**SOC 3150: Classical Sociological Theory**

**Lecture 7: Marx: Relations of Production & Class Structure**

The development of society is the result of productive interaction between humans & nature in both an analytical and historical sense

Every production system entails a definite set of self-creative social relationships between individuals: there is no isolated individual, no society that is not founded on a definite set of relations of production

This is handed down over time, sometimes encouraging expansion in the forces of production, other times holding them back

**Class Domination:**

Classes emerge where relations of production involve a differentiated division of labour allowing for surplus production that may be appropriated by a minority

This exploitative, dominating group may be termed a class

Ironically, as it was so often implicit, Marx never felt the need, until nearing the end of his career, to spell out the concept of class in a precise fashion.

In his late, unfinished manuscripts, however, he denied it could be neatly equated with either source of income or functional position in the division of labour (e.g. doctors, farmers, and builders pose difficulties). Nor can distribution be separated from production.

For Marx, classes are an aspect of the relations of production. They are constituted by the relationship of groups of individuals to the ownership of private property in the means of production.

Classes are dichotomous: all class societies are built around a primary line of division between 2 antagonistic classes: one dominant, the other subordinate. They only form a class in this relation to each other

**Class Structure and Market Relationships:**

While capitalist society closely approximates this picture, all historical class societies show a more complicated system of relationships which overlap this dichotomous class axis:

1. Classes which are marginal in the sense that they derive from relations of production which are either being superseded or in the ascendant (e.g. the free peasantry);
2. Strata which stand in a relation of functional dependence upon one of the main classes and identify with them (e.g. administrative staff); and
3. Heterogeneous clusters of individuals in the *Lumpenproletariat* who stand on the margins of the class system/are not wholly integrated into the division of labour (e.g. vagabonds, street people, criminals).

The extent to which a class = a homogeneous entity is historically variable: subordinate gradations exist in all classes (e.g. financial and industrial capitalists)

The ordering of classes and the nature of class conflict change with the historical emergence of successive modes of society (e.g. from pre-capitalist feudal societies to capitalist ones, where earlier, traditional classes are increasingly swallowed up by the bourgeoisie and the proletariat)

Classes form the main linkage between the means/relations of production (the base) and the rest of society (the superstructure). Thus, class relationships based on private property are the main axis around which political power is distributed and organized, though in variously decentralized to concentrated forms in different historical periods

The modern state emerges in conjunction with the struggle of the bourgeoisie with the remnants of feudalism and the demands of the capitalist economy, varying with the circumstances how the bourgeoisie gained ascendancy

**Ideology and Consciousness:**

Marx asserts that, most basically, human consciousness is rooted in *praxis* (i.e. human activity in society): “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (e.g. language is a social product, the basis of consciousness).

This is a continuous and reciprocal (dialectical) process

The class which controls the means of material production (mode of production) also has control over the means of intellectual production (superstructure)

In all class societies, the dominant class develops or takes over ideological forms which legitimize its operation (e.g. politics, law, and religion)

The dominant class is able to disseminate ideas which legitimate its position of dominance (e.g. “freedom” and “equality” may not be what they seem, but may, for example, back up employment contracts that disadvantage wage-labourers)

Ideologies must be studied in relation to the evolving social relationships in which they are embedded over time, not merely in their internal content

Two related emphases in Marx’s treatment of ideology:

1. The social circumstances in which people are active conditions their perception, their “practical consciousness” of the world;
2. In class societies, the creation and diffusion of ideas is heavily dependent on the ruling class

While it is true that an individual or group may develop ideas partly at variance with that of the dominant class, but these will not come into prominence unless they fit with the interests of the dominant or an ascending class

While the above implies stability, Marx does allow for revolutionary social change:

* in a stable society, there is relative equilibrium between the mode of production, its social relations, and the superstructure
* progressive changes in productive activity come up against the barriers of existing relations of production, fostering class and ideological conflict
* struggles in the political sphere over opposing 'principles’ ultimately either result in the “common ruin of the contending classes” (e.g. Rome) or “a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large” into a new period of relative stability (e.g. feudalism to capitalism)

Marx claims that the dominant modes of thought will not shed their ideological character until “class domination in general ceases to be the form in which the social order is organized.” Only then will it be possible to recover the alienated self in a rational order free from class domination.