

# Troy Catterson Course on Marxism

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I went through the videos and created the following outline based on the lecture material:

## Human Nature

1. Marx believes the essence of all life is activity. Not only do we act or strive for things but we do it for goals (i.e. envisioning having a college degree and doing labor to achieve this and become a future self that has a college degree).
2. There is a divide between the *actual* self/world and the *idea* of a future self/world. We are able to make changes in the world and in ourselves through labor.
3. We can achieve fulfillment when we have control over our labor and can imprint ourselves upon the world. Capitalism alienates us from our labor and thus forms one of the key contradictions as defined by Marx.

## Commodification

1. Capitalism alienates workers from their labor in four ways:
  - a. Worker from Product - What they produce is no longer their own because they are producing on behalf of someone else.
  - b. Worker from Act of Production - Workers have no say in what they produce, how it is designed, or how it is produced. This is entirely controlled by the capitalist owner.
  - c. Worker from Humanity - By no longer being able to own the means of production, the worker is no longer able to reflect themselves in the product.
  - d. Worker from Other Workers - As a wage worker, people are in competition with each other for the jobs controlled by the capitalists.
2. Capitalism is an exchange economy, specifically one that exchanges an object called a commodity.

- a. Humans all strive to attain things. Marx does not say what these are. However, he says that for each person, objects have a use value which is derived from the specific qualities of the object.
  - i. Prior to mass production, these specific qualities would be imparted upon the object by the creator through their labor. Thus the creator is able to be fulfilled through their labor by creating something with specific qualities unique to themselves.
  - ii. We can see that the use value is a function of the labor input.
- b. If two people have different objects and want to exchange them, due to their different use values we have to find a common denominator. This is labor. But, because the type of labor that goes into making different objects is incomparable, we have to abstract labor and only consider the *quantity* of labor and ignore the *quality* of labor used to make an object. Capitalists only consider labor as a specific quantity required to produce a commodity and therefore the labor of the worker is a commodity within itself.
- c. Money is simply the universal commodity. Due to humans being reduced to their labor, or their ability to produce, they are, in turn, reduced to a monetary value or commodified.

## Wage Enslavement

1. Money gets its value from a social convention with labor as its basis.
2. Recalling from before, a basic premise of alienation is that the worker does not own the means of production (materials, tools, property). The capitalists own this across the board and as a result the workers are required to compete for the opportunity to sell their labor to a capitalist. The capitalist, on the other hand, is looking to get the most labor for the least amount of money to make commodities which they can sell. We call this wage enslavement.
  - a. Classical slavery had ownership of the worker and the worker was paid in housing and food and in-kind. Under capitalism, the owner doesn't care for the worker but instead pays the worker a wage which the worker must use to survive.
3. This setup requires workers to "voluntarily" sell their labor to make a product for which they have no love and for which they exert no control over the production under the threat of being fired by the capitalist and unable to pay living expenses.
  - a. The volunteer aspect of selling labor is a farce because through mass production, each worker is a tool that is disposable and therefore must settle for working in a job that is neither meaningful (i.e. no control over what is produced, no control over the goals) nor fulfilling (i.e. no control over how it is produced).

## Exploitation

1. The capitalist's primary goal is to maximize the rate of profit (RP). Adam Smith discusses how the measure of a good capitalist economy is one that grows with the total amount of money in circulation as the measure of that.

2. Maximizing the rate of profit requires the minimization of costs. There are two types of costs:
  - a. Constant Capital (C)
    - i. Technology, land, raw materials, etc - These items do not appreciate in value but are required for the creation of new commodities.
  - b. Variable Capital (V)
    - i. Human labor - transforms the constant capital into something with added value, a.k.a. The final commodity. Labor is the only source of the surplus value (SV).
3. The formula for the rate of profit is given by:  $RP = SV / (C + V)$ . This demonstrates how in order to make a return on their money, they must pay the workers less than the full value of their labor.

## Historical Materialism

1. Marx lays out a process by which history unfolds: “In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. **It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.**”
2. What makes it historical?
  - a. History is pushed forward by conflict between classes and as classes change as does the nature of the conflict between them.
3. What makes it material?
  - a. Marx argues that ideas do not follow actions, but in fact the fulfillment of wants by humans create the conditions for ideas to arise.
  - b. Humans arrange their physical labor and ability to produce into what he terms the productive forces. These are comprised of labor plus the means of labor (technology).
  - c. Depending on the productive forces, there are specific relations of production. These are the social classes and divisions of labor and may serve to perpetuate and strengthen the productive forces.
  - d. Out of the relations of production comes a conscious ideology that serves to uphold the relations of production.
  - e. As productive forces grow (through technology) they will outgrow the existing relations of production and will be the basis of a change.
4. What makes it dialectical?
  - a. Marx says that throughout history there are always an oppressed class and an oppressor class. And eventually the oppressed class will overcome through struggle and form a new environment and a new set of oppressors and

oppressed. Ultimately, through the resolution of class conflict the oppressor can be eliminated and pave the way for communism.

5. Economic Conditions > Social Conditions > Worldview- Religious and Philosophical ideas

## Historical Epochs

1. Marx applied his general principles to the history of Europe.
2. Asiatic/ancient
  - a. Agriculture is the main form of production and is in the hands of the conquerors who own the land and are able to create and lay claim to a surplus of food. Those who were conquered were forced to work the land as slaves.
  - b. At some early point the landowners, known as the “patricians”, were exploiting the labor of the slaves who used their collective action to later become “plebians”, or common citizens. They were then able to enter places in society. Once Rome entered its empire period, the slave labor came from outside the country and were known as the “barbarians.” Over time, the civilization spreads which leads to more and more “barbarians” occupying places in society which weakens the empire. Eventually, the barbarians have enough collective power to overcome the empire and then are able to set up feudal kingdoms with themselves in power as nobles and the aristocracy.
3. Feudalism
  - a. The King moderates the relationship between feudal kingdoms and between the nobles, serfs, and vassals. Everyone is given rights to some extent because the relationships were reciprocal. The major relations of production are defined by the social contrasts between these three.
  - b. Not an exchange relation, but instead a barter relation.
  - c. As elementary manufacturing begins to build and these manufacturers start to dwell in cities, there is a transition whereby trade is outside of the traditional noble/serf relationship. These skilled craftspeople form guilds and start to build power as a new class, and they start to break down the social contracts to make way for exchange markets.
  - d. As technology and consolidation occurs, the manufacturing guilds are transformed into concentrated entities which begin accruing wealth for smaller numbers of individuals.
4. Capitalism
  - a. As the city dwellers begin to gain power and marginalize the noblemen, the state becomes reliant on the city dweller (bourgeoisie) for centralized power and transitions political power accordingly.
  - b. As technology allows the skill level of a wage worker to be less because machines are more capable, this creates a situation where the wage workers are forced to compete more with each other.

- c. Ultimately the wealth and power is concentrated into the hands of the bourgeoisie and the nobles are completely eliminated. The towns are marginalized and the cities become the centers of power.

## The Development of Capitalism

<b>Economic Structure</b>	Barter	Commerce	Industry	Stock Exchange
<b>Political Structure</b>	Feudal Monarchy	Capitalized nation-states	Democracies	International corporations
<b>Social Relations</b>	Guild vs. Noble	Manufacturer vs. Aristocracy/Guild	Middle class/ skilled wage worker vs. capitalist	Proletariat vs. capitalist
<b>Means of Production</b>	Crafts	Workshops	Factories (assembly line)	Total automation
<b>Technological</b>	Wind/water	Steam/ Loom/ Navigation	Electric/ railroads/ telegraph/ machines/ mass production	High tech/ information

## The Self-Destruction of Capitalism

1. A ruling class maintains its dominance by constructing a class consciousness by making the values of the dominant class the values of the overall society.
  - a. For example, a serf will willingly remain a serf because they believe that the noble has their best interest at heart and is willing to protect them and provide for their subsistence.
2. The special feature of capitalism is that the class interest of the capitalist does *not* create a sense of trust in the worker. The bourgeois capitalist creates a system that intentionally makes the worker poorer and poorer.
3. The engine of capitalism's growth is, in fact, *the engine of revolution*.
4. There are two distinct features of capitalism that combined lead to its own destruction:
  - a. Industrial growth +
    - i. As industry grows and markets grow, they stretch across the globe and eliminate boundaries.
    - ii. The elimination of boundaries homogenizes the conditions between workers in every nation.

- iii. The experience of exploitation becomes a common interest or experience between workers across national boundaries.
- b. Wage labor =
  - i. As discussed prior, the wage labor relation to production forces workers to compete with each other for the opportunity to earn a wage from the capitalists.
  - ii. The competition between laborers unites them around a common interest.
- c. Alliance of interests
  - i. The realization of the exploitation and the common interests allows the workers to unite around a common enemy and through this process gain class consciousness.
  - ii. Once the common enemy, the bourgeoisie, is realized, the majority can take shape.
  - iii. This majority is unique in that once all workers are united as a class, they become the first majority in history that is oppressed and therefore creates a minority of oppressors.
  - iv. The desire to no longer be oppressed sets the stage for a proletarian revolution and the establishment of the rule of the proletariat, or the dictatorship of the proletariat.
  - v. The *elimination of the kind of property that concentrates the resources in the hands of the few* is what allows the class divides to be eliminated and the formation of a classless society. This is very specifically *not* an abolition of property held for personal use.

## The Historical Nature of Property

1. One of the common criticisms of Marxism is also one that is commonly misunderstood - the abolition of private property
2. **Ethical criticism:** humans have the right to own property and abolishing this either by abolition of personal or private property is denying people their natural rights.
3. Marx responds to this by saying the definition of property is dependent on the productive and social forces of the time. Basically, he is asking, "What property are you talking about?"
  - a. Ancient ideas of property were simply that which you possessed, so if you are strong and take property from someone else, it belongs to you. Is this the property you mean?
  - b. Feudal ideas of property were literally "that which is a payment for a service to a superior." This was based upon the hierarchical class structure which began with the king granting land from God to the feudal vassals in exchange of service to him, the vassals granting the land to serfs to farm and in exchange of service to them. Is this the property you mean?
  - c. Peasant/artisan ideas of property are based upon Locke's concept of property being inherent to the self and as a product of labor. The mixing of the self with labor develops the property. Marx agrees with this notion as he sees humans as

producers who express their being into that which they create, or that which *is proper to them*. Marx argues that this is the form of property that is being destroyed by capitalism and that the bourgeois notion of property is actually counter to the peasant/ artisan concept of property.

- d. Bourgeois property is otherwise known as capital. This is the means by which production takes place, including laborers and equipment and anything else with exchange value. With the destruction of individual shops and production arises the industrial means of mass production. This transformation destroys the rights of people to our property.

## Eliminating Private Property

1. How does capitalism transform us from individual property to bourgeois property?
2. Capitalism requires a separation of the individual labor and the ownership of the means of production.
3. In the early stage of capitalism, the bourgeoisie acquire money and resources in order to create production. They centralize the control of resources and means.
4. Once control is centralized in the hands of the capitalists, the control is taken away from the workers and possessed by the very few.
5. The basic function of capital requires the exploitation of labor and systematically creates class exploitation.
6. By creating the division between a capitalist and a worker, a new type of property is created. Workers are denied the property that they are entitled to through creation.

## Collective Ownership

1. Once the Marxist thesis of the elimination of private property (i.e., capitalist property) is established, it is possible to explore the transition to collective ownership. Marx is only trying to do away with the machine that uses capital to create more capital through exploitation.
2. Capitalism continuously transforms the ownership of property in such a way that individual shops and plots of land are eliminated and property is collected in the hands of the few.
  - a. Therefore, the so-called *private ownership* is actually collective ownership, but the property is *collected in the hands of the few*.
  - b. Marx proposes that instead of this property being used for a few to create profits for themselves the workers take control and re-distribute the ownership of the property to themselves the workers. This places the collective ownership of the property *into the hands of all*.
  - c. Basically, Marx is saying communists are not eliminating private property because under capitalism private property has already been eliminated; in fact, we are seeking to restore that property back to the people.
3. **Practical criticism:** Elimination of private property and the profit motive eliminates the incentive for people to work.

- a. Marx responds to this by asking, what do the workers get out of private property?
  - b. This criticism contains within it a flaw which is, if the inability for people to profit for their labor will bring about lack of incentive and the collapse of society then *why has society not collapsed under capitalism?* Our present society is set up in such a way that most of the population works to produce and is forced to surrender most of the wealth created by their labor to the idle class of those who don't work. So if the criticism's logic held true, *society should have already collapsed* because those who work don't enjoy the products of their labor and those who don't work enjoy the products of other people's labor.
  - c. Marx argues for a transition from a profit motive to a pride/merit motive. His argument is for everyone to have rights to the products of their labor. This is the basis for the concept of "to each according to his labor." This is counter to the misconception that under communism that all people will receive the same material conditions because Marx never argues for this.
4. Once the profit motive is eliminated then value of production can be realized in *use*. Practical value of the things we produce can become the driver for production.
  5. Collective ownership as described by Marx is *not* a step backwards to the individual plots of land, however. This is because the productive forces won't allow it. Mass production allowed for creation of vast wealth through the revolutionary process of mechanization and centralization of production. **The problem is not the manner in which things are produced but the manner in which the wealth is distributed after production.**