

Power: Interpersonal, Organizational, and Global Dimensions

Monday, 31 October 2005

TOPIC: How do power differentials arise? Lessons from social theory; Marx continued.

IDEOLOGY

behaviorist – to mid 20th century, democratic liberal scholars, ideology consisted of coherent and articulated world views

- “coherent” a problem – people are rarely coherent in the logical form, are often inconsistent
- political scientists ended up describing the American people as incoherent – their ideas are all over the board and so the American people have no ideology

Marx/Engels – ideology as **false ideas**

Terry Eagleton (British cultural scholar) – ideology is what we do with **signs** (words, symbols), “a convenient way of categorizing under one heading a whole lot of different things we do with signs”; ideology is about human practices of **representation** (communication, how we try to describe the world with words)

Wittgenstein – (before 20th century) words do not equal the things that they stand for

- no natural relationship between word and thing
- before Wittgenstein, lots of philosophers believed that words across languages had something to do with the thing, that there was some relation

ideology = the ability of words (accumulated as ideas) **to affect circumstances, the capacity of words to shape the material and the social world**

To view institutions and social processes through the lens of ideology implies that things are not what they appear to be, that our representations of them, our descriptions and ideas of them *mask* some truer account.

Capitalist ideologies, false consciousness, and commodity fetishism.

Alienation – labor is embodied in things, products become separate from the people/labor that made it and comes to dominate those who produced it – this is Marx’s analysis of the **ideology of capitalism**; like Dr. Frankenstein – his creation comes to overwhelm the creator.

How does alienated labor come to dominate through ideology and **false consciousness**?

Ruling ideas become the common sense of ordinary people – these ideas protect the interest of those who are benefiting from this organization of work.

Workers are potentially subject to the same ideas as those of the ruling class (especially in contemporary society where most information comes from very few sources, e.g. media concentration). Working people who make the objects come to accept these common "ruling"

ideas that circulate in the culture as their own. **They perceive the world not in terms of their own experiences of production but according to the ideas of the common culture; the common culture disproportionately produced by particular classes.** (Whether the producers of the public culture act in their own interests, or inadvertently or purposively serve other interests is a topic for another day. Suffice for now that there is a commonly shared culture, contradictory as it may be.) The working classes, according to Marx, come to believe what they are told (through schools and the media) and thus **misrecognize their own experiences!**

Example: *What is the purpose of higher education?*

manifest purpose – educate the next generation

latent function (achieved but not necessarily intended or articulated) – put forth a certain ideology (e.g. knowledge is good)

- *What does keeping kids in school do to the material organization of society?* If you're in school, you're not working, therefore those who are in labor force can be paid more. School keeps you out of the labor force. It also **stratifies** the labor force (those with education vs. those without). Marx would ask, are these understandings of the relationship between education and the structure of the labor force part of the consciousness of the students? If not, one result may be support for the common idea that some people are worth more than others. (They are smarter and worth more, or perhaps only that they invested time and so should get return on their investment). Now most people know that education boosts your income. If so, why don't all people seek out that higher education? White collar workers live longer than blue collar; that education puts you in a different world of cultural consumption, and as importantly of political opinion - generally, not absolutely. Why don't all people pursue that higher education? Discussion about how desires and wants are developed from social conditions, opportunities (relations of production).

How does alienation create false consciousness?

In *Das Kapital*, Marx talks about **commodity fetishism** (which appears more in his later works) more than false consciousness. What is a fetish?

- something is **more than it appears to be**, has more meaning than appears
- words do not equal things; meanings are not synonymous with words
- obsession over the object is possible because object represents many other sentiments/ideas
- **meaning and emotion** attached – objects become more than just the material (e.g. doll, security blanket, cross, communion)
- **hide the true meaning**

Marx is not a relativist – he does not argue that the evaluation of the worth of an object is just an individual opinion. Instead, commodities have true meanings for Marx, but they get **mystified** – they are given **false meanings, false consciousness through the market.**

Commodities can be exchanged on the market (for x amount of money or other commodities). But the real meaning is that these commodities are accumulated human labor, **“congealed labor.”** In capitalism, despite our protests against human slavery, we exchange goods and services (human labor = human beings) in markets.

We have some labor that does *not* get exchanged on the market and gets treated as having no value, e.g. parenting. The function for parenting for the economy is great – reproduction of labor

for the market! **Parenting reproduces the necessary, essential raw materials for the economy – human beings.** It produces them not only as physical bodies but socializes them to become workers. Advice given to parents changes depending on the needs of the market, e.g. market needs more mind workers so information on how to teach how to read vs. earlier emphasis on moral behavior and the virtue of work. Parenting is not valued and is reproductive without compensation – thus helping to produce **surplus value**, a worker who is compensated for time on the job but contributes the results of that unpaid labor (knowledge, skill, habits).

Asks the class to put in an order a small plastic telephone, a 16oz can of coke, a Nike sneaker, and an Apple lap top. One student puts them in size order, everyone laughs. Another student quickly puts them in price order. Everyone knows the price of each item.

When we produce goods and exchange them on the market they become **commodities** and once that happens, they become **extra-productive**. We do not perceive the **use value** alone or the labor value or the circumstances behind the product – we perceive the **exchange (commodity) value**. That value is created by attaching **excess** meaning to the commodity. That excess meaning is what constitutes/ makes the commodity a fetish.

We see and respond to the fetishized meanings – we have emotional relationships to that thing that have been generated by the imagination/manipulation of the producers. *We see these fetishized meanings that are the consequences of our own imagination and that of the producers.*

Through **signs**, we communicate things. The meaning is produced by professional work (advertisement), invested so as to market the commodity. People will pay far more for items with excess meanings.

- e.g. Steuben glass that used to be sold in five and dime stores. It was very clear and smooth but didn't have much of a market. Then it was put on display on Fifth Avenue in NYC, on dark blue velvet, very few items per window, and priced considerably higher – making it rare and expensive. Profits soared, *created* desirability by apparent, false exclusivity. (cf. DeBeers diamonds).

-e.g. Nike – Michael Jordan as spokesman markets NIKE with the slogan “Just do it.” The price far exceeds the costs of production, even with Jordan's multi-million dollar fees. The message is false because the motto obscures the labor of the people; it is also false because the meaning is a lie – the people to whom it is being sold cannot “just do it” by themselves solely on the basis of individual will or talent or wearing Nikes. The slogan fits in with a culture that encourages kids to believe that all they have to do is try and they will be Michael Jordan.

- Sociologists have shown that the likelihood of an African American boy becoming a doctor or lawyer is far greater than becoming an NBA player. (See research of Professor Harry Edwards, UC Berkeley.)

When we see commodities, we see the meanings invested by the advertisers not the cost of the materials or the labor behind them.

We respond to false consciousness only through struggle. It isn't an even struggle – the state plays a role (“history is a class struggle”)

- in American economy, state supports business more than labor (therefore helps business)(e.g. tax structure, capital gains pays fraction of the income tax that labor /salary pays, justified by the claim that business needs to be supported so that it can employ labor, that investment is

risky and therefore needs to be encouraged by lower taxes while business risks are protected, e.g. Savings and Loan defaults; payment to energy companies under deregulation, protections for failed corporations (e.g. Global Capital, Chrysler...)

- by helping business, it obscures the fact that we're all laborers (in business, trying to earn a living)

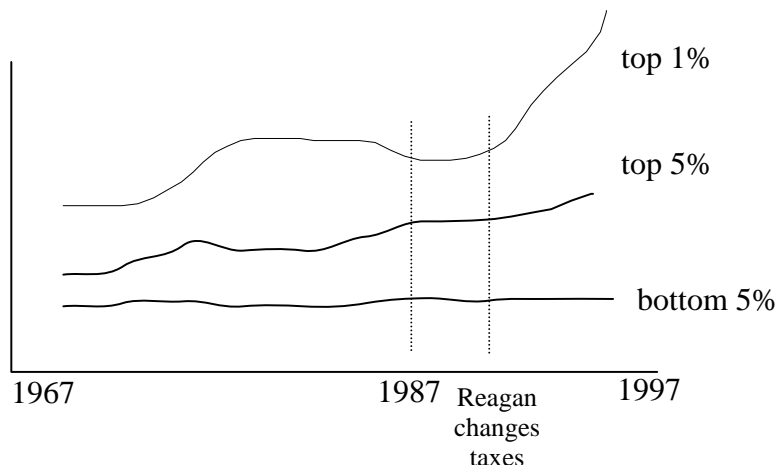
Another example: IVP meat packing wants to set up plant in Waterloo, Iowa. Town gave tax benefits to company that promised to hire 1000 people at \$6.50/hour. Once set up, laborers did not come from Waterloo; it was dangerous, onerous work – couldn't get anyone to work there for \$6.50/hr and so they bused in illegal immigrants. Those employed in Waterloo worked as managers/execs or private security in the factory. Area has not been helped but hurt – new needy population brought to a town without resources or facilities. (Is this an example of what produces the 'red states'?)

There is always a struggle going on that is masked by the fetish. We do not see the power relations for what they are. We do not see our own role in the reproduction in the power relations that help to sustain capitalism and the consequential distribution of wealth and power. We see things as *mana* from heaven rather than as congealed labor.

Fetishism contributes to capitalism – we create and express and seek to satiate desires and so we overproduce

- **purposeful overproduction**, like newer and newer models of things that **extend profitability** for companies, e.g. computers, fashion
- consumers continually want more and this sustains production
- consumers are not only spending income on disposables but are **sustaining inequality in the society**, sustaining differences in wealth so that... [see diagram below]

Change in wealth since 1967, approximate diagram



Aren't we all commodity fetishists? Some authors suggest it's not inevitable – *who* are the actual laborers, the producers? When people started start consumer-awareness campaigns concerning sweat shops in the developing world, labels emerge indicating origin to differentiate those with

well paid labor from this stigma of sweat shops.