Writing remarks re: marx writing

how to write a re-marx-able essay in a few easy steps (please note, many other possible steps exist)

1. Avoid bad starting points.

It's (too) easy to (dis)agree with marx's conception of socialism (especially when you are likely to be arguing with something that is only vaguely related to marx's ideas on socialism, of which there is little concrete evidence, and which we haven't spent much time reading in this class). Don't do this, unless you have very good reason to and are aware of the burden you are accepting when you take this mantle onto your shoulders. Even with that caveat: Don't. Do. It. Don’t. (or do. Whatever. Your funeral…)

[More generally, since we are, for better or worse, a sociology class, effective writing will be that which takes a sociological perspective. You don’t have to commit to this for your entire life, of course, but while a part of our class, it’s best to pretend to be a sociologist. You might even like it!]

1. Consider some of Marx’s ideas…
   1. History: Marx has a dynamic, roiling theory of history, one that simultaneously appears beyond the reach of human intervention as well as positing the need and openings for political activism. How does Marx help us understand (or confuse us) about the nature of agency and structure. What kinds of agency does he see as possible/meaningful?
   2. Culture and materialism: Marx uses the concept of hegemony to explain how those on the bottom of a system come to take on the beliefs of those at the top. Do you find this a helpful concept to understand, e.g., American political practice and discourse?
   3. Things: Marx sees things as both a product and a social process, as the basis and expression of social relations. Can you use things/commodities from which to read larger social structures?
   4. Class. For Marx, it’s all about class. But is his definition of class particularly useful, especially to describe the “complex” social world we inhabit? Moreover, does class necessarily imply shared interest and shared identities? Why (not)?
   5. Work: Marx things work is the measure of all things, and that work under capitalism is grossly distorted (i.e., estranged, alienated). Do you find his theory of work useful? He posits revolutionary change as the only means to change this, but perhaps you have better ideas.
   6. Contradictions: The dialectic is all about contradictions, and Marx wanted to read a society through these tensions. What contradictions might you look to in order to get a better grasp on social relations?
   7. Strategy vs tactics (revolution vs. reform): Marx advocated revolution, which is a politics that relies on a conception of singular power from which all other social aspects flow – i.e., if you capture the power center, you can change things. But reform is based on a very different conception of social structure and power dynamics. What might a reformist version of social life that conforms to his visions look like?
   8. Critical practice: The danger of critical practice is to fall into “ideology critique” where you are the only one enlightened enough to know the “real” situation, and everyone else suffers from false consciousness. How does this dynamic help us understand the social construction and use of consciousness and its meanings?
2. Consider Marx in relation to Durkheim
   1. For Marx, to understand society, you go to work. For Durkheim, to understand a society you go to church.
   2. For Marx, society’s essence is conflict. For Durkheim, that essence is cohesion.
   3. For Marx, the self is understood as creative. For Durkheim, the self is defined as deviant.
   4. For Marx, the point is to change the world. For Durkheim, it is to keep it healthy.
   5. For Marx, alienation is the problem. For Durkheim, it’s anomie.

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