

La teoría marxista en la geografía ambiental: Introducción al curso

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Resumen

Esta sesión presente algunos asuntos muy básicos sobre el marxismo para comenzar el curso.

Textos

- Las descripciones de varios conceptos aquí están basadas en Bottomore (1992) (clave: Bottomore1992)

Notas de discusión

¿Qué es el marxismo?

- Title of the course somewhat misleading, insofar as Marxism relies on a unity of theory and praxis: understand the world in order to change it
- “Marxism” as a term was not used in Marx’s lifetime. The term can be misleading insofar as Marx’s ideas built on various predecessors (albeit transforming them in the process), and various persons since Marx have made important contributions to Marxist theory and praxis.
 - Marx himself appears to have conceived his theoretical work as primarily (a) a critique of political economy from the standpoint of the revolutionary proletariat, and (b) a materialist conception of history
 - Lenin proposed the idea of Marxism as a world view in his theory of party, developed in the context of pre-revolutionary Russia. He was prepared to accept revisions to this idea, but under Stalin, it became Soviet dogma. This led to the idea of Marxist science, Marxist physics, Marxist art, etc.
- Marxism is not a religion or a dogma
 - Marx’s theories and his theoretical approach are still generally concerned valid, but not immutable, infallible, or definitive. Thus, the only argument in Marxism to which “Marx said X” is a definitive resolution is one about what Marx said. This implies a great deal of diversity and debate within Marxist thought, as well as over what precisely constitutes Marxist thought.
 - On the other hand, various proposals and ideas can be evaluated as consistent or inconsistent with Marxism based on their compatibility with other aspects of Marxist theory

- * Stalinism, for instances, is widely regarded as inconsistent with Marxism, except perhaps by Stalinists and many opponents of Marxism, because it violates several basic tenets of Marxism, including that revolution and the transition to socialism must be undertaken by the working class rather than imposed from above by a state bureaucracy, that the workers rather than said bureaucracy control the means of production under socialism, and more generally that the workers should overthrow the state rather than be tyrannically ruled by it.
- Parties are generally formed around a set of principles or political program they consider consistent with Marxist theory

El marxismo y el socialismo

- Marxism is frequently, and correctly, associated with socialism and communism. Although the modern socialist movement is generally considered to have originated in the publication of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, written by Marx and Engels (Marx and Engels, 1978), socialism predates this by centuries. Marx and Engels re-conceptualized socialism as the outcome of the working class's struggle to overthrow capitalism, with its specific form determined by historical development and the workers who construct it rather than specified entirely in advance.
- Marx used communism to describe both the revolutionary movement of the working class in capitalist society (socialism was also frequently used by Marx and others in this context) and as the form of society that the working class was struggling to bring about
- Lenin distinguished between socialism and communism by proposing that the former corresponds to the first phase of post-capitalist society suggested by Marx (1978) as a transitional phase from capitalism to communism characterized by:
 - Private ownership of the means of production abolished
 - Workers replace the ruling class and establish a workers state under the dictatorship of the proletariat to guard against a resurgence of the bourgeoisie
 - Bourgeois ideologies and practices continue to influence social thought
 - Income calculated according to labor performed rather than need, but no longer derived from property ownership
 - Access to the means of subsistence still mediated by exchange
- Communism, in turn, would correspond to what Marx referred to as a higher stage of communism, characterized by:
 - Elimination of classes and division of labor both necessary preconditions
 - Abolition of private property and human self-alienation
 - Each produces according to ability and receives according to need
 - The state, no longer necessary, withers away
- Marx and Engels did not necessarily consider socialism nor communism as ends in themselves, but the conditions under which humanity can achieve its emancipation from need and transcend its alienation.

El marxismo y el socialismo “realmente existente”

- Substantial debate over the response to countries (e.g., Soviet Union, China, Cuba) that identify themselves or are frequently described as “socialist” exists. At a fundamental level, such claims can be evaluated by asking whether such countries indicate movement towards communism, which tends to yield four groups of responses:
 - Nominally socialist countries are genuinely socialist and moving towards communism in a manner consistent with Marxist theory
 - Nominally socialist countries are genuinely socialist, but progress towards communism has been impeded by the rise of a bureaucracy
 - Nominally socialist countries, if they were ever genuinely socialist, have regressed to capitalism
 - Nominally socialist countries have developed into new types of class-exploitative societies that are neither capitalist nor socialist
- Most Marxists hold that provision of services by the state, state ownership or control over the means of production and central planning do not constitute socialism, or even a move towards socialism, especially when the tax burden of supporting them is primarily extracted from the earnings of the working class.

Conceptos claves en la teoría marxista

- Materialist dialectic (or dialectical materialism)
 - Dialectic an extremely complex concept to explain, but materialism posits primacy of material reality (over ideas)
 - Dialectical relationship between society and nature as they continually transform each other; neither can be reduced or subsumed by the other, although society is embedded in and dependent upon nature, but nature is not dependent upon society
- Historical materialism
 - Human development rooted in the means and relations of production — i.e., how humans come together and develop methods to meet their needs
 - Characterization of societies by their mode of production
- Mode of production
 - Technical — methods and techniques used in the production of a particular type of use-value (e.g., mode of production of cotton)
 - Abstract — abstract representation of a reasonably narrowly defined set of relationships (e.g., capitalist mode of production, characteristic form of the labor-process under the class relations of capitalism (including production of surplus-value) presuming production of commodities for exchange)
 - Holistic/comparative — whole gamut of production, exchange, distribution, and consumption relations as well as institutional, juridical, and administrative arrangements, political organizations and state apparatus, ideology and characteristic forms of social (class) reproduction
- Capitalism

- As a historical phase, consists of complex social formations and involves economic, social, and political behavior and attributes of different groups that do not necessarily break into two simple classes (capitalist and worker)
- As a mode of production, has a more theoretical and formal designation of two basic classes and wage labor-capital as the defining relation, in addition to other general attributes:
 - * Production for exchange rather than use by numerous producers
 - * Market where labor-power is bought and sold
 - * Predominant mediation of exchange by the money commodity
 - * Control of the labor-process by the capitalist or its managerial agent
 - * Competition between capitals
- Value theory
 - Commodities contradictory unity of use-value and exchange-value
 - Capital produces commodities to realize surplus-value contained in exchange-value of its commodities; worker forced to sell her labor-power as a commodity to obtain the money needed to purchase the use-values in commodity form necessary to subsistence and reproduction
 - In societies characterized by the predominance of commodity exchange, socially necessary labor-time becomes the standard of value
 - Valuing labor-power by this same standard allows the capitalist to extract surplus-value, because labor-power is the only commodity capable of producing new value, but the worker is only paid for the value of her labor-power, not the value that she produces
 - Capital–wage-labor relation becomes the central contradiction of the capitalist mode of production; mutually constituted but antagonistically
 - Insofar as it is not a product of labor, nature is not a commodity, and therefore has no value
 - * Nature is, however, a fundamental precondition to human survival, the source of the object and instrument of labor — and, as humanity is itself a part of nature, a source of the subject — and a source of use-values
 - * When the worker engages in the labor-process she transforms nature and is herself transformed
- Alienation
 - Separation of producers from means/materials of production, each other, and nexus of social relations within which their actions and reactions to nature take place
 - Labor is the process by which humanity regulates the metabolism between itself and nature
 - Second-order mediations of capital in the labor-process (private property–exchange–division of labor) transform production into alienated productive activity and nature into alienated nature.
 - Mediation via production is, therefore, not the source of alienation, rather the second-order mediation of capital relations.
- Class struggle
 - Class struggle as the historical fulcrum of social change and revolution between modes of production
 - Definition of what constitutes class struggle, however, extends beyond the workplace and includes struggles over housing, education, health care, and numerous other issues
 - Under capitalism, the working class is the only class with both the interest and the capacity to overthrow the capital system and move society to socialism

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