture. As pointed out above, the critical school has shifted to a concern with the cultural "superstructure" rather than with the economic "base." One factor motivating this shift is that the critical school feels that Marxists have overemphasized economic structures and that this emphasis has served to overwhelm their interest in the other aspects of social reality, especially the culture. In addition to this factor, a series of external changes in society point to such a shift (Agger, 1978). In particular, the prosperity of the post-World War II period in America *seems* to have led to a disappearance of internal economic contradictions in general and class conflict in particular. False consciousness *seems* to be nearly universal: all social classes, including the working class, appear to be beneficiaries and ardent supporters of the capitalist system. In addition, the former Soviet Union, despite its socialist economy, was at least as oppressive as capitalist society. Because the two societies had different economies, the critical thinkers had to look elsewhere for the major source of oppression. What they looked toward initially was culture.

To the previously discussed aspects of the Frankfurt school's concerns—rationality, the culture industry, and the knowledge industry—can be added another set of concerns, the most notable of which is an interest in ideology. By *ideology* the critical theorists mean the idea systems, often false and obfuscating, produced by societal elites. All these specific aspects of the superstructure and the critical school's orientation to them can be subsumed under the heading "critique of domination" (Agger, 1978; Schroyer, 1973). This interest in domination was at first stimulated by fascism in the 1930s and 1940s, but it has shifted to a concern with domination in capitalist society. The modern world has reached a stage of unsurpassed domination of individuals. In fact, the control is so complete that it no longer requires deliberate actions on the part of the leaders. The control pervades all aspects of the cultural world and, more important, is internalized in the actor. In effect, actors have come to dominate themselves in the name of the larger social structure. Domination has reached a complete stage where it no longer appears to be domination at all. Because domination is no longer perceived as personally damaging and alienating, it often seems as if the world is the way it is supposed to be. It is no longer clear to actors what the world *ought* to be like. Thus, the pessimism of the critical thinkers is buttressed, because they no longer can see how rational analysis can help alter the situation.

One of the critical school's concerns at the cultural level is with what Habermas (1975) called *legitimations*. These can be defined as systems of ideas generated by the political system, and theoretically by any other system, to support the existence of the system. They are designed to "mystify" the political system, to make it unclear exactly what is happening.

In addition to such cultural interests, the critical school is concerned with actors and their consciousness and what happens to them in the modern world. The consciousness of the masses came to be controlled by external forces (such as the culture industry). As a result, the masses failed to develop a revolutionary consciousness. Unfortunately, the critical theorists, like most Marxists and most sociologists, often fail to differentiate clearly between individual consciousness and culture or specify the many links between them. In much of their work, they move freely back and forth between consciousness and culture with little or no sense that they are changing levels.

Of great importance here is the effort by critical theorists, most notably Marcuse (1969), to integrate Freud's insights at the level of consciousness (and unconsciousness) into the critical theorists' interpretation of the culture. Critical theorists derive three things from Freud's work: (1) a psychological structure to work with in developing their theories, (2) a sense of psychopathology that allows them to understand both the negative impact of modern society and the failure to develop revolutionary consciousness, and (3) the possibilities of psychic liberation (G. Friedman, 1981). One of the benefits of this interest in individual consciousness is that it offers a useful corrective to the pessimism of the critical school and its focus on cultural constraints. Although people are controlled, imbued with false needs, and anesthetized, in Freudian terms they also are endowed with a libido (broadly conceived as sexual energy), which provides the basic source of energy for creative action oriented toward the overthrow of the major forms of domination.

### *Dialectics*

The second main positive focus of critical theory is an interest in dialectics (this idea is critiqued from the viewpoint of analytical Marxism later in this chapter). At the most general level, a dialectical approach means a focus on the social *totality*.<sup>3</sup> "No partial aspect of social life and no isolated phenomenon may be comprehended unless it is related to the historical whole, to the social structure conceived as a global entity" (Connerton, 1976:12). This approach involves rejection of a focus on any *specific* aspect of social life, especially the economic system, outside of its broader context. This approach also entails a concern with the interrelation of the various levels of social reality—most important, individual consciousness, the cultural superstructure, and the economic structure. Dialectics also carries with it a methodological prescription: One component of social life cannot be studied in isolation from the rest.

This idea has both diachronic and synchronic components. A *synchronic* view leads us to be concerned with the interrelationship of components of society within a contemporary totality. A *diachronic* view carries with it a concern for the historical roots of today's society as well as for where it might be going in the future (Bauman, 1976). The domination of people by social and cultural structures—the "one-dimensional" society, to use Marcuse's phrase—is the result of a specific

<sup>3</sup> Jay (1984) sees "totality" as the heart of Marxian theory in general, not just of critical theory. However, this idea is rejected by postmodern Marxists (see the discussion later in this chapter).

historical development and is not a universal characteristic of humankind. This historical perspective counteracts the common-sense view that emerges in capitalism that the system is a natural and inevitable phenomenon. In the view of the critical theorists (and other Marxists), people have come to see society as “second nature”; it is “perceived by common-sensical wisdom as an alien, uncompromising, demanding and high-handed power—exactly like non-human nature. To abide by the rules of reason, to behave rationally, to achieve success, to be free, man now had to accommodate himself to the ‘second nature’” (Bauman, 1976:6).

The critical theorists also are oriented to thinking about the future, but following Marx’s lead, they refuse to be utopian; rather, they focus on criticizing and changing contemporary society (Alway, 1995). However, instead of directing their attention to society’s economic structure as Marx had done, they concentrate on its cultural superstructure. Their dialectical approach commits them to work in the real world. They are not satisfied with seeking truth in scientific laboratories. The ultimate test of their ideas is the degree to which they are accepted and used in practice. This process they call *authentication*, which occurs when the people who have been the victims of distorted communication take up the ideas of critical theory and use them to free themselves from that system (Bauman, 1976:104). Thus we arrive at another aspect of the concerns of the critical thinkers—the *liberation* of humankind (Marcuse, 1964:222).

In more abstract terms, critical thinkers can be said to be preoccupied with the interplay and relationship between theory and practice. The view of the Frankfurt school was that the two have been severed in capitalist society (Schroyer, 1973:28). That is, theorizing is done by one group, which is delegated, or more likely takes, that right, whereas practice is relegated to another, less powerful group. In many cases, the theorist’s work is uninformed by what went on in the real world, leading to an impoverished and largely irrelevant body of Marxian and sociological theory. The point is to unify theory and practice so as to restore the relationship between them. Theory thus would be informed by practice, whereas practice would be shaped by theory. In the process, both theory and practice would be enriched.

Despite this avowed goal, most of critical theory has failed abysmally to integrate theory and practice. In fact, one of the most often voiced criticisms of critical theory is that it usually is written in such a way that it is totally inaccessible to the mass of people. Furthermore, in its commitment to studying culture and superstructure, critical theory addresses a number of very esoteric topics and has little to say about the pragmatic, day-to-day concerns of most people.

***Knowledge and Human Interests*** One of the best-known dialectical concerns of the critical school is Jurgen Habermas’s (1970, 1971) interest in the relationship between knowledge and human interests—an example of a broader dialectical concern with the relationship between subjective and objective factors. But Habermas has been careful to point out that subjective and objective factors cannot be dealt with in isolation from one another. To him, knowledge systems exist at the objective level whereas human interests are more subjective phenomena.

Habermas differentiated among three knowledge systems and their corresponding interests. The interests that lie behind and guide each system of knowledge are

generally unknown to laypeople, and it is the task of the critical theorists to uncover them. The first type of knowledge is *analytic science*, or *classical positivistic scientific systems*. In Habermas's view, the underlying interest of such a knowledge system is technical prediction and control, which can be applied to the environment, other societies, or people within society. In Habermas's view, analytic science lends itself quite easily to enhancing oppressive control. The second type of knowledge system is *humanistic knowledge*, and its interest lies in *understanding* the world. It operates from the *general* view that understanding our past generally helps us understand what is transpiring today. It has a practical interest in mutual and self-understanding. It is neither oppressive nor liberating. The third type is *critical knowledge*, which Habermas, and the Frankfurt school in general, espoused. The interest attached to this type of knowledge is *human emancipation*. It was hoped that the critical knowledge generated by Habermas and others would raise the self-consciousness of the masses (through mechanisms articulated by the Freudians) and lead to a social movement that would result in the hoped-for emancipation.

## Criticisms of Critical Theory

A number of criticisms have been leveled at critical theory (Bottomore, 1984). First, critical theory has been accused of being largely ahistorical, of examining a variety of events without paying much attention to their historical and comparative contexts (for example, Nazism in the 1930s, anti-Semitism in the 1940s, student revolts in the 1960s). This is a damning criticism of any Marxian theory, which should be inherently historical and comparative. Second, the critical school, as we have seen already, generally has ignored the economy. Finally, and relatedly, critical theorists have tended to argue that the working class has disappeared as a revolutionary force, a position decidedly in opposition to traditional Marxian analysis.

Criticisms such as these led traditional Marxists such as Bottomore to conclude, "The Frankfurt School, in its original form, and as a school of Marxism or sociology, is dead" (1984:76). Similar sentiments have been expressed by Greisman, who labels critical theory "the paradigm that failed" (1986:273). If it is dead as a distinctive school, that is because many of its basic ideas have found their way into Marxism, neo-Marxian sociology, and even mainstream sociology. Thus, as Bottomore himself concludes in the case of Habermas, the critical school has undergone a rapprochement with Marxism and sociology, and "at the same time some of the distinctive ideas of the Frankfurt School are conserved and developed" (1984:76).

## The Ideas of Jurgen Habermas

Although critical theory *may* be on the decline, Jurgen Habermas<sup>4</sup> and his theories are very much alive (J. M. Bernstein, 1995; R. H. Brown and Goodman, 2001; Outhwaite, 1994). We touched on a few of his ideas earlier in this chapter, but we close this

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<sup>4</sup> Habermas began as Theodor Adorno's research assistant in 1955 (Wiggershaus, 1994:537).

section on critical theory with a more detailed look at his theory (still other aspects of his thinking will be covered in Chapters 10 and 11).

### *Differences with Marx*

Habermas contends that his goal has been “to develop a theoretical program that I understand as a reconstruction of historical materialism” (1979:95). Habermas takes Marx’s starting point (human potential, species-being, “sensuous human activity”) as his own. However, Habermas (1971) argues that Marx failed to distinguish between two analytically distinct components of species-being—work (or labor, purposive-rational action) and social (or symbolic) interaction (or communicative action). In Habermas’s view, Marx tended to ignore the latter and to reduce it to work. As Habermas put it, the problem in Marx’s work is the “*reduction of the self-generative act of the human species to labor*” (1971:42). Thus, Habermas says: “I take as my starting point the fundamental distinction between *work* and *interaction*” (1970:91). Throughout his writings, Habermas’s work is informed by this distinction, although he is most prone to use the terms *purposive-rational action* (work) and *communicative action* (interaction).

Under the heading “purposive-rational action,” Habermas distinguishes between instrumental action and strategic action. Both involve the calculated pursuit of self-interest. *Instrumental action* involves a single actor rationally calculating the best means to a given goal. *Strategic action* involves two or more individuals coordinating purposive-rational action in the pursuit of a goal. The objective of *both* instrumental and strategic action is instrumental mastery.

Habermas is most interested in *communicative action*, in which

the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of *reaching understanding*. In communicative action participants are not primarily oriented to their own successes; they pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can *harmonize* their plans of action on the basis of *common situation definitions*.

(Habermas, 1984:286; italics added)

Whereas the end of purposive-rational action is to achieve a goal, the objective of communicative action is to achieve communicative understanding (Sean Stryker, 1998).

Clearly, there is an important speech component in communicative action. However, such action is broader than that encompassing “speech acts or equivalent nonverbal expressions” (Habermas, 1984:278).

Habermas’s key point of departure from Marx is to argue that communicative action, *not* purposive-rational action (work), is the most distinctive and most pervasive human phenomenon. It (not work) is the foundation of all sociocultural life as well as all the human sciences. Whereas Marx was led to focus on work, Habermas is led to focus on communication.

Not only did Marx focus on work, he took free and creative work (species-being) as his baseline for critically analyzing work in various historical epochs, especially capitalism. Habermas, too, adopts a baseline, but in the realm of communicative rather than in that of purposive-rational action. Habermas’s baseline is undistorted communication, communication without compulsion. With this baseline, Habermas is



able to critically analyze distorted communication. Habermas is concerned with those social structures that distort communication, just as Marx examined the structural sources of the distortion of work. Although they have different baselines, both Habermas and Marx *have* baselines, and these permit them to escape relativism and render judgments about various historical phenomena. Habermas is critical of those theorists, especially Weber and previous critical theorists, for their lack of such a baseline and their lapse into relativism.

There is still another parallel between Marx and Habermas and their baselines. For both, these baselines represent not only their analytical starting points but also their political objectives. That is, whereas for Marx the goal was a communist society in which undistorted work (species-being) would exist for the first time, for Habermas the political goal is a society of undistorted communication (communicative action). In terms of immediate goals, Marx seeks the elimination of (capitalist) barriers to undistorted work and Habermas is interested in the elimination of barriers to free communication.

Here Habermas (1973; see also Habermas, 1994:101), like other critical theorists, draws on Freud and sees many parallels between what psychoanalysts do at the individual level and what he thinks needs to be done at the societal level. Habermas sees psychoanalysis as a theory of distorted communication and as being preoccupied with allowing individuals to communicate in an undistorted way. The psychoanalyst seeks to find the sources of distortions in individual communication, that is, repressed blocks to communication. Through reflection, the psychoanalyst attempts to help the individual overcome these blocks. Similarly, through *therapeutic critique*, "a form of argumentation that serves to clarify systematic self-deception" (Habermas, 1984:21), the *critical theorist* attempts to aid people in general to overcome social barriers to undistorted communication. There is, then, an analogy (many critics think an *illegitimate* analogy) between psychoanalysis and critical theory. The psychoanalyst aids the patient in much the same way that the social critic helps those unable to communicate adequately to become "undisabled" (Habermas, 1994:112).

As for Marx, the basis of Habermas's ideal future society exists in the contemporary world. That is, for Marx elements of species-being are found in work in capitalist society. For Habermas, elements of undistorted communication are found in every act of contemporary communication.

### ***Rationalization***

This brings us to the central issue of rationalization in Habermas's work. Here Habermas is influenced not only by Marx's work but by Weber's as well. Most prior work, in Habermas's view, has focused on the rationalization of purposive-rational action, which has led to a growth of productive forces and an increase in technological control over life (Habermas, 1970). This form of rationalization, as it was to Weber and Marx, is a major, perhaps *the* major, problem in the modern world. However, the problem is rationalization of purposive-rational action, *not* rationalization in general. In fact, for Habermas, the antidote to the problem of the rationalization of purposive-rational action lies in the *rationalization of communicative action*. The rationalization

of communicative action leads to communication free from domination, free and open communication. Rationalization here involves emancipation, “*removing restrictions on communication*” (Habermas, 1970:118; see also Habermas, 1979). This is where Habermas’s previously mentioned work on *legitimations* and, more generally, *ideology* fits in. That is, these are two of the main causes of distorted communication, causes that must be eliminated if we are to have free and open communication.

At the level of social norms, such rationalization would involve decreases in normative repressiveness and rigidity leading to increases in individual flexibility and reflectivity. The development of this new, less-restrictive or nonrestrictive normative system lies at the heart of Habermas’s theory of social evolution. Instead of a new productive system, rationalization for Habermas (1979) leads to a new, less-distorting normative system. Although he regards it as a misunderstanding of his position, many have accused Habermas of cutting his Marxian roots in this shift from the material level to the normative level.

The end point of this evolution for Habermas is a rational society (Delanty, 1997). *Rationality* here means removal of the barriers that distort communication, but more generally it means a communication system in which ideas are openly presented and defended against criticism; unconstrained agreement develops during argumentation. To understand this better, we need more details of Habermas’s communication theory.

### **Communication**

Habermas distinguishes between the previously discussed communicative action and discourse. Whereas communicative action occurs in everyday life, *discourse* is

that form of communication that is removed from contexts of experience and action and whose structure assures us: that the bracketed validity claims of assertions, recommendations, or warnings are the exclusive object of discussion; that participants, themes, and contributions are not restricted except with reference to the goal of testing the validity claims in questions; that no force except that of the better argument is exercised; and that all motives except that of the cooperative search for truth are excluded.

(Habermas, 1975:107–108)

In the theoretical world of discourse, but also hidden and underlying the world of communicative actions, is the “ideal speech situation,” in which force or power does not determine which arguments win out; instead the better argument emerges victorious. The weight of evidence and argumentation determine what is considered valid or true. The arguments that emerge from such a discourse (and that the participants agree on) are true (Hesse, 1995). Thus Habermas adopts a consensus theory of truth (rather than a copy [or “reality”] theory of truth [Outhwaite, 1994:41]). This truth is part of all communication, and its full expression is the goal of Habermas’s evolutionary theory. As Thomas McCarthy says, “The idea of truth points ultimately to a form of interaction that is free from all distorting influences. The ‘good and true life’ that is the goal of critical theory is inherent in the notion of truth; it is anticipated in every act of speech” (1982:308).

Consensus arises theoretically in discourse (and pretheoretically in communicative action) when four types of validity claims are raised and recognized by interactants.

First, the speaker's utterances are seen as understandable, comprehensible. Second, the propositions offered by the speaker are true; that is, the speaker is offering reliable knowledge. Third, the speaker is being truthful (veracious) and sincere in offering the propositions; the speaker is reliable. Fourth, it is right and proper for the speaker to utter such propositions; he or she has the normative basis to do so. Consensus arises when all these validity claims are raised and accepted; it breaks down when one or more are *questioned*. Returning to an earlier point, there are forces in the modern world that distort this process, prevent the emergence of a consensus, and would have to be overcome for Habermas's ideal society to come about (Morris, 2001).

## Critical Theory Today

While Habermas is the most prominent of today's social thinkers, he is not alone in struggling to develop a critical theory that is better adapted to contemporary realities (see, for example, the various essays in Wexler, 1991; Antonio and Kellner, 1994). Castells (1996) has made the case for the need for a critical theory of the new "information society." To illustrate these continuing efforts, a brief discussion follows of Kellner's (1989c) effort to develop a critical theory of what he labels "techno-capitalism."

### *Techno-Capitalism*

Kellner's theory is based on the premise that we have not moved into a postmodern, or postindustrial, age, but rather that capitalism continues to reign supreme, as it did in the heyday of critical theory. Thus, he feels that the basic concepts developed to analyze capitalism (for example, reification, alienation) continue to be relevant in the analysis of techno-capitalism. Kellner defines techno-capitalism as

a configuration of capitalist society in which technical and scientific knowledge, automation, computers and advanced technology play a role in the process of production parallel to the role of human labor power, mechanization and machines in earlier eras of capitalism, while producing as well new modes of societal organization and forms of culture and everyday life.

(Kellner, 1989c:178)

In technical Marxian terms, in techno-capitalism "constant capital progressively comes to replace variable capital, as the ratio between technology and labor increases at the expense of the input of human labor power" (Kellner, 1989c:179). Yet we should not lose sight of the fact that techno-capitalism remains a form of capitalism, albeit one in which technology is of far greater importance than ever before.

Kellner has learned from the failures of other Marxists. Thus, for example, he resists the idea that technology determines the "superstructure" of society. The state and culture are seen as at least partially autonomous in techno-capitalism. He also refuses to see techno-capitalism as a new stage in history, but views it as a new configuration, or constellation, within capitalism. Kellner does not simply focus on the problems caused by techno-capitalism, but also sees in it new possibilities for social progress and the emancipation of society. In fact, a key role for critical theory, in Kellner's view, is not just to criticize it, but to "attempt to analyze the emancipatory

possibilities unleashed by techno-capitalism” (1989c:215). Kellner also refuses to return to the old class politics, but sees great potential in the various social movements (women, the environment) that have arisen in the last few decades.

Kellner does not endeavor to develop a full-scale theory of techno-capitalism. His main point is that although it has changed dramatically, capitalism remains predominant in the contemporary world. Thus, the tools provided by the critical school, and Marxian theory more generally, continue to be relevant in today’s world. We close this section with Kellner’s description of “techno-culture,” since a concern with culture was so central to critical theory in its prime:

Techno-culture represents a configuration of mass culture and the consumer society in which consumer goods, film, television, mass images and computerized information become a dominant form of culture throughout the developed world [and] which increasingly penetrate developing countries as well. In this techno-culture, image, spectacle, and aestheticized commodification, or “commodity aesthetics,” come to constitute new forms of culture which colonize everyday life and transform politics, economics and social relations. In all these domains, *technology* plays an increasingly fundamental role.

(Kellner, 1989c:181)

There is much here to be explored by future critical theorists, such as the nature of techno-culture itself, its commodification, its colonization of the life-world, and its dialectical impact on the economy and other sectors of society. There is much that is new here, but there is also much that is based on the fundamental ideas of critical theory.

## Later Developments in Cultural Critique

Kellner and Lewis (2007) see the Frankfurt school as part of a tradition of work that involves “cultural critique,” which, in turn, is part of the “cultural turn” and cultural studies (McGuigan, 2005; Storey, 2007). At the center of this tradition lies the Frankfurt school, but is it predated by work by Kant, Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud (among others) and is succeeded by later work, especially that associated with the “Birmingham school.”

As the name suggests, the Birmingham school, or the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, was associated with the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom (Barker, 2007). Founded in 1964, it remained in existence until 1988. Created by Richard Hoggart, the center gained its greatest fame and coherence as a center of cultural studies under the leadership of Stuart Hall (Rojek, 2003, 2005). In contrast to the literary tradition in England, which privileged and valued high art and the elite classes, the Birmingham school valued and focused on popular culture, its products, and the lower classes with which they are associated. Furthermore, popular culture was seen as the arena in which hegemonic ideas operated as mechanisms of social control, were consented to, and, most important from a Marxian perspective, were resisted by the lower classes. Concepts like hegemonic ideas, consent, and resistance clearly aligned the Birmingham school with Marxian theory, especially the theories of Antonio Gramsci (although structuralism and

semiotics influenced at least some of its work). An ideological struggle was in existence, and as “organic intellectuals” (thinkers who were, at least theoretically, part of the working class) it was the responsibility (if not always fulfilled) of the Birmingham scholars to be part of popular culture and help those associated with it wage a counter-hegemonic ideological battle against those in power. They also saw as their role the debunking and demystification of dominant texts with their abundant ideologies and myths that served the interests of elites. They were not disinterested social scientists but rather “populists” who sided with the “people” against the power elite (McGuigan, 2002, 2005). Thus, like the critical theories, those associated with the Birmingham school moved away from economic determinism and a base-superstructure perspective and toward an emphasis on the superstructure, especially culture (as well as the nation-state), which was seen as relatively autonomous of the economic base.

At that level of culture, the focus was on ideology and hegemony and on the ways that power and control manifested itself and was resisted. This meant a concern, on the one hand, with how the media expressed ideologies of the dominant groups and how working-class youth reproduced their subordinate position and, on the other hand, with how working-class youth resisted that position and the ideology of the dominant groups through such things as dress and style (e.g., the “skinheads”). Relatedly, the Birmingham school was interested in analyzing a variety of texts (reflecting the influence of structuralism and semiotics; see Chapter 13)—films, advertisements, soap operas, news broadcasts—in order to show how they were hegemonic products and how their meanings were not fixed but rather were produced in various, sometimes antithetical or oppositional, ways by the audience. Again, this was a reflection of the school’s dual concern with hegemony and resistance.

The power of the lower classes to redefine culture in antithetical and oppositional ways was related to a major difference between the Birmingham school and the Frankfurt school. The latter saw culture as debased by the culture industry; the former saw that as an elitist perspective. The Birmingham school had a much more positive view of culture, especially as it was interpreted and produced by the lower classes.

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## Neo-Marxian Economic Sociology

Many neo-Marxists (for example, critical theorists) have made relatively few comments on the economic institution, at least in part as a reaction against the excesses of the economic determinists. However, these reactions have set in motion a series of counterreactions. In this section we will deal with the work of some of the Marxists who have returned to a focus on the economic realm. Their work constitutes an effort to adapt Marxian theory to the realities of modern capitalist society (Lash and Urry, 1987; Mészáros, 1995).

We will deal with two bodies of work in this section. The first focuses on the broad issue of capital and labor. The second comprises the narrower, and more contemporary, work on the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism.

## Capital and Labor

Marx's original insights into economic structures and processes were based on his analysis of the capitalism of his time—what we can think of as competitive capitalism. Capitalist industries were comparatively small, with the result that no single industry, or small group of industries, could gain complete and uncontested control over a market. Much of Marx's economic work was based on the premise, accurate for his time, that capitalism is a competitive system. To be sure, Marx foresaw the possibility of future monopolies, but he commented only briefly on them. Many later Marxian theorists continued to operate as if capitalism remained much as it had been in Marx's time.

### *Monopoly Capital*

It is in this context that we must examine the work of Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy (1966; Toscano, 2007b). They began with a criticism of Marxian social science for repeating familiar formulations and failing to explain important recent developments in capitalistic society. They accused Marxian theory of stagnating because it continued to rest on the assumption of a competitive economy. A modern Marxian theory must, in their view, recognize that competitive capitalism largely has been replaced by monopoly capitalism.

In *monopoly capitalism* one or a few capitalists control a given sector of the economy. Clearly, there is far less competition in monopoly capitalism than in competitive capitalism. In competitive capitalism, organizations competed on a price basis; that is, capitalists tried to sell more goods by offering lower prices. In monopoly capitalism, firms no longer have to compete in this way because one or a few firms control a market; competition shifts to the sales domain. Advertising, packaging, and other methods of appealing to potential consumers are the main areas of competition.

The movement from price to sales competition is part of another process characteristic of monopoly capitalism—*progressive rationalization*. Price competition comes to be seen as highly irrational. That is, from the monopoly capitalist's point of view, offering lower and lower prices can lead only to chaos in the marketplace, to say nothing of lower profits and perhaps even bankruptcy. Sales competition, in contrast, is not a cutthroat system; in fact, it even provides work for the advertising industry. Furthermore, prices can be kept high, with the costs of the sales and promotion simply added to the price. Thus sales competition is also far less risky than price competition.

Another crucial aspect of monopoly capitalism is the rise of the giant corporation, with a few large corporations controlling most sectors of the economy. In competitive capitalism, the organization was controlled almost single-handedly by an entrepreneur. The modern corporation is owned by a large number of stockholders, but a few large stockholders own most of the stock. Although stockholders "own" the corporation, managers exercise the actual day-to-day control. The managers are crucial in monopoly capitalism, whereas the entrepreneurs were central in competitive capitalism. Managers have considerable power, which they seek to maintain.

They even seek financial independence for their firms by trying, as much as possible, to generate whatever funds they need internally rather than relying on external sources of funding.

Baran and Sweezy commented extensively on the central position of the corporate manager in modern capitalist society. Managers are viewed as a highly rational group oriented to maximizing the profits of the organization. Therefore, they are not inclined to take the risks that were characteristic of the early entrepreneurs. They have a longer time perspective than the entrepreneurs did. Whereas the early capitalist was interested in maximizing profits in the short run, modern managers are aware that such efforts may well lead to chaotic price competition that might adversely affect the long-term profitability of the firm. The manager will thus forgo *some* profits in the short run to maximize long-term profitability.

Baran and Sweezy have been criticized on various grounds. For example, they overemphasize the rationality of managers. Herbert Simon (1957), for example, would argue that managers are more interested in finding (and are only able to find) minimally satisfactory solutions than they are in finding the most rational and most profitable solutions. Another issue is whether managers are, in fact, the pivotal figures in modern capitalism. Many would argue that it is the large stockholders who really control the capitalistic system.

### ***Labor and Monopoly Capital***

Harry Braverman (1974) considered the labor process and the exploitation of the worker the heart of Marxian theory. He intended not only to update Marx's interest in manual workers but also to examine what has happened to white-collar and service workers.

Toward the goal of extending Marx's analysis, Braverman argued that the concept "working class" does not describe a specific group of people or occupations but is rather an expression of a process of buying and selling labor power. In modern capitalism, virtually no one owns the means of production; therefore, the many, including most white-collar and service workers, are forced to sell their labor power to the few who do. In his view, capitalist control and exploitation, as well as the derivative processes of mechanization and rationalization, are being extended to white-collar and service occupations.

***Managerial Control*** Braverman recognized economic exploitation, which was Marx's focus, but concentrated on the issue of *control*. He asked the question: How do the capitalists control the labor power they employ? One answer is that they exercise such control through managers. In fact, Braverman defined *management* as "*a labor process conducted for the purpose of control within the corporation*" (1974:267).

Braverman concentrated on the more impersonal means employed by managers to control workers. One of his central concerns was the utilization of specialization to control workers. Here he carefully differentiated between the division of labor in society as a whole and specialization of work within the organization. All known societies have had a division of labor (for example, between men and

women, farmers and artisans, and so forth), but the specialization of work within the organization is a special development of capitalism. Braverman believed that the division of labor at the societal level may enhance the individual, whereas specialization in the workplace has the disastrous effect of subdividing human capabilities: "The subdivision of the individual, when carried on without regard to human capabilities and needs, is a crime against the person and against humanity" (1974:73).

Specialization in the workplace involves the continual division and subdivision of tasks or operations into minute and highly specialized activities, each of which is then likely to be assigned to a *different* worker. This process constitutes the creation of what Braverman calls "detail workers." Out of the range of abilities any individual possesses, capitalists select a small number that the worker is to use on the job. As Braverman put it, the capitalist first breaks down the work process and then "dismembers the worker as well" (1974:78) by requiring the worker to use only a small proportion of his or her skills and abilities. In Braverman's terms, the worker "never voluntarily converts himself into a lifelong detail worker. This is the contribution of the capitalist" (1974:78).

Why does the capitalist do this? First, it increases the control of management. It is easier to control a worker doing a specified task than it is to control one employing a wide range of skills. Second, it increases productivity. That is, a group of workers performing highly specialized tasks can produce more than can the same number of craftspeople, each of whom has all the skills and performs all the production activities. For instance, workers on an automobile assembly line produce more cars than would a corresponding number of skilled craftspeople, each of whom produces his or her own car. Third, specialization allows the capitalist to pay the least for the labor power needed. Instead of highly paid, skilled craftspeople, the capitalist can employ lower-paid, unskilled workers. Following the logic of capitalism, employers seek to progressively cheapen the labor of workers, and this results in a virtually undifferentiated mass of what Braverman called "simple labor."

Specialization is not a sufficient means of control for capitalists and the managers in their employ. Another important means is scientific technique, including such efforts as scientific management, which is an attempt to apply science to the control of labor on the behalf of management. To Braverman, scientific management is the science of "how best to control alienated labor" (1974:90). Scientific management is found in a series of stages aimed at the control of labor—gathering many workers in one workshop, dictating the length of the workday, supervising workers directly to ensure diligence, enforcing rules against distractions (for example, talking), and setting minimum acceptable production levels. Overall scientific management contributed to control through "*the dictation to the worker of the precise manner in which work is to be performed*" (Braverman, 1974:90). For example, Braverman discussed F. W. Taylor's (Kanigel, 1997) early work on the shoveling of coal, which led him to develop rules about the kind of shovel to use, the way to stand, the angle at which the shovel should enter the coal pile, and how much coal to pick up in each motion. In other words, Taylor developed methods that ensured almost total control over the labor process. Workers were to be left with as few independent decisions as possible;



thus, a separation of the mental and the manual was accomplished. Management used its monopoly over work-related knowledge to control each step of the labor process. In the end, the work itself was left without any meaningful skill, content, or knowledge. Craftsmanship was utterly destroyed.

Braverman also saw machinery as a means of control over workers. Modern machinery comes into existence "when the tool and/or the work are given a fixed motion path by the structure of the machine itself" (Braverman, 1974:188). The skill is built into the machine rather than being left for the worker to acquire. Instead of controlling the work process, workers come to be controlled by the machine. Furthermore, it is far easier for management to control machines than to control workers.

Braverman argued that through mechanisms such as the specialization of work, scientific management, and machines, management has been able to extend its control over its manual workers. Although this is a useful insight, especially the emphasis on control, Braverman's distinctive contribution has been his effort to extend this kind of analysis to sectors of the labor force that were not included in Marx's original analysis of the labor process. Braverman argued that white-collar and service workers are now being subjected to the same processes of control that were used on manual workers in the nineteenth century (Schmutz, 1996).

One of Braverman's examples is white-collar clerical workers. At one time such workers were considered to be a group distinguished from manual workers by such things as their dress, skills, training, and career prospects (Lockwood, 1956). However, today both groups are being subjected to the same means of control. Thus it has become more difficult to differentiate between the factory and the modern factorylike office, as the workers in the latter are progressively proletarianized. For one thing, the work of the clerical worker has grown more and more specialized. This means, among other things, that the mental and manual aspects of office work have been separated. Office managers, engineers, and technicians now perform the mental work, whereas the "line" clerical workers do little more than manual tasks such as keypunching. As a result, the level of skills needed for these jobs has been lowered, and the jobs require little or no special training.

Scientific management also is seen as invading the office. Clerical tasks have been scientifically studied and, as a result of that research, have been simplified, routinized, and standardized. Finally, mechanization has made significant inroads into the office, primarily through the computer and computer-related equipment.

By applying these mechanisms to clerical work, managers find it much easier to control such workers. It is unlikely that such control mechanisms are as strong and effective in the office as they are in the factory; still, the trend is toward the development of the white-collar "factory."<sup>5</sup>

Several obvious criticisms can be leveled at Braverman. For one thing, he probably has overestimated the degree of similarity between manual work and clerical work. For another, his preoccupation with control has led him to devote relatively

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that Braverman's book was written before the boom in computer technology in the office, especially the widespread use of the word processor. It may be that such technology, requiring greater skill and training than do older office technologies, will increase worker autonomy (Zuboff, 1988).

little attention to the dynamics of economic exploitation in capitalism. Nonetheless, he has enriched our understanding of the labor process in modern capitalist society (Foster, 1994; Meiksins, 1994).

### ***Other Work on Labor and Capital***

The issue of control is even more central to Richard Edwards (1979). To Edwards, control lies at the heart of the twentieth-century transformation of the workplace. Following Marx, Edwards sees the workplace, both past and present, as an arena of class conflict, in his terms a “contested terrain.” Within this arena, dramatic changes have taken place in the way in which those at the top control those at the bottom. In nineteenth-century competitive capitalism, “simple” control was used, in which “bosses exercised power personally, intervening in the labor process often to exhort workers, bully and threaten them, reward good performance, hire and fire on the spot, favor loyal employees, and generally act as despots, benevolent or otherwise” (Edwards, 1979:19). Although this system of control continues in many small businesses, it has proved too crude for modern, large-scale organizations. In such organizations, simple control has tended to be replaced by impersonal and more sophisticated technical and bureaucratic control. Modern workers can be controlled by the technologies with which they work. The classic example of this is the automobile assembly line, in which the workers’ actions are determined by the incessant demands of the line. Another example is the modern computer, which can keep careful track of how much work an employee does and how many mistakes he or she makes. Modern workers also are controlled by the impersonal rules of bureaucracies rather than the personal control of supervisors. Capitalism is changing constantly, and with it the means by which workers are controlled.

Also of note is the work of Michael Burawoy (1979) and its interest in why workers in a capitalist system work so hard. He rejects Marx’s explanation that such hard work is a result of coercion. The advent of labor unions and other changes largely eliminated the arbitrary power of management. “Coercion alone could no longer explain what workers did once they arrived on the shop floor” (Burawoy, 1979:xii). To Burawoy, workers, at least in part, consent to work hard in the capitalist system, and at least part of that consent is produced in the workplace.

We can illustrate Burawoy’s approach with one aspect of his research, the games that workers play on the job and, more generally, the informal practices that they develop. Most analysts see these as workers’ efforts to reduce alienation and other job-related discontent. In addition, they usually have been seen as social mechanisms that workers develop to oppose management. In contrast, Burawoy concludes that these games “are usually neither independent nor in opposition to management” (1979:80). In fact, “management, at least at the lower levels, actually participates not only in the organization of the game but in the enforcement of its rules” (1979:80). Rather than challenging management, the organization, or, ultimately, the capitalist system, these games actually support them. For one thing, playing the game creates consent among the workers about the rules on which the game is based and, more generally, about the system of social relations (owner-manager-worker) that defines

the rules of the game. For another, because managers and workers both are involved in the game, the system of antagonistic social relations to which the game was supposed to respond is obscured.

Burawoy argues that such methods of generating active cooperation and consent are far more effective in getting workers to cooperate in the pursuit of profit than is coercion (such as firing those who do not cooperate). In the end, Burawoy believes that games and other informal practices are all methods of getting workers to accept the system and of eliciting their contributions to ever higher profits.

## Fordism and Post-Fordism

One of the most recent concerns of economically oriented Marxists is the issue of whether we have witnessed, or are witnessing, a transition from “Fordism” to “post-Fordism” (Wiedenhof, 2005; A. Amin, 1994; Kiely, 1998). This concern is related to the broader issue of whether we have undergone a transition from a modern to a postmodern society (Gartman, 1998). We will discuss this larger issue in general (Chapter 13), as well as the way in which it is addressed by contemporary Marxian theorists (later in this chapter). In general, *Fordism* is associated with the modern era, while *post-Fordism* is linked to the more recent, postmodern epoch. (The Marxian interest in Fordism is not new; Gramsci [1971] published an essay on it in 1931.)

Fordism, of course, refers to the ideas, principles, and systems spawned by Henry Ford. Ford generally is credited with the development of the modern mass-production system, primarily through the creation of the automobile assembly line. The following characteristics may be associated with Fordism:

- The mass production of homogeneous products.
- The use of inflexible technologies such as the assembly line.
- The adoption of standardized work routines (Taylorism).
- Increases in productivity derived from “economies of scale as well as the deskilling, intensification and homogenization of labor” (Clarke, 1990:73).
- The resulting rise of the mass worker and bureaucratized unions.
- The negotiation by unions of uniform wages tied to increases in profits and productivity.
- The growth of a market for the homogenized products of mass-production industries and the resulting homogenization of consumption patterns.
- A rise in wages, caused by unionization, leading to a growing demand for the increasing supply of mass-produced products.
- A market for products that is governed by Keynesian macroeconomic policies and a market for labor that is handled by collective bargaining overseen by the state.
- Mass educational institutions providing the mass workers required by industry (Clarke, 1990:73).

While Fordism grew throughout the twentieth century, especially in the United States, it reached its peak and began to decline in the 1970s, especially after the oil

crisis of 1973 and the subsequent decline of the American automobile industry and the rise of its Japanese counterpart. As a result, it is argued that we are witnessing the decline of Fordism and the rise of post-Fordism, characterized by the following:

- A decline of interest in mass products is accompanied by a growth of interest in more specialized products, especially those high in style and quality.
- More specialized products require shorter production runs, resulting in smaller and more productive systems.
- More flexible production is made profitable by the advent of new technologies.
- New technologies require that workers, in turn, have more diverse skills and better training, more responsibility and greater autonomy.
- Production must be controlled through more flexible systems.
- Huge, inflexible bureaucracies need to be altered dramatically in order to operate more flexibly.
- Bureaucratized unions (and political parties) no longer adequately represent the interests of the new, highly differentiated labor force.
- Decentralized collective bargaining replaces centralized negotiations.
- The workers become more differentiated as people and require more differentiated commodities, lifestyles, and cultural outlets.
- The centralized welfare state no longer can meet the needs (for example, health, welfare, education) of a diverse population, and differentiated, more flexible institutions are required (Clarke, 1990:73–74).

If one needed to sum up the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism, it would be described as the transition from homogeneity to heterogeneity. There are two general issues involved here. First, has a transition from Fordism to post-Fordism actually occurred (Pelaez and Holloway, 1990)? Second, does post-Fordism hold out the hope of solving the problems associated with Fordism?

First, of course, there has been *no* clear historical break between Fordism and post-Fordism (S. Hall, 1988). Even if we are willing to acknowledge that elements of post-Fordism have emerged in the modern world, it is equally clear that elements of Fordism persist and show no signs of disappearing. For example, something we might call “McDonaldism,” a phenomenon that has many things in common with Fordism, is growing at an astounding pace in contemporary society. On the basis of the model of the fast-food restaurant, more and more sectors of society are coming to utilize the principles of McDonaldism (Ritzer, 2004a). McDonaldism shares many characteristics with Fordism—homogeneous products, rigid technologies, standardized work routines, deskilling, homogenization of labor (and customer), the mass worker, homogenization of consumption, and so on. Thus, Fordism is alive and well in the modern world, although it has been transmogrified into McDonaldism. Furthermore, classic Fordism—for example, in the form of the assembly line—retains a significant presence in the American economy.

Second, even if we accept the idea that post-Fordism is with us, does it represent a solution to the problems of modern capitalist society? Some neo-Marxists (and many supporters of the capitalist system [Womack, Jones, and Roos, 1990]) hold out great

hope for it: "Post-Fordism is mainly an expression of hope that future capitalist development will be the salvation of social democracy" (Clarke, 1990:75). However, this is merely a hope, and in any case, there is already evidence that post-Fordism may not be the nirvana hoped for by some observers.

The Japanese model (tarnished by the precipitous decline of Japanese industry in the 1990s) is widely believed to be the basis of post-Fordism. However, research on Japanese industry (Satoshi, 1982) and on American industries utilizing Japanese management techniques (Parker and Slaughter, 1990) indicates that there are great problems with these systems and that they may even serve to *heighten* the level of exploitation of the worker. Parker and Slaughter label the Japanese system as it is employed in the United States (and it is probably worse in Japan) "management by stress": "The goal is to stretch the system like a rubber band on the point of breaking" (1990:33). Among other things, work is speeded up even further than on traditional American assembly lines, putting enormous strain on the workers, who need to labor heroically just to keep up with the line. More generally, Levidow describes the new, post-Fordist workers as "relentlessly pressurized to increase their productivity, often in return for lower real wages—be they factory workers, homeworkers in the rag trade, privatized service workers or even polytechnic lecturers" (1990:59). Thus, it may well be that rather than representing a solution to the problems of capitalism, post-Fordism may simply be merely a new, more insidious phase in the heightening of the exploitation of workers by capitalists.

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## Historically Oriented Marxism

Marxists oriented toward historical research argue that they are being true to the Marxian concern for historicity. The most notable of Marx's historical research was his study of precapitalist economic formations (1857–1858/1964). There has been a good deal of subsequent historical work from a Marxian perspective (for example, S. Amin, 1977; Dobb, 1964; Hobsbawm, 1965). In this section, we deal with a body of work that reflects a historical orientation—Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974, 1980, 1989, 1992, 1995; Chase-Dunn, 2001, 2005a) research on the modern world-system (Chase-Dunn, 2005b).

### The Modern World-System

Wallerstein chose a unit of analysis unlike the units used by most Marxian thinkers. He did not look at workers, classes, or even states, because he found most of these too narrow for his purposes. Instead, he looked at a broad economic entity with a division of labor that is not circumscribed by political or cultural boundaries. He found that unit in his concept of the *world-system*, which is a largely self-contained social system with a set of boundaries and a definable life span; that is, it does not last forever. It is composed internally of a variety of social structures and member groups. However, Wallerstein was not inclined to define the system in terms of a consensus that holds it together. Rather, he saw the system as held together by a variety of forces that are in inherent tension. These forces always have the potential for tearing the system apart.

Wallerstein argued that thus far we have had only two types of world-systems. One is the world empire, of which ancient Rome is an example. The other is the modern capitalist world-economy. A world empire is based on political (and military) domination, whereas a capitalist world-economy relies on economic domination. A capitalist world-economy is seen as more stable than a world empire for several reasons. For one thing, it has a broader base, because it encompasses many states. For another, it has a built-in process of economic stabilization. The separate political entities within the capitalist world-economy absorb whatever losses occur, while economic gain is distributed to private hands. Wallerstein foresaw the *possibility* of still a third world-system, a *socialist world government*. Whereas the capitalist world-economy separates the political sector from the economic sector, a socialist world-economy would reintegrate them.

The *core* geographical area dominates the capitalist world-economy and exploits the rest of the system. The *periphery* consists of those areas that provide raw materials to the core and are heavily exploited by it. The *semiperiphery* is a residual category that encompasses a set of regions somewhere between the exploiting and the exploited. The key point is that to Wallerstein the international division of exploitation is defined not by state borders but by the economic division of labor in the world.

In the first volume on the world-system, Wallerstein (1974) dealt with the origin of the world-system roughly between the years 1450 and 1640. The significance of this development was the shift from political (and thus military) to economic dominance. Wallerstein saw economics as a far more efficient and less primitive means of domination than politics. Political structures are very cumbersome, whereas economic exploitation "makes it possible to increase the flow of the surplus from the lower strata to the upper strata, from the periphery to the center, from the majority to the minority" (Wallerstein, 1974:15). In the modern era, capitalism provided a basis for the growth and development of a world-economy; this has been accomplished without the aid of a unified political structure. Capitalism can be seen as an economic alternative to political domination. It is better able to produce economic surpluses than are the more primitive techniques employed in political exploitation.

Wallerstein argued that three things were necessary for the rise of the capitalist world-economy out of the "ruins" of feudalism: geographical expansion through exploration and colonization, development of different methods of labor control for zones (for example, core, periphery) of the world-economy, and the development of strong states that were to become the core states of the emerging capitalist world-economy. Let us look at each of these in turn.

### ***Geographical Expansion***

Wallerstein argued that geographical expansion by nations is a prerequisite for the other two stages. Portugal took the lead in overseas exploration, and other European nations followed. Wallerstein was wary of talking about specific countries or about Europe in general terms. He preferred to see overseas expansion as caused by a group of people acting in their immediate interests. Elite groups, such as nobles, needed



## IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN

### *A Biographical Sketch*

Although Immanuel Wallerstein achieved recognition in the 1960s as an expert on Africa, his most important contribution to sociology is his book *The Modern World-System* (1974). That book was an instant success. It has received worldwide recognition and has been translated into ten languages and Braille.

Born on September 28, 1930, Wallerstein received all his degrees from Columbia University, including a doctorate in 1959. He next assumed a position on the faculty at Columbia; after many years there and a five-year stint at McGill University in Montreal, Wallerstein became, in 1976, distinguished professor of sociology at the State University of New York at Binghamton.

Wallerstein was awarded the prestigious Sorokin Award for the first volume of *The Modern World-System* in 1975. Since that time, he has continued to work on the topic and has produced a number of articles as well as two additional volumes, in which he takes his analysis of the world-system up to the 1840s. We can anticipate more work from Wallerstein on this issue in the coming years. He is in the process of producing a body of work that will attract attention for years to come.

overseas expansion for various reasons. For one thing, they were confronted with a nascent class war brought on by the crumbling of the feudal economy. The slave trade provided them with a tractable labor force on which to build the capitalist economy. The expansion also provided them with various commodities needed to develop it—gold bullion, food, and raw materials of various types.

### *Worldwide Division of Labor*

Once the world had undergone geographical expansion, it was prepared for the next stage, the development of a worldwide division of labor. In the sixteenth century, capitalism replaced statism as the major mode of dominating the world, but capitalism did not develop uniformly around the world. In fact, Wallerstein argued, the solidarity of the capitalist system ultimately was based on its unequal development. Given his Marxian orientation, Wallerstein did not think of this as a consensual equilibrium but rather as one that was laden with conflict from the beginning. Different parts of the capitalist world-system came to specialize in specific functions—breeding labor power, growing food, providing raw materials, and organizing industry. Furthermore, different areas came to specialize in producing particular types of

In fact, in many ways the attention it already has attracted and will continue to attract is more important than the body of work itself. The concept of the world-system has become the focus of thought and research in sociology, an accomplishment to which few scholars can lay claim. Many of the sociologists now doing research and theorizing about the world-system are critical of Wallerstein in one way or another, but they all clearly recognize the important role he played in the genesis of their ideas (Chase-Dunn, 2005a).

Although the concept of the world-system is an important contribution, at least as significant has been the role Wallerstein played in the revival of theoretically informed historical research. The most important work in the early years of sociology, by people such as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, was largely of this variety. However, in more recent years, most sociologists have turned away from doing this kind of research and toward using ahistorical methods such as questionnaires and interviews. These methods are quicker and easier to use than historical methods, and the data produced are easier to analyze with a computer. Use of such methods tends to require a narrow range of technical knowledge rather than a wide range of historically oriented knowledge. Furthermore, theory plays a comparatively minor role in research utilizing questionnaires and interviews. Wallerstein has been in the forefront of those involved in a revival of interest in historical research with a strong theoretical base.

workers. For example, Africa produced slaves; western and southern Europe had many peasant tenant-farmers; western Europe was also the center of wage workers, the ruling classes, and other skilled and supervisory personnel.

More generally, each of the three parts of the international division of labor tended to differ in terms of mode of labor control. The core had free labor, the periphery was characterized by forced labor, and the semiperiphery was the heart of sharecropping. In fact, Wallerstein argued that the key to capitalism lies in a core dominated by a free labor market for skilled workers and a coercive labor market for less skilled workers in peripheral areas. Such a combination is the essence of capitalism. If a free labor market should develop throughout the world, we would have socialism.

Some regions of the world begin with small initial advantages, which are used as the basis for developing greater advantages later on. The core area in the sixteenth century, primarily western Europe, rapidly extended its advantages as towns flourished, industries developed, and merchants became important. It also moved to extend its domain by developing a wider variety of activities. At the same time, each of its activities became more specialized in order to produce more efficiently. In contrast, the periphery stagnated and moved more toward what Wallerstein called a "monoculture," or an undifferentiated, single-focus society.



### *Development of Core States*

The third stage of the development of the world-system involved the political sector and how various economic groups used state structures to protect and advance their interests. Absolute monarchies arose in western Europe at about the same time that capitalism developed. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the states were the central economic actors in Europe, although the center later shifted to economic enterprises. The strong states in the core areas played a key role in the development of capitalism and ultimately provided the economic base for their own demise. The European states strengthened themselves in the sixteenth century by, among other things, developing and enlarging bureaucratic systems and creating a monopoly of force in society, primarily by developing armies and legitimizing their activities so that they were assured of *internal stability*. Whereas the states of the core zone developed strong political systems, the periphery developed correspondingly weak states.

### *Later Developments*

In *The Modern World-System II*, Wallerstein (1980) picked up the story of the consolidation of the world-economy between 1600 and 1750. This was not a period of a significant expansion of the European world-economy, but there were a number of significant changes within that system. For example, Wallerstein discussed the rise and subsequent decline in the core of the Netherlands. Later, he analyzed the conflict between two core states, England and France, as well as the ultimate victory of England. In the periphery, Wallerstein's detailed descriptions include the cyclical fortunes of Hispanic America. In the semiperiphery we witness, among other things, the decline of Spain and the rise of Sweden. Wallerstein continued his historical analysis from a *Marxian viewpoint of the various roles played by different societies within the division of labor of the world-economy*. Although Wallerstein paid close attention to political and social factors, his main focus remained the role of economic factors in world history.

In a later work, Wallerstein (1989) brings his historical analysis up to the 1840s. Wallerstein looks at three great developments during the period from 1730 to the 1840s—the Industrial Revolution (primarily in England), the French Revolution, and the independence of the once-European colonies in America. In his view, none of these were fundamental challenges to the world capitalist system; instead, they represented its “further consolidation and entrenchment” (Wallerstein, 1989:256).

Wallerstein continues the story of the struggle between England and France for dominance of the core. Whereas the world-economy had been stagnant during the prior period of analysis, it was now expanding, and Great Britain was able to industrialize more rapidly and come to dominate large-scale industries. This shift in domination to England occurred in spite of the fact that in the eighteenth century France had dominated in the industrial realm. The French Revolution played an important role in the development of the world capitalist system, especially by helping to bring the lingering cultural vestiges of feudalism to an end and by aligning the cultural-ideological system with economic and political realities. However, the revolution

served to inhibit the industrial development of France, as did the ensuing Napoleonic rules and wars. By the end of this period, "Britain was finally truly hegemonic in the world-system" (Wallerstein, 1989:122).

The period between 1750 and 1850 was marked by the incorporation of vast new zones (the subcontinent of India, the Ottoman and Russian empires, and West Africa) into the periphery of the world-economy. These zones had been part of what Wallerstein calls the "external area" of the world-system and thus had been linked to, but were not in, that system. *External zones* are those from which the capitalist world-economy wanted goods but which were able to resist the reciprocal importation of manufactured goods from the core nations. As a result of the incorporation of these external zones, countries adjacent to the once-external nations also were drawn into the world-system. Thus, the incorporation of India contributed to China's becoming part of the periphery. By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the pace of incorporation had quickened, and "the entire globe, even those regions that had never been part even of the external area of the capitalist world-economy were pulled inside" (Wallerstein, 1989:129).

The pressure for incorporation into the world-economy comes not from the nations being incorporated but "rather from the need of the world-economy to expand its boundaries, a need which was itself the outcome of pressures internal to the world-economy" (Wallerstein, 1989:129). Furthermore, the process of incorporation is not an abrupt process but one which occurs gradually.

Reflecting his Marxian focus on economics, Wallerstein (1989:170) argues that becoming part of the world-economy "necessarily" means that the political structures of the involved nations must become part of the interstate system. Thus, states in incorporated zones must transform themselves into part of that interstate political system, be replaced by new political forms willing to accept this role, or be taken over by states that already are part of that political system. The states that emerge at the end of the process of incorporation not only must be part of the interstate system but also must be strong enough to protect their economies from external interference. However, they must not be too strong; that is, they must not become powerful enough to be able to refuse to act in accord with the dictates of the capitalist world-economy.

Finally, Wallerstein examines the decolonization of the Americas between 1750 and 1850. That is, he details the fact that the Americas freed themselves from the control of Great Britain, France, Spain, and Portugal. That decolonization, especially in the United States, was, of course, to have great consequences for later developments in the world capitalist system.

### ***World-System Theory Today***

Marxists have criticized the world-system perspective for its failure to emphasize relations between social classes adequately (Bergeson, 1984). From their point of view, Wallerstein focuses on the wrong issue. To Marxists the key is not the core-periphery international division of labor but rather class relationships *within* given societies. Bergeson seeks to reconcile these positions by arguing that there are strengths

and weaknesses on both sides. His middle-ground position is that core-periphery relations are not only unequal exchange relations but also global *class* relations. His key point is that core-periphery relations *are* important, not only as exchange relations, as Wallerstein argues, but also, and more importantly, as power-dependence relationships, that is, class relationships. More recently, world-system theorists have pushed the theory forward to deal with the world today and in the coming years (Chase-Dunn, 2001; Wallerstein, 1992, 1999) as well as backward to before the modern era (Chase-Dunn and Hall, 1994).

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## Neo-Marxian Spatial Analysis

*Categorization of neo-Marxian theories, indeed all theories, is somewhat arbitrary.* That is made clear here by the fact that the work on world-systems discussed in the previous section under the heading “Neo-Marxian Economic Sociology” also could be discussed in this section. For example, the idea of the world-system is, among other things, inherently spatial, concerned with the global differentiation of the world-economy. Work on the world-system is part of a broader body of work that involves a number of notable contributions by neo-Marxian theorists to our understanding of space and its role in the social world. And this is only part of a broader resurgence of interest in space in sociology (Gieryn, 2000) and social theory. In this section we will deal with several of the leading contributions to this area in which neo-Marxists have been in the forefront.<sup>6</sup>

A starting point for the growth in interest in space in neo-Marxian theory (and elsewhere) is the work of Michel Foucault (see Chapter 13), who pointed out that many theories, but especially Marxian theories, had privileged time over space: “This devaluation of space that has prevailed for generations. . . . Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic” (Foucault, 1980b:70). The implication is that space should, along with time, be given its due and treated as rich, fecund, alive, and dialectical. While the focus may have been on time (and history) in the past, Foucault (1986:22) contends, “*The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space.*” In fact, as we will see in Chapter 13, Foucault offers a number of important insights into space in his discussion of such topics as the “carceral archipelago” and the Panopticon.

## The Production of Space

The pathbreaking work in the neo-Marxian theory of space is Henri Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) *The Production of Space* (see also Faist, 2005; Kurasawa, 2005). Lefebvre argues for the need for Marxian theory to shift its focus from the means of production to the production of space. To put it another way, he wants to see a shift in focus from

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<sup>6</sup> Reflective of categorization problems is the fact that at least one major contribution to the theory of space that can be seen as neo-Marxian—Fredric Jameson’s (1984, 1991) work on “hyperspace”—is discussed elsewhere in this book under the heading “Postmodern Social Theory” (see Chapter 13). Furthermore, additional important contributions on space have emanated from still other theoretical roots and will be discussed at yet other points in this book. For example, Anthony Giddens’s very important ideas on space (and time), distanciation, and so on, will be discussed in Chapter 11.

things in space (for example, means of production such as factories) to the actual production of space itself. Marxian theory needs to broaden its concerns from (industrial) production to the production of space. This is reflective of the fact that the focus needs to shift from production to reproduction. Space serves in various ways to reproduce the capitalist system, the class structure within that economic system, and so on. Thus, any revolutionary action has to concern itself with the restructuring of space.

A key aspect of Lefebvre's complex argument lies in the following tripartite distinction. He begins with *spatial practice*, which for him involves the production and the reproduction of space. Overlying and ultimately dominating spatial practice is what Lefebvre calls *representations of space*. This is space as it is conceived by societal elites such as urban planners and architects. They think of this as "true space," and it is used by them and others to achieve and maintain dominance. Thus, for example, urban planners and architects conceived of the once popular program of "urban renewal" that was designed, theoretically, to tear down the dilapidated housing of the poor and replace it with far better and more modern housing. However, urban renewal came to be known as "urban removal." The poor were moved out to make room for new housing, but when that housing was built, it was more often for the middle and upper classes interested in gentrifying the city. Frequently, the poor had to move to new areas, often finding themselves in housing little, if at all, better than what they had left. They also were forced to adapt to new areas, communities, and neighbors. Thus, the "spatial practices" of the poor were radically altered by the "representations of space" of those who supported, created, and implemented urban renewal.

Representations of space are dominant not only over spatial practices but also over *representational spaces*. While representations of space are the creations of dominant groups, representational spaces flow from the lived experiences of people, especially from those that are underground or clandestine. While, as we have seen, representations of space are considered "true space" by those in power, representations of space yield the "truth of space." That is, they reflect what really happens in lived experience rather than being an abstract truth created by someone such as an urban planner in order to achieve dominance. However, in the contemporary world, representations of space, like spatial practices, suffer because of the hegemony of representations of space. In fact, Lefebvre (1974/1991:398) goes so far as to say, "Representational space disappears into representations of space." Thus, a major problem for Lefebvre is the predominance of elite representations of space over day-to-day spatial practices and representational spaces. Furthermore, if the new and potentially revolutionary ideas that flow out of representational spaces are disappearing, how is the hegemony of elites such as urban planners ever to be contested, let alone threatened?

While the preceding is a strongly ideational way of addressing space, Lefebvre offers a second tripartite distinction that addresses it in more material—and more optimistic—terms. Paralleling Marx's notion of species-being, Lefebvre begins with what he calls *absolute spaces*, or natural spaces (e.g., "green" areas) that are not colonized, rendered inauthentic, or smashed by economic and political forces.

Just as Marx spent little time analyzing species-being (and communism), Lefebvre spends little time on absolute space. While Marx devoted most of his attention

to critiquing capitalism, Lefebvre is interested in critically analyzing what he calls *abstract space*. Like representations of space, this is space from the point of view of an abstract subject such as an urban planner or an architect.<sup>7</sup> But abstract space is not just ideational; it actually replaces historical spaces (which are erected on the base of absolute spaces). Abstract space is characterized by the absence of that which is associated with absolute space (trees, clean air, and so on). It is a dominated, occupied, controlled, authoritarian (even involving brutality and violence), repressive space. Lefebvre emphasizes the role of the state, more than economic forces, in exercising power over abstract space, although that exercise of power is hidden. Furthermore, "abstract space is a tool of power" (Lefebvre, 1974/1991:391). That is, not only is power exercised in it, the abstraction of space is itself a form of power. While those in power have always sought to control space, what is new here is that "power aspires to control space in its entirety" (Lefebvre, 1974/1991:388). Thus, the ruling class uses abstract space as a tool of power to gain control over increasingly large spaces. While Lefebvre deemphasizes economic factors and forces, he does recognize that power of and over abstract space does generate profit. That is, it is not just the factory that generates profits, but also the railway lines and highways that provide routes in to the factory for raw materials and out of the factory for finished products.

Being a good Marxian theorist, Lefebvre emphasizes contradictions. While abstract space serves to smother contradictions, it simultaneously generates them, including those that have the potential to tear it apart. Although he wonders why people accept the kind of control exerted over them by abstract space and are silent about it, he seems to accept the idea that they eventually will be spurred to action by these contradictions. Indeed, as in Marx's analysis of contradictions in capitalism, Lefebvre argues that the seeds of a new kind of space can be glimpsed within the contradictions of abstract space.

That new kind of space, the third of the types of space to be discussed here, is *differential space*. While abstract space seeks to control and homogenize everyone and everything, differential space accentuates difference and freedom from control. While abstract space breaks up the natural unity that exists in the world, differential space restores that unity. Again, Lefebvre has much more to say about that which he critiques—abstract space—than he does about his hoped-for alternative to it.

Lefebvre argues that space can play a variety of roles in the socioeconomic world. First, it can take the role of one of many forces of productions (other, more traditional such forces are factories, tools, and machines). Second, space itself can be a vast commodity that is consumed (as, for example, by a tourist visiting Disneyland), or it can be consumed productively (for example, the land on which a factory is built). Third, it is politically instrumental, facilitating control of the system (building roads to facilitate troop movements to put down rebellions). Fourth, space underpins the reproduction of productive and property relations (for example, expensive gated communities for the capitalists and slums for the poor). Fifth, space can take the form of a superstructure that, for example, seems neutral but conceals the

<sup>7</sup>Although the abstract subject also could be a more mundane figure such as the driver of an automobile.

economic base that gives rise to it and that is far from neutral. Thus, a highway system may seem neutral but really advantages capitalistic enterprises that are allowed to move raw materials easily and cheaply. Finally, there is always positive potential in space, such as the creation of truly human and creative works in it, as well as the possibility of reappropriating space on behalf of those who are being controlled and exploited.

The production of space occupies two positions in Lefebvre's work. First, as discussed above, it constitutes a new focus of analysis and critique. That is, our attention should shift from the means of production to the production of space. Second, Lefebvre puts this all in terms of a desired direction for social change. That is, we live in a world characterized by a *mode of production in space*. This is a world of domination in which control is exercised by the state, the capitalist, and the bourgeoisie. It is a closed, sterile world, one that is being emptied out of contents (e.g., highways replacing and destroying local communities). In its stead we need a world characterized by the *production of space*. Instead of domination, we have here a world in which appropriation is predominant. That is, people in concert with other people work in and with space to produce what they need to survive and prosper. In other words, they modify natural space in order to serve their collective needs. Thus, Lefebvre's (1974/1991:422) goal is "producing the space of the human species . . . a planet-wide space as social foundation of a transformed everyday life." Needless to say, the political state and private ownership of the means of production that control the mode of production are seen as withering away. Thus, the production of space is not only Lefebvre's analytic focus but also his political objective in much the same way that communism is Marx's political goal, and with many of the same characteristics.

## Trialectics

Edward Soja (1989) was heavily influenced by both Foucault and Lefebvre. For example, like Foucault he critiques the focus on time (and history) as creating "carceral historicism" and a "temporal prisonhouse" (Soja, 1989:1). He seeks to integrate the study of space and geography with that of time. Lefebvre has had a profound influence on Soja's thinking, but Soja is critical of some aspects of his work and seeks to go beyond it in various ways.

Perhaps the core of Soja's (1996, 2000) theoretical contribution to our understanding of space is his notion of *trialectics*. Obviously, Soja is building, and expanding, on the Marxian (and Hegelian) notion of dialectics. However, a more immediate source is Lefebvre's work, especially the distinction discussed above among spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. Most generally, Lefebvre is making a distinction between material practices and two types of ideas about space. Soja uses this basic distinction in order to theorize what he calls *cityspace*, or "the city as a historical-social-spatial phenomenon, but *with its intrinsic spatiality highlighted* for interpretive and explanatory purposes" (Soja, 2000:8). This definition highlights one of Soja's basic premises; that is, while he privileges space, he insists on including in his analysis history (or time more generally) and social relations. While the move toward including space in social analyses is to be encouraged, it

should not be done to the detriment of the analysis of history and time. Furthermore, the inclusion of social relations sets Soja's perspective squarely in the tradition of the *sociological and social theories dealt with throughout this book.*

The Firstspace perspective is basically a materialist orientation that is consistent with the approach most often taken by geographers in the study of the city (and Lefebvre's sense of spatial practice). Here is the way Soja (2000:10) describes a Firstspace approach: "cityspace can be studied as a set of materialized 'social practices' that work together to produce and reproduce the concrete forms and specific patternings of urbanism as a way of life. Here cityspace is physically and empirically perceived as form and process, as measurable and mappable configurations and practices of urban life." A Firstspace approach focuses on objective phenomena and emphasizes "things in space."

In contrast, a Secondspace approach (encompassing Lefebvre's representations of space and representational space) tends to be more subjective and to focus on "thoughts about space." In a Secondspace perspective, "cityspace becomes more of a mental or ideational field, conceptualized in imagery, reflexive thought, and symbolic representation, a *conceived* space of the imagination, or . . . urban imaginary" (Soja, 2000:11). Examples of a Secondspace perspective include the mental maps we all carry with us, visions of an urban utopia, and more formal methods for obtaining and conveying information about the geography of the city.

Soja seeks to subsume both of the above in Thirdspace, which is viewed as another way of thinking about the social production of human spatiality that incorporates both Firstspace and Secondspace perspectives while at the same time opening up the scope and complexity of the geographical or spatial imagination. In this alternative or "third" perspective, the spatial specificity of urbanism is investigated as fully *lived space*, a simultaneously real-and-imagined, actual-and-virtual, locus of structured individual and collective experience and agency.

(Soja, 2000:11)

This is a highly complex view of cityspace. Because of its great complexity and because much is hidden and perhaps unknowable, the best we can do is to explore cityspace selectively "through its intrinsic spatial, social, and historical dimensions, its *interrelated spatiality, sociality, and historicity*" (Soja, 2000:12). Throughout his career, Soja's favorite cityspace has been Los Angeles, and he returns to it over and over to analyze it from various perspectives, including his own integrative sense of Thirdspace.

## Spaces of Hope

We began this section with the point that the categorization of theories is somewhat arbitrary. In fact, the work of Edward Soja fits as much into a category—postmodern *Marxian theory*—we will discuss below as it does into neo-Marxian spatial analyses. The same is true of the work of the thinker we will discuss next—David Harvey—and, in fact, we will discuss his work not only under this heading but also under that of postmodern Marxian theory.

In fact, Harvey has produced analyses of space under a variety of guises as his work has undergone several twists and turns over the years. In reflecting on his early work, Harvey thought of himself as lax scientifically, but he underwent a first change of orientation in the late 1960s and declared himself a positivist guided by the scientific method and, as a result, oriented toward quantification, the development of theories, the discovery of laws, and the like (Harvey, 1969). However, within a few years Harvey (1973) had undergone another paradigm change and rejected his earlier commitment to positivism. He now favored materialist theory with a powerful debt to the work of Karl Marx.

While, as we will see later, Harvey flirted with postmodern theory and certainly was influenced by it in many ways, he has retained his commitment to Marxian theory, and this is clear in one of his more recent books, *Spaces of Hope* (Harvey, 2000). One aspect of Harvey's argument that is particularly relevant to this discussion of neo-Marxian theory is his analysis and critique of the geographical arguments made in the *Communist Manifesto*. Harvey sees the idea of the "spatial fix" as central to the *Manifesto*. That is, the need to create ever-higher profits means that capitalist firms must, among other things, continually seek new geographical areas (and markets) to exploit and find more thorough ways of exploiting the areas in which they already operate. While such geographical arguments occupy an important place in the *Manifesto*, they characteristically are subordinated in a "rhetorical mode that in the last instance privileges time and history over space and geography" (Harvey, 2000:24).

Harvey (2000:31) begins by acknowledging the strengths of the *Manifesto* and its recognition that "geographical reorderings and restructurings, spatial strategies and geopolitical elements, uneven geographical developments, and the like, are vital aspects to the accumulation of capital and the dynamics of class struggle, both historically and today." However, the arguments made in the *Manifesto* on space (and other matters) are severely limited, and Harvey sets out to strengthen them and bring them up to date.

For example, Harvey argues that Marx and Engels operate with a simplistic differentiation between civilized-barbarian, and more generally core-periphery, areas of the world. Relatedly, the *Manifesto* operates with a diffusionist model, with capitalism seen as spreading from civilized to barbarian areas, from core to periphery. While Harvey acknowledges that there are instances of such diffusion, there are others, both historically and contemporaneously, in which internal developments within peripheral nations lead to the insertion of their labor power and commodities into the global marketplace.

More important, Harvey (2000:34) argues that "one of the biggest absences in the *Manifesto* is its lack of attention to the territorial organization of the world in general and of capitalism in particular." Thus, the recognition that the state was the executive arm of the bourgeoisie needs to be buttressed by recognition that "the state had to be territorially defined, organized, and administered" (Harvey, 2000:34). For example, loosely connected provinces had to be brought together to form the nation. However, territories do not remain set in stone once they have been transformed into states. All sorts of things alter territorial configurations, including revolutions in



transportation and communication, “uneven dynamics of class struggle,” and “uneven resource endowments.” Furthermore, “[f]lows of commodities, capital, labor, and information always render boundaries porous” (Harvey, 2000:35). Thus, territories continually are being redefined and reorganized, with the result that any model that envisions a final formation of the state on a territorial basis is overly simplistic. The implication is that we need to be attuned continuously to territorial changes in a world dominated by capitalism.

Another of the spatial arguments in the *Manifesto* is that the concentration of capitalism (for example, factories in the cities) leads to the concentration of the proletariat, which formerly was scattered throughout the countryside. Instead of conflict between isolated workers and capitalists, it becomes more likely that a collectivity of workers will confront capitalists, who are themselves now more likely to be organized into a collectivity. Thus, in Harvey’s (2000:36) words, “the production of spatial struggle is not neutral with respect to class struggle.” However, there is much more to be said about the relationship between space and class struggle, and this is amply demonstrated in the more recent history of capitalism. For example, capitalists in the late nineteenth century dispersed factories from the cities to the suburbs in an effort to limit the concentration of workers and their power. And in the late twentieth century we witnessed the dispersal of factories to remote areas of the world in a further effort to weaken the proletariat and strengthen the capitalists.

Harvey also points out that the *Manifesto* tended to focus on the urban proletariat and thereby largely ignored rural areas, as well as agricultural workers and peasants. Of course, the latter groups over the years have proved to be very active in revolutionary movements. Furthermore, Marx and Engels tended to homogenize the world’s workers, to argue that they have no country and that national differences are disappearing in the development of a homogeneous proletariat. Harvey notes that not only do national differences persist, but capitalism itself produces national (and other) differences among workers, “sometimes by feeding off ancient cultural distinctions, gender relations, ethnic predilections, and religious beliefs” (Harvey, 2000:40). In addition, labor plays a role here in sustaining spatial distinctions by, for example, mobilizing “through territorial forms of organization, building place-bound loyalties *en route*” (Harvey, 2000:40). Finally, Harvey notes the famous call in the *Manifesto* for workers of the world to unite and argues that given the increasingly global character of capitalism, such an exhortation is more relevant and more important than ever.

This is only a small part of a highly varied argument made by Harvey, but what does he mean by “spaces of hope”? First, he wishes to counter what he perceives to be a pervasive pessimism among today’s scholars. Second, he wants to acknowledge the existence of “spaces of political struggle,” and therefore hope, in society. Finally, he describes a utopian space of the future that offers hope to those concerned about the oppressiveness of today’s spaces.

Thus, in these and many other ways, Harvey builds on Marx’s (and in this case Engels’s) limited insights into space and capitalism to develop a richer and more contemporary perspective on their relationship to each other. In that sense, what Harvey is doing here is an almost paradigmatic example of neo-Marxian theory.

## Post-Marxist Theory

Dramatic changes have taken place in recent years in neo-Marxian theory (Aronson, 1995; Grossberg and Nelson, 1988; Jay, 1988). The most recent varieties of neo-Marxian theory are rejecting many of the basic premises of Marx's original theory as well as those of the neo-Marxian theories discussed earlier in this chapter. Hence, these new approaches have come to be thought of as post-Marxist theories (Dandaneau, 1992; Wright, 1987). While these theories reject the basic elements of Marxian theory, they still have sufficient affinities with it for them to be considered part of neo-Marxian theory. Post-Marxist theories are discussed here because they often involve the synthesis of Marxian theories with other theories, ideas, methods, and so on. How can we account for these dramatic changes in neo-Marxian theory? Two sets of factors are involved, one external to theory and involving changes in the social world and the other internal to theory itself (P. Anderson, 1984; Ritzer, 1991a).

First, and external to Marxian theory, was the end of the Cold War (Halliday, 1990) and the collapse of world communism. The Soviet Union is gone, and Russia has moved toward a market economy that resembles, at least in part, a capitalist economy (Piccone, 1990; Zaslavsky, 1988). Eastern Europe has shifted, often even more rapidly than Russia, in the direction of a capitalist-style economy (Kaldor, 1990). China clings to communism, but capitalism flourishes throughout that nation. Cuba is isolated, awaiting only the death or overthrow of Fidel Castro to move in the direction of capitalism. Thus, the failure of communism on a worldwide scale made it necessary for Marxists to reconsider and reconstruct their theories (Burawoy, 1990; Aronson, 1995).

These changes in the world were related to a second set of changes, internal to theory itself, the series of intellectual changes that, in turn, affected neo-Marxian theory (P. Anderson, 1990a, 1990b). New theoretical currents such as poststructuralism and postmodernism (see Chapter 13) had a profound impact on neo-Marxian theory. In addition, a movement known as *analytical Marxism* gained ground; it was premised on the belief that Marxian theories needed to employ the same methods as those used by any other scientific enterprise. This approach led to reinterpretations of Marx in more conventional intellectual terms, efforts to apply rational choice theory to Marxian issues, and attempts to study Marxian topics by utilizing the methods and techniques of positivistic science. As Mayer puts it more specifically, "Increased humility toward the conventional norms of science coincides with diminished piety toward Marxist theory itself" (1994:296).

Thus, a combination of social and intellectual changes dramatically altered the landscape of neo-Marxian theory in the 1990s. While the theories discussed earlier remain important, much of the energy in neo-Marxian theory as we enter the twenty-first century is focused on the theories to be discussed in this section.

## Analytical Marxism

Here is the way one of the leaders of analytical Marxism, John Roemer, defines it:

During the past decade, what now appears as a new species in social theory has been forming: analytically sophisticated Marxism. Its practitioners are largely

inspired by Marxian questions, which they pursue with contemporary tools of logic, mathematics and model building. Their methodological posture is conventional. These writers are, self-consciously, products of both the Marxian and neo-Marxian traditions.

(Roemer, 1986a:1)

Thus, analytical Marxists bring mainstream, "state-of-the-art" methods of analytical philosophy and social science to bear on Marxian substantive issues (Mayer, 1994:22). Analytical Marxism is discussed in this chapter because it "explicitly proposes to synthesize *non-Marxist* methods and Marxist theory" (Weldes, 1989:371).

Analytical Marxism adopts a nondogmatic approach to Marx's theory. It does not blindly and unthinkingly support Marx's theory, it does not deny historical facts in order to support Marx's theory, and it does not totally reject Marx's theory as fundamentally wrong. Rather, it views Marx's theory as a form of nineteenth-century social science with great power and with a valid core but also with substantial weaknesses. *Marx's theory should be drawn upon, but that effort requires the utilization of methods and techniques appropriate to the twenty-first century.* It rejects the idea that there is a distinctive Marxian methodology and criticizes those who think that such a methodology exists and is valid:

I do not think there is a specific form of Marxist logic or explanation. Too often, *obscurantism protects itself behind a yoga of special terms and privileged logic.* The yoga of Marxism is "dialectics." Dialectical logic is based on several propositions which may have a certain inductive appeal, but are far from being rules of inference: that things turn into their opposites, and quantity turns into quality. In Marxian social science, dialectics is often used to justify a lazy kind of teleological reasoning. Developments occur because they must in order for history to be played out as it was intended.

(Roemer, 1986b:191)

Similarly, Elster says: "There is no specifically Marxist form of analysis . . . there is no commitment to any specific method of analysis, beyond those that characterize good social science generally" (1986:220). Along the same lines, analytical Marxists reject the idea that fact and value cannot be separated, that they are dialectically related. They seek, following the canons of mainstream philosophic and social-scientific thinking, to separate fact and value and to deal with facts dispassionately through theoretical, conceptual, and empirical analysis.

One might ask why analytical Marxism should be called Marxist. Roemer, in reply to this question, says, "I am not sure that it should" (1986a:2). However, he does offer several reasons why we can consider it a (neo-) Marxian theory. First, it deals with traditional Marxian topics such as exploitation and class. Second, it continues to regard socialism as preferable to capitalism. Third, it seeks to understand and explain the problems associated with capitalism. However, while it is Marxist in these senses, it also "borrows willingly and easily from other viewpoints" (Roemer, 1986a:7). Again, analytical Marxism is very much in line with the move toward theoretical syntheses discussed throughout this book.

Three varieties of analytical Marxism will be discussed, at least briefly, in this section. First, we will discuss the effort to reanalyze Marx's work by utilizing mainstream intellectual tools. Second, we will deal with rational choice and game-theoretic

Marxism. Finally, we will touch on empirical research from a Marxian perspective that utilizes state-of-the-art methodological tools.

### ***Reanalyzing Marx***

As pointed out above, analytical Marxists reject the use of such idiosyncratic concepts as the dialectic and seek instead to analyze Marx (as well as the social world) by using concepts that are part of the broader intellectual tradition. The major example of this, and one of the key documents in analytical Marxism, is G. A. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (1978). Instead of interpreting Marx as an exotic dialectician, Cohen argues that he employs the much more prosaic functional form of explanation in his work. He offers the following examples of functional explanation in Marx's work:

- Relations of production *correspond* to productive forces.
- The legal and political superstructure *rises on* a real foundation.
- The social, political, and intellectual process *is conditioned* by the mode of production of material life.
- Consciousness is determined by social being.

(Cohen, 1978/1986:221)

In each of these examples, the second concept *explains* the first concept. The nature of the explanation is functional, in Cohen's view, because "the character of what is explained is determined by its effect on what explains it" (1978/1986:221). Thus, in the case of the last example, the character of consciousness is explained by its effect on, more specifically its propensity to sustain, social being. More generally, social phenomena are explained in terms of their consequences for other social phenomena. It is Cohen's view that Marx practices functional thinking in the examples above, and throughout his work, because he seeks to explain social and economic phenomena in this manner. Thus, Marx is not a dialectician; he is a functional thinker. In adopting such a perspective, Cohen is reinterpreting Marx by using mainstream philosophic ideas *and* viewing Marx as part of that mainstream.

Cohen takes pains to differentiate functional thinking from the sociological variety of (structural) functionalism discussed in Chapter 3. Cohen sees (structural) functionalism as composed of three theses. First, all elements of the social world are interconnected. Second, all components of society reinforce one another, as well as the society as a whole. Third, each aspect of society is the way it is because of its contribution to the larger society. These theses are objectionable to Marxists for a variety of reasons, especially because of their conservatism. However, the functional explanations mentioned previously can be employed by Marxists without their accepting any of the tenets of functionalism. Thus, functional explanation is not necessarily conservative; indeed, it can be quite revolutionary.

### ***Rational Choice Marxism***

Many analytical Marxists have drawn on neoclassical economics, especially rational choice theory and game theory (see Chapter 8 for a discussion of the use of rational choice theory in mainstream sociological theory). Roemer argues that "Marxian analysis requires micro-foundations," especially rational choice and game

theory, as well as “the arsenal of modelling techniques developed by neoclassical economics” (1986b:192). In drawing on such approaches, Marxian theory is giving up its pretensions of being different and is utilizing approaches widely used throughout the social sciences. But while neo-Marxian theory can and should draw on neoclassical economics, it remains different from the latter. For example, it retains an interest in collective action for changing society and accepts the idea that capitalism is an unjust system.

Jon Elster (1982, 1986) is a major proponent, along with John Roemer, of analytical Marxism. Elster believes that neo-Marxian theory has been impeded by its adoption of the kind of functional theorizing discussed by Cohen. He also believes that Marxian theory ought to make greater use of game theory, a variant of rational choice theory. Game theory, like other types of rational choice theory, assumes that actors are rational and seek to maximize their gains (Macy and Van de Rijt, 2007). Although it recognizes structural constraints, it does not suggest that they completely determine actors' choices. What is distinctive about game theory as a type of rational choice theory is that it permits the analyst to go beyond the rational choices of a single actor and deal with the interdependence of the decisions and actions of a number of actors. Elster (1982) identifies three interdependencies among actors involved in a game. First, the reward for each actor depends on the choices made by all the actors. Second, the reward for each actor depends on the reward for all. Finally, the choice made by each actor depends on the choices made by all. The analysis of “games” (such as the famous “prisoner’s dilemma” game, in which actors end up worse off if they follow their own self-interest than if they sacrifice those interests) helps explain the strategies of the various actors and the emergence of such collectivities as social class. Thus, rational choice Marxism searches for the micro-foundations of Marxist theory, although the rational actor of this theory is very different from critical theory’s actor (discussed earlier in this chapter), who is derived largely from Freudian theory.

Elster’s rational choice orientation is also manifest in *Making Sense of Marx* (1985). Elster argues that Marx’s basic method for explaining social phenomena was a concern for the unintended consequences of human action. To Elster, and in contrast with most other Marxists, who see Marx as a “methodological holist” concerned with macro structures, Marx practiced “methodological individualism,” or “the doctrine that all social phenomena—their structure and their change—are in principle explicable in ways that only involve individuals—their properties, their goals, their beliefs and their actions” (1985:5). To Elster, Marx *was* concerned with actors, their goals, their intentions, and their rational choices. Elster uses such a rational choice perspective to critique the orientation of the structural Marxists: “Capitalist entrepreneurs are *agents* in the genuinely active sense. They cannot be reduced to mere place-holders in the capitalist system of production” (1985:13). Rational choice Marxism focuses on these rational agents (capitalist and proletarians) and their interrelationships.

Roemer (1982) has been in the forefront of the development of an approach within analytical Marxism toward exploitation (for a critique, see J. Schwartz, 1995). Roemer has moved away from thinking of exploitation as occurring at the point of production (and therefore from the highly dubious labor theory of value) and toward thinking of

exploitation as relating to coercion associated with differential ownership of property. As Mayer puts it, “exploitation can arise from unequal possession of productive resources even without a coercive production process” (1994:62). Among other things, this perspective allows us to conceive of exploitation in socialist as well as capitalist societies. This view of exploitation also relates to rational choice theory in the sense, for example, that those whose exploitation arises from the unequal distribution of property can join social movements designed to redistribute property more equally. This kind of orientation also allows analytical Marxism to retain its ethical and political goals while buying into a mainstream orientation such as rational choice theory.

### ***Empirically Oriented Marxism***

The leading figure associated with the importation and application of rigorous methods to the empirical study of Marxian concepts is Erik Olin Wright (1985; Burawoy and Wright, 2001). Wright explicitly associates himself with analytical Marxism in general and the work of John Roemer in particular. Wright’s work involves three basic components: first, the clarification of basic Marxian concepts such as class; second, empirical studies of those concepts; third, the development of a more coherent theory based on those concepts (especially class).

In his book *Classes* (1985), Wright seeks to answer the question posed by Marx but never answered by him: “What constitutes class?” He makes it clear that his answer will be true to Marx’s original theoretical agenda. However, it will not be the same as the answer Marx might have offered, because since Marx’s day there has been over 100 years of both theoretical work and history. Thus, we are more sophisticated theoretically, *and* times have changed. As a result, Wright, like the other analytical Marxists, starts with Marx but does not accept his position as dogma or try to divine how he might have defined *class*. Because of Marx and the theoretical work done since his time, contemporary Marxists are in a better position to come up with such definitions. In any case, we live in very different times, and Marx’s definition, even if we could divine it, might well not be appropriate for modern society.

Since this is a book on theory, I need not go into detail about Wright’s research or that of any of the other empirically oriented Marxists. However, it would be useful to say something about his best-known conceptual contribution—the idea of “contradictory locations within class relations” (Wright, 1985:43). His basic premise is that a given position need not, as is commonly assumed, be located within a given class; it may be in more than one class simultaneously. Thus, a position may be simultaneously proletarian and bourgeois. For example, managers are bourgeois in the sense that they supervise subordinates, but they are also proletarian in that they are supervised by others. The idea of contradictory class locations is derived through careful conceptual analysis and then is studied empirically (see Gubbay, 1997, for a critique of Wright’s approach to social class).

### ***Analytical Marxism Today***

While, as we have seen, analytical Marxists consider themselves to be Marxists, there are those (for example, Callinicos, 1989) who wonder whether their attraction to mainstream concepts and methods makes this designation meaningless or subversive

of a Marxian orientation (Kirkpatrick, 1994). In response, Elster asserts: "Most of the views that I hold to be true and important, I can trace back to Marx" (1985:531).

Mayer (1994) has offered an overview of analytical Marxism that attempts, among other things, to review and rebut what he sees as the six major criticisms of the approach. However, before we discuss those criticisms, there is one critique that emanates from Mayer's work itself: "Analytical Marxism is not a unified or even an internally consistent body of thought" (1994:300). The differences among the three major practitioners discussed here (Cohen, Roemer, and Wright), to say nothing of the others who can be included under this heading (especially Adam Przeworski [1985] and his work on the state), are enormous and make it difficult to discuss these individuals in the same context. Those differences may splinter analytical Marxism before it has an opportunity to develop into a coherent perspective.

The first criticism reviewed by Mayer is that analytical Marxism is atomistic and focuses on rational actors. He responds that analytical Marxists do not conceive of society as composed of isolated individuals and that they recognize that people do not always behave rationally. Second, analytical Marxists are accused of economic determinism, but the response is that the predominant position is that economic factors are primary, not that they are deterministic. The third critique is that analytical Marxists are ahistorical, but Mayer does not see this characteristic as inherent in the approach. Rather, it is traceable to its newness and to the fact that there has not been time to deal with historical issues. Fourth, and relatedly, analytical Marxists are accused of offering static approaches that have difficulty dealing with change. While Mayer recognizes this problem, he argues that virtually all social scientists have this predicament. Fifth, there is the accusation of tautology—"assuming what needs to be proven" (Mayer, 1994:305). Mayer sees this as a problem inherent in all deductive approaches. Finally, analytical Marxism is seen as lacking in moral fervor, but Mayer counters, "Analytical Marxists are quite capable of moral passion, and what their moral critique of capitalism lacks in fervor it more than gains in accuracy and insight" (1994:315).

Mayer concludes with a discussion of six challenges facing analytical Marxism, challenges that must be met if analytical Marxism is to be a significant force in the social sciences. First, analytical Marxism must develop a more dynamic approach. As Mayer puts it, "Any version of Marxism unable to account for social dynamics cannot expect to flourish" (1994:317). Second, the theories of the analytical Marxists must do a better job of relating to specific events and situations. Third, practitioners of this approach must right the current imbalance in the direction of theory and do more empirical research. Fourth, analytical Marxists must expand from their base in economic factors and deal with a wider range of social factors. Fifth, they must move away from a focus on advanced capitalist nations and deal with less developed nations. Finally, analytical Marxists must demonstrate the existence of viable alternatives to capitalism.

## Postmodern Marxian Theory

Marxian theory has been profoundly affected by theoretical developments in structuralism, poststructuralism (P. Anderson, 1984:33), and, of particular interest here, postmodernism (Landry, 2000; E. M. Wood and Foster, 1997; see Chapter 13).

### *Hegemony and Radical Democracy*

A major representative work of postmodern Marxism is Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985). In Ellen Wood's view, this work, accepting the focus on linguistics, texts, and discourse in postmodernism, detaches ideology from its material base and ultimately dissolves "the social altogether into ideology or 'discourse'" (1986:47). The concept of hegemony, which is of central importance to Laclau and Mouffe, was developed by Gramsci to focus on cultural leadership rather than on the coercive effect of state domination. This shift in focus, of course, leads us away from the traditional Marxian concern with the material world and in the direction of ideas and discourse. As Wood puts it, "In short, the Laclau-Mouffe argument is that there *are* no such things as material interests but only discursively constructed *ideas* about them" (1986:61).

In addition to substituting ideas for material interests, Laclau and Mouffe displace the proletariat from its privileged position at the center of Marxian theory. As Wood argues, Laclau and Mouffe are part of a movement involved in the "declassing of the socialist project" (1986:4). Laclau and Mouffe put the issue of class in subjective, discursive terms. The social world is characterized by diverse positions and antagonisms. As a result, it is impossible to come up with the kind of "unified discourse" that Marx envisioned surrounding the proletariat. The universal discourse of the proletariat "has been replaced by a polyphony of voices, each of which constructs its own irreducible discursive identity" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:191). Thus, instead of focusing on the single discourse of the proletariat, Marxian theorists are urged to focus on a multitude of diverse discourses emanating from a wide range of dispossessed voices, such as those of women, blacks, ecologists, immigrants, and consumers, among others. Marxian theory has, as a result, been *decentered* and *detotalized* because it no longer focuses only on the proletariat and no longer sees the problems of the proletariat as *the* problem in society.

Having rejected a focus on material factors and a focal concern for the proletariat, Laclau and Mouffe proceed to reject, as the goal of Marxian theory, communism involving the emancipation of the proletariat. Alternatively, they propose a system labeled "radical democracy." Instead of focusing, as the political right does, on individual democratic rights, they propose to "create a new hegemony, which will be the outcome of the articulation of the greatest number of democratic struggles" (Mouffe, 1988:41). What is needed in this new hegemony is a "hegemony of democratic values, and this requires a multiplication of democratic practices, institutionalizing them into even more diverse social relations" (Mouffe, 1988:41). Radical democracy seeks to bring together under a broad umbrella a wide range of democratic struggles—antiracist, antisexist, anticapitalist, antiexploitation of nature (Eder, 1990), and many others. Thus, this is a "radical and plural democracy" (Laclau, 1990:27). The struggle of one group must not be waged at the expense of the others; all democratic struggles must be seen as equivalent struggles. Thus, it is necessary to bring these struggles together by modifying their identity so that the groups see themselves as part of the larger struggle for radical democracy. As Laclau and Mouffe argue:

The alternative of the Left should consist of locating itself fully in the field of the democratic revolution and expanding the chains of equivalents between different



struggles against oppression. *The task of the Left therefore cannot be to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy. . . .* It is not in the abandonment of the democratic terrain but, on the contrary, in the extension of the field of democratic struggles to the whole of civil society and the state, that the possibility resides for a hegemonic strategy of the Left.

(Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:176)

While radical democracy retains the objective of the abolition of capitalism, it recognizes that such abolition will not eliminate the other inequalities within society. Dealing with all social inequalities requires a far broader movement than that anticipated by traditional Marxists.

### ***Continuities and Time-Space Compression***

Another Marxian foray into postmodernist theory (see Chapter 13 for a discussion of yet another, the work of Fredric Jameson) is David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989). While Harvey sees much that is of merit in postmodern thinking, he sees serious weaknesses in it from a Marxian viewpoint. Postmodernist theory is accused of overemphasizing the problems of the modern world and underemphasizing its material achievements. Most important, it seems to accept postmodernity and its associated problems rather than suggesting ways of overcoming these difficulties: "The rhetoric of postmodernism is dangerous for it avoids confronting the realities of political economy and the circumstances of global power" (Harvey, 1989:117). What postmodernist theory needs to confront is the source of its ideas—the political and economic transformation of early twenty-first-century capitalism.

Central to the political economic system is control over markets and the labor process (these two arenas involve the issue of *accumulation* in capitalism). While the postwar period between 1945 and 1973 was characterized by an inflexible process of accumulation, since 1973 we have moved to a more flexible process. Harvey associates the earlier period with Fordism (as well as Keynesian economics) and the later period with post-Fordism (for a critique of this, see Gartman, 1998), but we need not discuss these issues here, since they already have been covered in this chapter. While Fordism is inflexible, Harvey sees post-Fordism as associated with flexible accumulation resting "on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption. It is characterized by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and, above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation" (1989:147).

While Harvey sees great changes, and argues that it is these changes that lie at the base of postmodern thinking, he believes that there are many *continuities* between the Fordist and post-Fordist eras. His major conclusion is that while "there has certainly been a sea-change in the surface appearance of capitalism since 1973 . . . the underlying logic of capitalist accumulation and its crisis tendencies remain the same" (Harvey, 1989:189).

Central to Harvey's approach is the idea of time-space compression. He believes that modernism served to compress both time and space and that that process has accelerated in the postmodern era, leading to "an intense phase of time-space compression

that has a disorienting and disruptive impact upon political-economic practices, the balance of class power, as well as upon cultural and social life" (Harvey, 1989:284). But this time-space compression is *not* essentially different from earlier epochs in capitalism: "We have, in short, witnessed another fierce round in that process of annihilation of space through time that has always lain at the center of capitalism's dynamic" (Harvey, 1989:293). To give an example of the annihilation of space through time, cheeses once available only in France now are sold throughout the United States because of rapid, low-cost transportation. Or, in the 1991 war with Iraq, television transported us instantaneously from air raids in Baghdad to "scud" attacks on Tel Aviv to military briefings in Riyadh.

Thus, to Harvey, postmodernism is *not* discontinuous with modernism; they are reflections of the same underlying capitalist dynamic.<sup>8</sup> Both modernism and postmodernism, Fordism and post-Fordism, coexist in today's world. The emphasis on Fordism and post-Fordism will "vary from time to time and place to place, depending on which configuration is profitable and which is not" (Harvey, 1989:344). Such a viewpoint serves to bring the issue of postmodernity under the umbrella of neo-Marxian theory, although it is, in turn, modified by developments in postmodern thinking.

Finally, Harvey discerns changes and cracks in postmodernity, indicating that we already may be moving into a new era, an era that neo-Marxian theory must be prepared to theorize, perhaps by integrating still other idea systems.

## After Marxism

There are innumerable post-Marxist positions (Beilharz, 2005d) that *could* be discussed in this section, but we will close with one of the more extreme positions.

The title of Ronald Aronson's (1995) book, *After Marxism*, tells much of the story. Aronson, a self-avowed Marxist, makes it clear that Marxism is over and that Marxist theorists are now on their own in dealing with the social world and its problems. This position is based on the idea that the "Marxian project" involved the integration of theory and practice. While some Marxists may continue to buy into parts of Marxian theory, the Marxian project of the transformation from capitalism to socialism is dead, since it clearly has failed in its objectives. It is history, not Aronson, that has rendered the judgment that the Marxian project has failed. Thus, those Marxists who continue to buy into the theory are destroying the dialectical whole of theory and practice that constituted the Marxian project. This splintering is disastrous because what gave Marxism its compelling power is the fact that it represented "a single coherent theoretical and practical project" (Aronson, 1995:52).

But how can the Marxian project be over if capitalism continues to exist and may, with the death of communism, be more powerful than ever? In fact, Aronson recognizes that there are a variety of arguments to be made on behalf of the idea that Marxism is still relevant. For example, he recognizes that most people around the world are worse-off today than they were at the dawn of capitalism and that in spite

<sup>8</sup> Bauman (1990) contends that capitalism and socialism are simply mirror images of modernity.

of a number of changes, the fundamental exploitative structure of capitalism is unaltered. In spite of such realities, Aronson argues that a variety of transformations must lead us to the conclusion that crucial aspects of Marxian theory are obsolete:

- The working class has *not* become increasingly impoverished.
- The class structure has *not* simplified to two polarized classes (bourgeoisie and proletariat).
- Because of the transformation of manufacturing processes, the number of industrial workers has declined, the working class has become more fragmented, and their consciousness of their situation has eroded.
- The overall shrinkage of the working class has led to a decline in its strength, its class consciousness, and its ability to engage in class struggle.
- Workers are increasingly less likely to identify themselves as workers; they have multiple and competing identities, and so being a worker is now just one of many identities.

While Marxism is over as far as Aronson is concerned, he argues that we should *not regret its existence, even with the excesses (for example, Stalinism) that were committed in its name. Marxism*

gave hope, it made sense of the world; it gave direction and meaning to many and countless lives. As the twentieth century's greatest call to arms, it inspired millions to stand up and fight, to believe that humans could one day shape their lives and their world to meet their needs.

(Aronson, 1995:85)

In addition to the failures of Marxism in the real world, Aronson traces the demise of Marxism to problems within the theory itself. Those problems he traces to the fact that Marx's original theory was created during the early days of the modern world and, as a result, contains an uncomfortable mixture of modern and premodern ideas. This problem has plagued Marxian theory throughout its history. For example, the premodern, prophetic belief in *emancipation coexisted with a modern belief in science and the search for facts*: "Beneath its veneer of science, such dogmatic prophecy reveals its deeper and premodern kinship with religious anticipations of a world redeemed by a divine power beyond our control" (Aronson, 1995:97). To take one other example, Marxism tended to emphasize objective processes and to deemphasize subjective processes.

Aronson begins one of his chapters with the following provocative statement: "Feminism destroyed Marxism" (1995:124). He quickly makes it clear that feminism did not accomplish this feat on its own. However, feminism did contribute to the destruction of Marxism by demanding a theory that focuses on the "oppression of women *as women*" (Aronson, 1995:126). This focus clearly undermined Marxian theory, which purported to offer a theory applicable to all human beings. Feminism also set the stage for the development of other groups demanding that theories focus on their specific plight rather than on the universal problems of humanity.

Aronson describes post-Marxist theories like the analytical Marxism discussed earlier as Marxism without Marxism. That is, they are pure theories, lacking in practice, and therefore, in his view, should not be called Marxism:

They may claim the name, as does analytical Marxism, but they do so as so many Marxisms without Marxism. They have become so transformed, so limited, so narrowly theoretical that even when their words and commitments ring true they only invoke Marxism's aura, but no more. However evocative, the ideas cannot conjure the fading reality.

(Aronson, 1995:149)

Such Marxian theories will survive, but they will occupy a far humbler place in the world. They will represent just one theoretical voice in a sea of such voices.

Given all this, Aronson concludes that critical analysts of the modern world are on their own without a Marxian project to build upon. However, this is a mixed blessing. While the Marxian project had enormous strengths, it was also an albatross around the necks of critical analysts. Should former Marxists search for a new Marx? Or a new Marxian project? In light of developments in society and in theory, Aronson feels that the answer to these questions is no, because we have moved "beyond the possibility of the kind of holism, integration, coherence and confidence that Marxism embodied" (1995:168). Thus, for example, instead of a single radical movement, what we must seek today is a radical coalition of groups and ideas. The goal of such a coalition is the emancipation of modernity from its explosive inner tensions and its various forms of oppressiveness.

One problem facing such a new radical movement is that it can no longer hope to be driven by a compelling vision of some future utopia. Yet it must have some sort of emotional cement to hold it together and keep it moving ahead. The movement must have a moral base, a sense of what is right and what is wrong. It also must have hope, albeit a far more modest hope than that which characterized the Marxian project. Although modest, such hopes are less likely to lead to the profound disenchantment that characterized the Marxian project when it failed to achieve its social objectives.

## Criticisms of Post-Marxism

Many Marxian theorists are unhappy with post-Marxist developments (for example, Burawoy, 1990; E. M. Wood, 1986; E. M. Wood and Foster, 1997). Burawoy, for instance, attacks the analytical Marxists for eliminating the issue of history and for making a fetish of clarity and rigor. Weldes criticizes analytical Marxism for allowing itself to be colonized by mainstream economics, adopting a purely "technical, problem-solving approach," becoming increasingly academic and less political, and growing more conservative (1989:354). Ellen Wood picks up on the political issue and criticizes analytical Marxism (as well as postmodern Marxism) for its political quietism and its "cynical defeatism, where every radical programme of change is doomed to failure" (1989:88). Even supporters of one branch of analytical Marxism, the rigorous empirical study of Marxian ideas, have been critical of their brethren in rational choice theory, who, mistakenly in their view, adopt a position of methodological individualism (A. Levine, Sober, and Wright, 1987).

The work of Laclau and Mouffe has come under particularly heavy attack. For example, Allen Hunter criticizes them for their overall commitment to idealism and, more specifically, for situating "themselves at the extreme end of discourse analysis,

viewing *everything* as discourse" (1988:892). Similarly, Geras (1987) attacks Laclau and Mouffe for their idealism, but he also sees them as profligate, dissolute, illogical, and obscurantist. The tenor of Laclau and Mouffe's reply to Geras is caught by its title "Post-Marxism without Apologies" (1987). Burawoy attacks Laclau and Mouffe for getting "lost in the web of history where everything is important and explanation is therefore impossible" (1990:790).

Finally, in contrast to Aronson, Burawoy believes that Marxism remains useful in understanding capitalism's dynamics and contradictions (see also E. M. Wood, 1995). Thus, with the demise of communism and the ascendancy of worldwide capitalism, "Marxism will . . . , once more, come into its own" (Burawoy, 1990:792). More recently, and in light of developments in the 1990s, Wood and Foster (1997:67) argue that Marxism is more necessary than ever because "humanity is more and more connected in the global dimensions of exploitation and oppression."

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## Summary

In this chapter we examine a wide range of approaches that can be categorized as neo-Marxian sociological theories. All of them take Marx's work as their point of departure, but they often go in very different directions. Although these diverse developments give neo-Marxian theory considerable vitality, they also create at least some unnecessary and largely dysfunctional differentiation and controversy. Thus, one task for the modern Marxian sociological theorist is to integrate this broad array of theories while recognizing the value of various specific pieces of work.

The first neo-Marxian theory historically, but the least important at present, especially to the sociologically oriented thinker, is economic determinism. It was against this limited view of Marxian theory that other varieties developed. Hegelian Marxism, especially in the work of Georg Lukács, was one such reaction. This approach sought to overcome the limitations in economic determinism by returning to the subjective, Hegelian roots of Marxian theory. Hegelian Marxism is also of little contemporary relevance; its significance lies largely in its impact on later neo-Marxian theories.

The critical school, which was the inheritor of the tradition of Hegelian Marxism, *is* of contemporary importance to sociology. The great contributions of the critical theorists (Marcuse, Habermas, and so forth) are the insights offered into culture, consciousness, and their interrelationships. These theorists have enhanced our understanding of cultural phenomena such as instrumental rationality, the "culture industry," the "knowledge industry," communicative action, domination, and legitimations. To this they add a concern with consciousness, primarily in the form of an integration of Freudian theory in their work. However, critical theory has gone too far in its efforts to compensate for the limitations of economic determinism; it needs to reintegrate a concern for economics, indeed, for large-scale social forces in general.

Also discussed in this context is the work of the Birmingham school, which had a much more positive view of culture, especially as it emerged from the lower classes.

Next this chapter offers discussions of two lines of work in neo-Marxian economic sociology. The first deals with the relationship between capital and labor, especially in the works of Baran and Sweezy and of Braverman. The second is concerned with the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism. Both sets of work represent efforts to return to some of the traditional economic concerns of Marxian sociology. This work is significant for its effort to update Marxian economic sociology by taking into account the emerging realities of contemporary capitalist society.

Another concern is historically oriented Marxism, specifically the work of Immanuel Wallerstein and his supporters on the modern world-system. Then there is a discussion of those neo-Marxists who focus on spatial issues. The chapter closes with a section devoted to what, in light of the demise of communism, have come to be called post-Marxist theories. Included under this heading are several types of analytical Marxism and postmodern Marxian theory. Also included in this section is a discussion of an example of the kind of position taken by Marxists who have been forced to give up on the Marxian project in light of developments in the world.