

MARXISM AS A FOUNDATION FOR CRITICAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY¹

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The separation of facts and values is a cornerstone of scientific research. To remain a credible scientific discipline, it is often necessary to assure a skeptical public that the facts uncovered through rigorous investigation disclose the way the world is rather than the way we would like it to be. In a discipline such as social psychology – where the distinction between facts and values is always in danger of collapsing – anxieties surrounding credibility are likely to be particularly acute. These anxieties are certainly not abated by the succession of crises that have followed social psychology up to the present day (Bartlett, 2014; Collier, Minton & Reynolds, 1991; Elms, 1975; Parker, 1989). While each crisis has given social psychologists a chance to reflect on the values embedded within the very structure of their discipline, few have sought to interrogate in any systematic fashion the basic assumptions that guide social psychological research and practice. It is here that Marxism is in a unique position to illuminate the complex relationship between the discipline of social psychology and the economic structure of modern society. Yet to fully grasp the importance of a Marxist critique, it is necessary to bring the assumptions underlying orthodox social psychology into view.

Orthodox Social Psychology

Although the questions animating orthodox social psychology have their roots in antiquity (Taylor, 1998), its methodological orientation largely took shape during the first half of the twentieth century. From Allport's (1924) commitment to carving out a unique identity for the discipline to Lewin's (1931) attempt to construct a new science of the social on the foundation of Galilean physics, orthodox social psychology has since its inception striven to be an *experimental* social science. And while Lewin's views on the importance of theory and the limitations of statistical analysis have more or less fallen on deaf ears, his commitment to experimental methodology continues to exert a considerable influence on the discipline (Collier, Minton & Reynolds, 1991; Ross, Lepper & Ward, 2010; Smith, 1988). To fully appreciate the central role that experimentation plays in orthodox social psychology, it is important to see it within the context of revolutionary developments in the natural sciences.

At the heart of the scientific revolution is a radically new way of looking at the universe. Whereas Aristotelian physics was often closely aligned with everyday experience from the setting of the sun to the motion of

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objects as they fall to the ground, Galileo's investigations suggested that underlying our ordinary reality one could discern with proper methodological rigor a more primordial world of mechanical motion (Machamer, 1998). Yet in order to bring the essential features of this new reality into view, it was necessary to abstract from the world of everyday experience. Indeed, it was only through this abstraction that the mechanical forces lurking in the shadows could be brought into the clear light of day.

To understand the universe as a sophisticated mechanism, Galileo had to revise many of the basic principles that had guided philosophers and theologians since antiquity. In place of a closed universe organized hierarchically along a vertical axis, Galileo substituted an open and homogenous universe in which the movement of physical bodies operates in strict accordance with fundamental laws of motion. According to Koyré (1943), the emergence of this mechanistic view of the universe involves:

a replacement of the classic and medieval conception of the Cosmos – closed unity of a qualitatively determined and hierarchically well ordered whole in which different parts (heaven and earth) are subject to different laws – by that of the Universe, that is of an open and indefinitely extended entirety of Being, governed and united by the identity of its fundamental laws (p.334).

By turning the world on its side, it became possible to view the universe less as a collection of rigid dichotomies and classes and more as a series of fluid transitions and gradients (Lewin, 1931). Placed on a horizontal axis, the finite world of everyday experience was transformed into the infinite world of geometric space.

In a universe governed by mechanical laws, the very nature of knowledge is also radically transformed. For Aristotelian philosophy, knowledge and history are interwoven so that the movement of an object is intimately related to the nature of the object and its purpose within a particular social and historical context. In contrast, within the abstract space of a mechanical universe, the connection between knowledge and history is severed so that particular objects become little more than occasions for observing the universal forces underlying mechanical motion (Lewin, 1931). Within the abstract world of Galilean physics, interest in an object's historical context was largely eclipsed by the systematic study of the field of forces operating on an object at any particular moment.

To observe these forces, Galileo argued that it is necessary to construct a machine at least in thought if not in reality (Machamer, 1998). To the extent that the machine duplicates the processes under investigation, it becomes possible to furnish a mechanical explanation without any metaphysical gaps. Moreover, the ability to translate our experience of everyday phenomena into a mechanism establishes firm criteria for what is acceptable as a genuine scientific explanation. From this moment forward, explaining something scientifically becomes equivalent to transforming it into a real or ideal mechanical device.

In order to build a machine, it is first necessary to identify all of its essential components. Once these components have been identified, it

becomes possible to construct a model in which the forces and dynamics of the system are clearly specified. Here analysis refers to a process of atomization and recombination – what Galileo would come to refer to as the resolute-compositive method (Cassirer, 1951; Macpherson 1962). Through this analysis, the forces and dynamics within the machine itself are manifest while anything that cannot be transformed into a mechanism and integrated into the machine is systematically excluded.

There are a number of ways that orthodox social psychology bears the imprint of this mechanical view of the universe. To establish itself as a science, social psychology endeavored to identify universal features of social thought and behavior. As a mechanistic science, social psychology constructs an abstraction – the social situation – where all the variables and essential features of that situation can be brought under experimental control (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1968; Festinger, 1953). Within this abstraction, attention is restricted to the forces operating within this artificial context while the historical dimension of the social situation are either controlled or systematically excluded (Lewin, 1931).

The methodological constraints of experimentation also shape the way orthodox social psychology conceptualizes the nature of social reality. To fully appreciate the various forces at work in these specific social situations, it is necessary to resolve social situations into constituent elements so that the latter can be brought together in a systematic way. Through this process, the social is redefined so that social reality becomes an aggregate of individuals. The result is that “the norms of a certain kind of experimental practice were now equated with the essential structure of the social reality to be investigated” (Danziger, 1992, p.321). Here the attempt to fashion a science of the social on the mechanistic approach of seventeenth century natural science contributes to a radical restructuring of the nature of social reality.

If the use of experimental methods gave orthodox social psychology its scientific credentials, it still remained necessary to carve out a space for a uniquely psychological investigation of social phenomena. To this end, social psychologists emphasize the extent to which a social actor’s interpretation of a social situation influences his or her thoughts and behavior. Congruent with transformations in twentieth century psychological theory, these interpretations are treated as *cognitive* processes occurring in the minds of individual social actors (Bless, Fielder & Strack, 2004; Collier et al, 1991, Fiske & Taylor, 2013; Moskowitz, 2005). While this enables orthodox social psychology to fortify its unique disciplinary territory, the emphasis on cognition also makes it possible to treat the human mind as a mechanical or computational device. Here the emphasis on cognition facilitates a scientific explanation of the psychological forces underlying social reality that is consistent with the redefinition of the social as an aggregate of individuals.

Another central feature of the cognitive orientation of orthodox social psychology is the view that an individual’s interpretation of social reality is a process of active construction (Taylor, 1998). The metaphor of construction suggests that out of a collection of elements in their experience, individuals fashion a particular representation of their social worlds. Here

representation refers to “an encoding of some information, which an individual can construct, retain in memory, access, and use in various ways” (Smith, 1998, p.391). This process of construction is active insofar as social actors continually draw on and modify these mental representations as they navigate social reality. Within this framework, activity is viewed first and foremost as a psychological process so that all social activities can in principle be traced to mental activities occurring in the minds of individual social actors.

One consequence of this approach to interpretation is the assumption that our engagement with the world is fundamentally indirect. For Ross, Lepper & Ward (2010), if a core message is to be taken from social psychology it is that “people respond to subjective rather than objective reality” (p.23). To the extent that individuals differ in their interpretation of social reality, it is because the unique experiences of each social actor produce various and in some cases competing representations of reality. So while the content of our mental representations is subject to social and cultural variation, orthodox social psychology views the fact that we relate to our social world through our representations of that world as a universal feature of human psychology (Arfken, 2015).

In both its methodological commitments and its view of the nature of social reality, orthodox social psychology embodies a philosophical anthropology or a specific conception of *social being*. For those working within the discipline (Fiske, 2010; Taylor, 1998), the notion of social being serves as something of refuge from the dizzying array of metaphors and theories that have dominated orthodox social psychology since its inception. So while the social actor has been variously conceived as a ‘naïve scientist’, ‘cognitive miser’, or ‘motivated tactician’, the notion of social being secures a measure of stability that is vital for the development a coherent disciplinary identity. As we have seen, at the heart of orthodox social psychology’s conception of social being is a commitment to experimental methodology and social cognition.

To date, critics of orthodox social psychology have challenged both the emphasis on experimentation and the cognitive framework for investigating social reality. With respect to experimentation, critics argue that a disciplines methods or ways of knowing the world necessarily draw on ontological commitments about the nature and structure of that world. So while experimental investigations of social reality may help us understand the dynamics of a particular social situation, they also inevitably reinforce the notion of social being that serves as the foundation of that knowledge. In addition, while critics agree that people actively construct their social worlds, they argue that modern psychology is perhaps best understood as the outcome rather than the foundation of this process. In other words, to speak of some psychological activity existing in our heads is already to participate in a social and cultural world in which something like a psychological discourse is intelligible.

The most general term given to these critiques of orthodox social psychology is *social constructionism* (Gergen, 1999; Potter, 1996). While scholars working under the banner of social constructionism exhibit a range of methodological and theoretical commitments, these commitments tend to

gravitate around the notion that mental construction emerges against the background of a more primordial realm of social practice. Insofar as orthodox social psychology endeavors to identify the universal psychological mechanisms underlying our interpretations of social reality, it constitutes a form of cultural imperialism whereby the goals and values of a dominant culture colonize and dominate more local and marginalized practices. Here orthodox social psychological discourse appears less as a means for investigating the underlying structure of social reality and more as an ethnocentric indigenous psychology.

Although a Marxist critique of orthodox social psychology addresses many of the same issues raised by social constructionism, it places these issues within the context of a critique of political economy. Within this framework, experimentation and social cognition are not so much cultural constructions or discursive practices as they are reflections of the social relations of production within a competitive market society. In order to contrast a Marxist conception of social being with the one advanced by orthodox social psychology, it is important to appreciate the fundamental idea animating Marx's work in general.

Commodity Fetishism

According to Marx (1859/1977), the guiding thread of his critique of political economy can be summarized in the following way:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness (p.389).

In every epoch, our way of interacting and engaging with one another necessarily emerges within the context of a historically specific organization of the social relations of production. The basis of these relations of production is not cognition but rather human labor (Doyal & Harris, 1983). Under the capitalist mode of production, labor is organized around the production of surplus-value and the private ownership of the means of production. One of the consequences of this organization of labor is that most people have to sell their labor in a competitive market in order to survive. At the same time, the wealth generated by this labor is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a narrow section of the population. It is against the background of these social relations that larger institutional structures come into existence and remain intelligible. Psychological theories of human thought and behavior are thoroughly embedded within this institutional

structure such that these theories inevitably bear the imprint of the economic organization of society. Here the contrast between orthodox social psychology and Marxism is particularly striking. Because of its commitment to experimental methodology and representational theories of knowledge, orthodox social psychology begins with a collection of basic psychological processes that provide the necessary foundation for human social activity. In contrast, Marxism approaches social being as an economic process where the social relations of production create a framework within which anything like a human psychology is intelligible. In this sense, social being is first and foremost social and economic and only derivatively psychological. Moreover, while a Marxist approach to social being treats human practical activities as primary, it also emphasizes the fact that cultural and discursive practices must always be reconciled with the existing social relations of production.

Within his early work – particularly the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844)* – Marx argues that the principle mode of existence in a competitive market society is one of alienation. Under the capitalist mode of production, a gulf divides workers from their world, from the products of their labor, and from one another. Within these conditions, the mass of workers are reduced to little more than sources of surplus-value and consumers of an ever expanding collection of commodities – a state of affairs that is actually magnified by the worker's own labor. According to Marx (1844/1964), the estrangement of labor operates in direct proportion to the amount of labor expended so that workers paradoxically reproduce the conditions necessary for their own exploitation:

The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. With the *increasing value* of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the *devaluation* of the world of men. Labor produces not only commodities: it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity* – and this in the same general proportion in which it produces commodities (p.107).

Under capitalism, labor is transformed into a commodity to be bought and sold within a competitive market. Workers not only supply the fuel for this economic system, they also produce themselves as commodities. In Marx's mature work he traces alienation to the very structure of the commodity form through his analysis of *commodity fetishism* (Eagleton, 1991).

At a fundamental level, Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism explores the role that objects play in human activity. To the extent that an object is created or modified to serve human needs, its function in the service of those needs and its origin in human labor remains entirely transparent. For example, through human labor trees are transformed into lumber which provides the material for constructing a table. By sitting at the table and using it in the service of human needs, the table is directly consumed and the entire process from tree to table remains entirely intelligible. Alternatively, a table may be built not for the purpose of direct consumption but rather to be sold or exchanged within a competitive

market. According to Marx (1867/1990), when objects are brought into contact with one another through an exchange market – that is, when they become commodities – they begin to exhibit an unusual quality:

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers (p.164-165).

Through the process of exchange, human labor assumes the form of an objective property of the commodity itself. Here the social relations between producers are objectified or transformed into a property of the commodity at the same time as the relations between objects on an exchange market are socialized. For Marx, with the rise of the commodity form human productive activity is increasingly divorced from and eclipsed by the activity of commodities in a market economy.

Marx also stresses that the emergence of a market economy is necessarily a function of the degree of development of the division of labor within a particular society (Mandel, 1967). In the absence of a division of labor, individuals have little need to exchange commodities since most of their productive activities are oriented towards producing what they require for direct consumption. As the degree of the division of labor increases, there is a shift from the production of objects for direct consumption to the production of commodities. Isolated from one another and banished to a narrow section of the production process, workers are increasingly compelled to participate in a market economy in order to secure those basic commodities that they have neither the time nor the means to produce through their own labor. With the dawn of advanced capitalism the production of commodities for exchange overtakes the production of commodities for direct consumption.

Insofar as human relationships emerge against the background of a system of commodity exchange, a historically specific commodity form comes to be experienced as an inexorable feature of human existence. According to Callinicos (1999), "since the social relationships between producers is mediated by the exchange of their products, the market economy comes to be seen as an autonomous process governed by natural laws beyond human control" (p.88-89). Since the value of commodities fluctuates according to aspects of the market that transcend the decisions of individual producers, exchange value is experienced as an objective characteristic of the object itself. To the extent that social relationships are organized around the satisfaction of human needs, nearly every dimension of human interaction from family dynamics to the institutional structure of society is brought into conformity with the objective value of the commodities themselves (Balibar, 1995). So while the social relations under the historically specific conditions of capitalistic accumulation set into

motion the alienating organization of production, the process of exchange makes these social relations of production appear natural and objective.

With the rise of the commodity form, market relations are increasingly viewed as a universal feature of human nature rather than a stage in the evolution of the relations of production. Moreover, since the degree of the division of labor is proportional to the rise of the commodity form, fragmentation appears not as a consequence of the social relations of production but rather as the immutable structure of social reality. As a consequence of a historically specific organization of the labor process, the isolated individual comes to serve as the basis for constructing larger social structures from the ostensibly free labor contract to democratic forms of government. For Marx, the reification of human labor and the fragmentation of social relationships reaches its zenith in classical political economy where the objectivity of the commodity form is treated as a natural law:

Marx presents this elementary objectivity, which appears as soon as a simple relationship with commodities on the market exists, as the starting-point and model of objectivity of economic phenomena in general and their laws; it is these laws which are studied by political economy, which ceaselessly compares them – either explicitly, by the use of mechanical or dynamic concepts, or implicitly, by the mathematical methods it employs – with the objectivity of the laws of nature (Balibar, 1995, p.58).

Under market relations, the commodity form becomes a new standard of objectivity. Here the abstraction produced by the rise of the commodity form intersects with the abstraction underlying seventeenth century mechanistic science (Goldberg, 1999; Machamer, 1998; Sohn-Rethel, 1978; Zizek, 1989). As we have seen, the mechanistic abstraction of seventeenth century science inverted reality so that the everyday world of human existence is now derived from a more primordial universe of mechanical motion. In a similar fashion, the commodity form transforms a historically specific organization of the relations of production into the very foundation of social reality.

Much as a map serves as a condensed representation of a territory (Schumacher, 1977), the commodity form increasingly replaces our direct engagement with the fruits of our labor, with the world, and with one another. As a map, the commodity form emphasizes those features of the landscape that are most conducive to its own reproduction while minimizing those features that could threaten its existence. While this abstraction clearly comes to bear an imprint on human consciousness, the source of this abstraction is not to be found in the mind but rather in the social relations of production underlying the economic structure of modern society. In advanced capitalism where the production of commodities has overtaken the production of goods for direct consumption, the commodity form is also a map that increasingly extends over the entire territory (Dubord, 1977). Rather than simply standing in for certain elements in reality, under the commodity form representations ultimately become a surrogate for that reality. Here the claim that social actors encounter their representation of social reality rather than social reality itself parallels the

underlying structure of the commodity form. In this light, the psychologization of social relations (Fraser & Gordon, 1999; Parker, 2007, 2015) is not so much a cultural or discursive practice as it is an expression of social relations under the capitalist mode of production.

In contrast to Marx's earlier work on ideology (Marx & Engels, 1846/1998), his analysis of commodity fetishism resists being transformed into a psychological process operating within the minds of individual social actors (Eagleton, 1991; Ripstein, 1987). According to orthodox social psychology, social actors encounter not the world but rather their representation of that world and it is this indirect relationship that makes it possible to treat social activity as the outcome of a collection of basic psychological processes. The beauty of Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism is that it invites us to approach the fetishism of the commodity as an epistemological or psychological issue *in order to* reject this picture. Indeed, once commodity fetishism is viewed within the context of a Marxist approach to social being, it becomes possible to see the entire enterprise of orthodox social psychology in a radically new way.

Within a Marxist framework, commodity fetishism is not so much an illusion that prevents social actors from grasping the true nature of the social situation as it is a feature of the social situation itself. Bensaïd (2009) takes us down this path when he argues that:

Fetishism is not simply misrepresentation. If it were, an ordinary science would suffice to divest it of its disguises and unveil its hidden truth. If it were only a bad image of the real, a good pair of spectacles would suffice to rectify it and exhibit the object as it really is. But the representation of fetishism operates constantly in the mutual illusion of subject and object, which are inextricably linked in the distorting mirror of their relationship (p.227).

Whereas orthodox social psychology points to the psychological mechanisms underlying a social actor's interpretation of social reality, the notion of commodity fetishism redirects attention to the social and historical context within which this epistemological picture has remained dominant. As this context is brought into the foreground it becomes clear that the epistemological picture underlying orthodox social psychology is ultimately a symptom of a more primordial rupture (Taylor, 1995). For Marx, the source of this rupture can be traced to the social relations underlying the commodity form itself:

to the producers, therefore, the social relations between their private labours *appear as what they are*, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between person in their work, but rather as material relations between person and social relations between things (Marx, 1867/1990, p.165-166; italics mine).

Here it is crucial to appreciate Marx's claim that the social relations between their private labours *appear as what they are* (Callinicos, 1999; Geras, 1972; Harvey, 2010). The fetishism of the commodity is not simply an

illusion to be traced to an individual producer but an actually existing feature of the process of commodity exchange. To the extent that individuals experience the products of their labor as possessing a value independent of that labor, it is because with the rise of the commodity form, the value of commodities has actually been severed from the productive labor that brought them into existence. As Eagleton (1991) notes:

It is not simply a question of the distorted perception of human beings, who invert the real world in their consciousness and thus *imagine* that commodities control their lives. Marx is not claiming that under capitalism commodities *appear* to exercise a tyrannical sway over social relations; he is arguing that they actually do (p.85).

Placed within the proper context, Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism suggests that the epistemological picture underlying orthodox social psychology is woven into the very fabric of the commodity form itself. To interrogate the commodity form, it is necessary to loosen the grip of this epistemological picture.

If we combine Marx's conception of social being with his analysis of commodity fetishism, we can begin to see interpretation not as a psychological event occurring in our minds but rather as a practical activity embedded in our engagement with the world. This means that within a Marxist framework, the social relations of production under capitalism are themselves an interpretation of social being. Transforming these relations is not so much a process of shifting worldviews as it is engaging in the practice of revolutionary class struggle.

The picture that emerges from this analysis is one in which orthodox social psychology is less a means for investigating alienation and more a potent institutional expression of that alienation. Under capitalism, social actors are increasingly in direct contact with a world turned upside down. Insofar as orthodox social psychology emerges against the background of this inverted world, its interpretation of social being can do little more than reproduce that world. In this sense, Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism makes it clear that at a fundamental level, orthodox social psychology is incapable of engaging with the class struggles woven into the underlying structure of modern social existence. While this points to the general inadequacy of orthodox social psychology, it is also important to see how these problems emerge within more specific areas of investigation.

Ideology & Class

Within orthodox social psychology, the analysis of *ideology* is typically approached as a topic within the broader domain of attitudinal research. For example, Eagly & Chaiken (1998) define ideologies as "clusters of attitudes and beliefs that are interdependent in the sense that they are organized around a dominant societal theme such as liberalism and conservatism" (p.284). According to Maio et al. (2003) ideologies exhibit a number of conceptual features that bring them within the domain of orthodox social psychology. First, ideologies are evaluative insofar as they reflect a positive

or negative valence towards a particular entity. In addition, ideologies are subjective in that they “reflect how a person sees the world and not necessarily how the world actually exists” (p.284). Here ideologies can be understood as a lens or a subjective representation of an objective reality. Finally, in terms of their underlying mechanism, ideologies may operate either consciously or unconsciously. At the most basic level, ideology “helps to explain why people do what they do; it organizes their values and beliefs and leads to political behavior” (Jost, 2006, p.653). Each of these features suggests that within orthodox social psychology, ideology is construed first and foremost as a psychological mechanism with important social and political implications.

In an effort to forge a link between social psychological and Marxist investigations of ideology, some scholars have drawn on Neo-Marxist interest in “false consciousness” (Jost, 1995; Jost & Banaji, 1994) Despite the fact that the term was never used by Marx, it has created a somewhat tenuous opening for an orthodox social psychological reading of Marx’s critique of political economy. According to Jost (1995), false consciousness refers to “the holding of false or inaccurate beliefs that are contrary to one’s own social interest and which thereby contribute to the maintenance of the disadvantaged position of the self or the group” (p.400). Within this framework, social actors contribute to their own subjugation by maintaining a collection of erroneous beliefs and ideas about the true nature of their predicament. By failing to comprehend their actual interests within a system of oppression, social actors ultimately play a powerful role in the justification of that system.

For scholars working within the critical tradition, orthodox social psychological conceptions of ideology are problematic on a number of fronts. As we have seen, the emphasis on individual mental processes often obscures the very real contradictions embedded within the economic organization of society (Augoustinos 1999; Goldberg, 1999, Parker, 2007). By locating distortion and illusion within the minds of individual social actors, orthodox social psychology confines the struggle for social justice to an exceedingly narrow section of the full economic and political spectrum. As such, it plays a powerful role in the reproduction of the existing social relations of production.

In addition, although psychological views of ideology emphasizes that our ways of knowing form the basis of social and political life, they fail to appreciate that these ways of knowing are themselves a product of a complex and tumultuous history. The questions animating seventeenth century science and epistemology were born out of a radical transformation in the economic organization of society (Polanyi, 1944). From its mechanistic models of human mental functioning to its reconfiguration of the social, orthodox social psychology bears the imprint of this transformation. In this sense, a psychological conception of ideology appears less as an explanation of the forces and dynamics underlying a social actor’s interpretation of social reality and more as a potent expression of the alienated state of social relations under the capitalist mode of production.

It is also clear that the notion of ideology does not provide particularly fertile ground for linking Marxism with orthodox social psychology. As we

have seen, Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism was in many ways a break with his earlier engagements with ideology (Balibar, 1995; Eagleton, 1991). Recognizing the limits of grounding his critique of political economy in a philosophy of consciousness, Marx followed through on his unwavering commitment to situate consciousness against the background of the social relations of production that dominate within a particular society. It is therefore surprising to see orthodox social psychologists attempting to forge a link between psychological conceptions of ideology and Marxism. For example, Jost and Jost (2007) argue that if one surveys Marx's entire oeuvre, it is clear that having become dissatisfied with the modest gains in the philosophy of his day, Marx largely abandons philosophical inquiry in order to pursue more systematic empirical investigation within the nascent social sciences. Within this framework, Marx's analysis of ideology is transformed into an intellectual antecedent of orthodox social psychological investigations of social reality. Yet if Marx did leave philosophy for social science, he certainly didn't bring the notion of ideology with him. Indeed, Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism makes it clear that the attempt to make consciousness the foundation of social scientific investigation does not so much dispense with philosophical contemplation as it grants such contemplation a scientific status. Far from anticipating orthodox social psychology, Marx's work represents an incisive and stinging rebuke to the discipline as a whole.

If we shift attention to the way that orthodox social psychology engages with the *class* structure of society, it is clear that its conception of social being also puts certain constraints on its approach to social and economic stratification. To appreciate this, it is important to highlight some of the different ways of approaching the concept of class. In some instances, class is treated as an objective location in a distribution (Wright, 2005). Here it assumes what Wright (1979) refers to as a gradational form:

The hallmark of the gradational view is that classes are always characterized as being "above" or "below" other classes. The very names given to different classes reflect this quantitative, spatial image: upper class, upper middle class, middle class, lower middle class, lower class, and so forth (p.5)

This approach to class is closely linked with popular discourse surrounding income distribution and policy initiatives geared towards transferring wealth to and from different locations on a spectrum (Wright, 2005). Despite the fact that these objective positions form a hierarchy, the emphasis at this level of analysis is on the position of individuals or groups within a distribution rather than the social forces that bring various positions within the distribution into contact with one another.

Another way to approach class involves focusing on how social actors locate themselves and others within a system of social inequality (Wright, 2005). Here the notion of subjective socioeconomic status has been particularly influential. In contrast to the objective measures that locate individuals along a distribution of social and economic inequality, subjective SES focuses on the way people perceive class and status (Wright, 2005). By focusing on the way people perceive social class, it is possible to link the experience of social class with other experiences of social stratification and

group differentiation. Within this context, the notion of identity is particularly important since it functions as a psychological mechanism that connects social actors to a system of social and economic stratification (Frable, 1997). Once social class is understood as an identity, it becomes possible to explore the various ways that a class identity contributes to specific interpretations of social reality. Here the notion of intersectionality draws attention to the overlapping injustices that individuals face when they identify with several marginalized and oppressed groups.

When class is treated as either an objective or subjective position within a distribution, attention is firmly focused on an unequal distribution of resources whether these resources are material (wealth, income) or social (prestige, honor). When class is used to highlight the life chances that individuals and groups face in a market economy -- that is, when the emphasis is on ensuring equal access to certain resources -- then social and economic stratification emerge exclusively against the background of distribution and exchange (Wright, 1979). Yet it is clear that restricting attention to the distribution and exchange of resources obscures certain fundamental dimensions of social class. For example, treating social classes as categories that identify groups based on the distribution of resources tends to pull apart the processes of distribution and production. The consequence is that classes become, "merely inequalities in the distribution of income, and therefore that class conflict can be alleviated or even eliminated altogether by the introduction of measures which minimize discrepancies between incomes" (Giddens, 1971, p.37).

As we have seen, shifting attention to the social relations of production makes it apparent that the conflict between laborers and employers is embodied in a labor process oriented around the production of commodities. Focusing exclusively on the market and the conflicts arising through the process of distribution and exchange overlooks the fundamental conflicts within the social relations of production (Crompton & Gubbay, 1977; Wright, 1979). While relational approaches to class draw attention to important features of class that are largely obscured by gradational approaches, restricting attention to the level of distribution and exchange obscures the role that production plays in producing and sustaining inequality. So while an emphasis on market exchanges may help us understand how social and economic resources are *acquired* and distributed by individuals and groups, it is only by focusing on the process of production that we can come to appreciate "the manner in which new values are *created*, and the social relationships arising out of and sustaining this process" (Crompton & Gubbay, 1977, p.16).

The emphasis on distribution and exchange also contributes to an important shift in the way that orthodox social psychology conceptualizes class. Insofar as class is approached as an identity, it becomes possible to understand the disadvantages and burdens that members of certain social classes experience as a consequence of the way people or institutions are oriented towards that identity. In other words, if racism, sexism, and homophobia describe a process of marginalizing and devaluing individuals because they identify with a certain race, gender, or sexual orientation, it is reasonable to infer that a similar process is responsible for the

disadvantages and burdens that members of certain social classes experience. It is within this context that the notion of *classism* has come to play a central role in social psychological investigations of social class. Classism refers to stereotypes and prejudices about class position that contribute to discrimination and domination (Bullock, 1995; Lott, 2012). Here the burdens and hardships that certain classes face are no longer located in the social relations of production but rather in the unequal distribution and exchange of recognition and the stigma associated with being a member of a devalued class.

The transformation of class from an economic to a cultural category is but one more example of the psychologization of social relations under the domination of the commodity form. Whatever role the emphasis on classism may have in reproducing the existing economic structure of society, it is of little help in addressing injustices grounded in the social relations of production. As Michaels (2006) observes:

it's not true that the problem with being poor is that people with more money don't think of you as their equal. The problem is that, with respect to money, they're right. And this problem would not be solved if rich people stopped looking down on poor people and started appreciating them instead. For while it may be plausible to think of cultures as different but equal, it cannot be plausible to think of classes in the same way (p.107).

There is little doubt that cultural categories are well suited to struggles over recognition (Arfken, 2014). Indeed, a range of social justice movements have made important strides in this area. The mistake is to transform the economic categories of class into a cultural category or identity (Fraser, 1995, 2003). By shifting the emphasis from class to classism, orthodox social psychologists fail to appreciate the fact that cultural categories are only contingently devalued while the notion of class is itself a measure of social and economic stratification (Arfken, 2013; Bensaïd, 2002; Eagleton, 2011; Michaels, 2006). It is not the appreciation but only the destruction of class that radically engages with the social relations of production.

When it comes to ideology and class, the orthodox social psychological conception of social being contributes to the affirmation rather than the transformation of the existing social relations of production (Fraser, 1995, 2003). Regardless of its utility in addressing oppression and domination, this conception of social being is ill equipped to interrogate the exploitive social relations that are a defining feature of capitalism. It is here that Marxism can serve as an important correction not only to orthodox social psychology but also to those forms of social constructionism that fail to engage with the class structure of modern society.

The Future of an Objective Illusion

According to Habermas (1971), one of the most important aspects of Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism is that it draws attention to the fact that within modern capitalism, class antagonisms that were once

institutionalized by political domination and social force are increasingly legitimized through the wage labor contract and embedded in the very constitution of the commodity form. This state of affairs is an 'objective illusion' existing not within our minds but in the social relations underlying the capitalist mode of production. To the extent that traditional structures of power have been reorganized to entrench our present predicament, it becomes incumbent upon us to search for new forms of resistance in order to destabilize this illusion.

Insofar as it remains committed to its current conception of social being, it is clear that orthodox social psychology is of little help in resisting this illusion. Although research on embodiment has the potential to shift attention to the central role that human labor plays in the constitution of social reality, orthodox social psychologists have for the most part remained reluctant to revise or abandon those assumption that put unreasonable constraints on this line of research. The result has been an exceedingly superficial appropriation of embodiment – one that is incapable of engaging with its more radical possibilities (Gallagher, 2015).

On the critical side, there is some reason for optimism. Although critical psychological scholarship emerges from a wide range of theoretical and methodological traditions, a number of influential scholars (Hayes, 2004; Parker, 2007; Parker & Spears, 1996) continue to place Marxism at the center of their work. Two recent conferences and special issues devoted to topics at the intersection of Marxism and psychology (Arfken, 2011; Painter, Pavón-Cuéllar & Moncada, 2015) also point to the viability of this form of scholarship. At the same time, it is important to remember that the most important work is not always found between the pages of a book or journal. Looking towards the future of Marxist scholarship, Bensaïd (2002) suggests that “it only has a genuine future if, rather than seeking refuge in the academic fold, it succeeds in establishing an organic relationship with the revived practice of social movements – in particular, with the resistance to imperialist globalization” (p. xv). With the looming threat of environmental collapse and economic catastrophe, Marxism is more important now than ever before.

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