

The Philosophy of Karl Marx

(Summary of Terms)

MATERIALISM

- no Mind or Idea is logically prior to Nature.
- matter is prior, but mind is still real; mind emerges from Nature without being reducible to it.
- matter: those limitations you encounter when you try to transcend Nature.

DIALECTIC

- since the content of everything consists of opposing factors, therefore all reality is a process of self-transformation.
- in this tension-riddled process, conditions arise which yield something *genuinely new*.
- all of the above is first found in nature and history, and is reflected in thought.
- everything is *dynamically* (not statically) connected to everything else.
- change is universal and such change is radical.

HUMANKIND

- since to be human we must distinguish ourselves from Nature, we therefore transform natural objects. (We always have a relationship to Nature, but now we're not simply dependent on Nature.)
- we *are* our labour: labour defines us: we are what we do.
- we are also object to another: we are *social* beings.

SOCIETY

- its base is economic (the "substructure")
- this substructure includes
 - the means of production (these are necessary for humankind's self-making)
 - the relationship to the m.o.p. (people have differing and antagonistic relations/views here, with the result that class divisions ensue.)
- in a class-divided society, our labour is not a means of self-expression but of self-alienation.
- because labour is forced, the harder we work the more *self*-alienated (not merely alienated from others) we become.
- because of the economic sub-structure and class-divisions, only the class has ontological status: we *are* our class because of our relationship to our labour.
- the economic limitation limits us *totally*; no genuine individualism is possible.

CAPITALISM

- it has a universality of sorts (here Marx contrasts its universality with that more commonly spoken of by philosophy.)
- it's a universal enslavement: capitalists are as enslaved as the workers they exploit.

MARX'S "FAITH"

- humans are *essentially* good and their "accidental" non-goodness will disappear as soon as private property is abolished.
- the workers' revolution will be final: they have nothing to lose (except their chains), and the revolution will usher in a new "world."

PHILOSOPHY, ART, RELIGION

- these are all "ideologies" (contrast with "ideation") by which we legitimate our place in society (especially our financial position.)
- we *cannot* wholly transcend our condition in thought; i.e., we cannot philosophize ourselves into something (someone) genuinely new. (NB: Kierkegaard agrees with this criticism of Hegel, but Kierkegaard does something very different with it.)

POST-REVOLUTION

- labour will become self-realization.
- payment will be according to need (not according to the capacity to exploit.)
- the proletariat will form an intermediate dictatorship as the state withers away.

Critical Comments

Is atheism an "ideology" for Marx?

Is Marxism eternally true? (Marx himself opposes such notions.)

Is Marxism pertinent only to a particular, passing economic sub-structure?

NOTE: All reductionist arguments "cut both ways."