

วารสารสังคมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร
ปีที่ 12 ฉบับที่ 2 (กรกฎาคม-ธันวาคม 2559)

Science, Hegemony and Action: On the Elements of Governmentality

Werner Bonefeld*

*Professor of Politics, Department of Politics, University of York, UK

Bonefeld, W. (2016). 12 (2): 19-41

DOI: 10.14456/jssnu.2016.13

Copyright © 2016 by Journal of Social Sciences, Naresuan University:

JSSNU

All rights reserved

Abstract

The article explores the character of counter-hegemonic social theory, including the Althusserian account of society and history, which provides an insightful theoretical backdrop to modern notions of hegemonic struggle. Developing Adorno's notions of 'abstract negativity' and 'quasi-practice', it argues that the theory and practice of counter-hegemony does not touch by thought the society it sets out to transform. Instead counter-hegemony is consumed by the governmentality of a negative world.

Keywords

Governmentality, counter-hegemonic social theory, Althusser, Adorno, quasi-practice, negative critique

บทคัดย่อ*

บทความนี้ทำก้าวตามลักษณะของทฤษฎีสังคมว่าด้วยการท้าทายการครองอำนาจจากน้า (Counter-hegemonic social theory) รวมถึงการวิเคราะห์สังคมและประวัติศาสตร์แบบอัลทุสเซอร์เรียน (Althusserian) ซึ่งมอบมนุนมองเชิงทฤษฎีที่เป็นประโยชน์ต่อความรู้ว่าด้วยการต่อสู้กับอำนาจน้า (Hegemonic struggle) สมัยใหม่ บทความนี้พัฒนาแนวคิดของออดอร์โน (Adorno) เรื่อง รายการปฏิเสธเชิงนามธรรม' (Abstract negativity) และแนวคิดเรื่อง 'ที่งบปฏิบัติการ' (Quasi-practice) เพื่อเสนอว่าทฤษฎีและภาคปฏิบัติการของ การท้าทายการครองอำนาจน้านั้นไม่ได้ไปแต่ต้องที่ความคิดเกี่ยวกับสังคมที่ต้องการเปลี่ยนแปลง แต่การท้าทายการครองอำนาจน้านั้นถูกนำไปใช้ภายใต้ชุดกำกับการทางความคิด (Governmentality) ของโลกที่มีเพียง (Negative world)

คำสำคัญ

ชุดกำกับการทางความคิด, ทฤษฎีสังคมว่าด้วยการท้าทายการครอง อำนาจน้า, อัลทุสเซอร์, ออดอร์โน, แนวคิดที่งบปฏิบัติการ, รายการปฏิเสธเชิงนามธรรม

* แปลโดยวชิรพล พุทธรักษ์, ล้านกทฤษฎีและปฏิบัติการทางสังคม คณะสังคมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร

Preface

There is only one reality. The world as it exists is not true. It is false. It is false because the satisfaction of human needs is not at all what capitalism is about. What counts is the profitable accumulation of some abstract form of wealth, of money that yields more money. Failure to make a profit entails great danger. To the vanishing point of death, the life of the class tied to work hangs by the success of turning her labour into profit as the fundamental condition of achieving and sustaining wage-based employment. The alternatives are bleak. The struggle to sustain access to the means of subsistence and maintain labour conditions is relentless. Yesterday's profitable appropriation of some other person's labour buys another Man today, the buyer for the sake of making a profit, on the pain of ruin; the seller in order to live. What can the seller of redundant labour power trade in its stead - body and body substances: how many for pornography, how many for prostitution, how many for drug mules, how many for kidney sales?

The macro-economic calculation of the unemployed as economic zeros is not untrue. It makes clear that the life of the sellers of labour power really 'hangs by' the profitability extraction of surplus value (Adorno, 1990: 320). Labouring for the sake of a surplus in value is innate to the concept of the worker. She belongs to a system of wealth in which her labour has utility as a means of profit. Sensuous activity not only vanishes in the supersensible world of economic things, of cash, price, and profit. It also appears in it - as struggle to avoid the risk of bankruptcy and being cut off from access to the means of subsistence. The 'movement of society' is not only 'antagonistic from the outset' (*ibid.*: 304). It also 'maintains itself only through antagonism' (*ibid.*: 311). That is, class struggle is the objective necessity of the false society. It belongs to its concept.

Practical Humanism and Activism: An Introduction

Louis Althusser famously declared that Marx's critique of political economy is a work of theoretical anti-humanism and proclaimed for a politics of practical humanism to set

things right (Althusser, 1996: chap. 7). In his Introduction to the French edition of *Capital*, he made two important observations that focus his anti-humanist stance succinctly (Althusser, 1971). First, he argued that the philosophical idea of alienation of the Marx of the *Paris-Manuscripts of 1844* does not have anything to do with the 'economic' Marx as the founder of scientific socialism. He therefore rejected the 'theory of reification' as a projection of the theory of alienation of the early Marx onto the 'analysis of commodity fetishism' ostensibly at the expense of the scientific character of Marx's account (Althusser 1996: 230). Second, he argued that *Capital* develops the conceptual system of scientific Marxism, not as a critique of capitalism as an existing reality, but as a means of comprehending history in its entirety (Althusser, 1971: 71-2). According to Althusser, Marx's study of capitalism led him to the discovery of the general economic laws of historical development that manifest themselves in the structure of the capitalist economic relations. Marx's *Capital* is thus seen to present the general economic laws of the forces of production in the historically specific modality of the capitalist social relations.¹

Althusser sees the late Marx as the scientific Marx, and defines science as a discourse without a subject (Althusser, 1971: 160). He argued that one can recognise Man only on the condition that the 'philosophical myth of Man is reduced to ashes' (Althusser, 1996: 229). Poulantzas reinforced this view when he conceived of scientific Marxism as a radical break from the 'historical problematic of the subject' (Poulantzas, 1969: 65). In this view, the human subject appeared thus as a mere metaphysical distraction to the scientific discovery of the general economic laws in the historically overdetermined structures of capitalist society. The most fundamental economic law is the inescapable necessity of labour. Labour as a force of transhistorical necessity is defined by its metabolism with nature. Capitalism is therefore viewed as a historically specific modality of this necessity of labour. In this tradition, there can thus neither be a critique of production nor a critique of labour. Instead, it offers a 'theory of production' defined by technical relations combining factors in material production, and it

offers a theory of labour defined by its enduring quality as the labour of social reproduction in general and by its specifically capitalist modality.² For the socialist Marxist tradition, the critique of the capitalist modality of labour entails the demand for the socialist substantiation of the natural necessary of labour. Freedom', as Engels (1983: 106) put it, 'is recognition of necessity'.

The capitalist modality of labour is said to be characterised by the law of private property. Private individuals possess a legal title to factors of production. According to Étienne Balibar (1970: 233), 'the economic relations of production appear...as a relation between three functionally defined terms: owner class/means of production/class of exploited producers'. That is to say, the transhistorical forces of production are seen to manifest themselves in the form of historically specific social relations, which, as Clarke (1980: 60) points out critically, are 'mapped on to production by the legal connection of ownership of means of production'. As an account of political economy, it defines the class character of society on the basis of the legal title to the factors of production, from which the classes derive their revenues - rent for the owners of land, profit for the owners of the means of production, and wages for the seller of labour power.³ Capitalism is seen as a fundamentally private organisation of labour based on the legal title of the owners of the means of production to the product of labour. At the same time this private character of labour organisation is fundamentally social in character since everybody is in fact working for each other. The connection between the private organisation of labour and its social character is established by the market, which brings the many private labours into contact with each other, establishing points of sale and purchase that involve interaction between multiple social forces, which are co-existing and interpenetrating in a tangled and confused manner, and which are thus anarchic, uncontrolled, unplanned, and crisis-ridden.⁴ Whereas social laws can be changed, the laws of nature cannot. The question of socialism thus becomes a question of the rational organisation of the natural necessity of labour, from the capitalist anarchy of the 'uncontrolled, unplanned, and crisis-ridden' market relations to its socialist rationalisation. The socialist task is to revolutionise the rule of private property, which accords legal entitlements to

the product of labour to identifiable individuals, transforming the social modality of the natural necessity of labour from the private ownership of the means of labour into public ownership, securing collective goals and achieving the satisfaction of needs by means of central planning by public authority.

Althusser's view that *Capital* is not a critique of capitalism as a living process but rather a scientific study of the capitalist anatomy of general economic laws is therefore apt - as a succinct characterisation of the traditional view that the capitalist social forms have a basis in nature and express thus a natural quality (see Althusser, 1971: 71-2). The idea that society is in the last instance determined by historically active general economic laws is in its entirety tied to existing conditions.⁵ Instead of the critical notion that 'concepts are moments of the reality that requires their formation' (Adorno 1990: 11), the Althusserian notion of the natural necessity of labour holds that concepts are generally applicable scientific instruments, which are capable to dissect and analyse every society at all times and places as distinct manifestations of abstract economic laws. Historical materialism conceived dogmatically as a science of some general economy laws reflects existing society under the spell of identification, which includes the idea that the specific manifestation of the economic laws depends on the power of the social forces that act upon them. This view suggests a radical separation between thought and reality. Callinicos (2005) offers a cogent articulation of this separation. He advocates that the Marxist method of analysis amounts to a sophisticated version of the science of knowledge, which hypothesises society as an 'as if' of theoretical construction.⁶ Theoretical knowledge appears as an hypothetical figure of speech, an 'as if', which is corroborated by empirical analysis that falsifies or verifies the proposed theory of society. This appearance is, however, deceitful in that the real world is mirrored in its theoretical hypothesis. That is, the science of knowledge posits the idea that the real world is, say, regulated by a competitive market structure and then applies this idea to capitalist markets, with conclusive effect, though questions remain as to whether the freedom of competition has in reality not trans-morphed into a freedom of monopolies.

The supposition of thought as an independent instrument of knowledge releases society from critical scrutiny. Rather than asking about the conceptuality of capitalist wealth,⁷ it supposes the existence of general economic laws, transforming the social laws into historically overdetermined derivatives of natural laws, and then analyses the manner of their mediation in the social world of inter-subjective actions, comprising class-relevant and other social interests, and finally it examines what it calls the hegemonic strategies of the competing social interests to ascertain emergent political opportunity structures for the conduct of hegemonic strategies that act through the state to achieve socialist objectives.⁸ The scientific supposition of society does not comprehend society. It merely describes it abstractly as an hypothesised unit of analysis; depending on the balance of the social forces that act through the state it can be either this economy of labour or that economy of labour. The scientific statement that capitalism is in the last instance determined by the general economic laws of development, is as hypothetical in its view of society as the statement that their specific modality is contingent upon the power of the social forces that act through the state.

Marx's critique of Proudhon focused on this simple point. Proudhon substituted the critique of capitalism for a critique of the capitalist, seeking to free capital from the capitalist so as to utilise the power of capital for the benefit of a just and fair society, investing in society. In its practical dimension, scientific socialism is on the lookout for opportunity structures for the establishment of a socialist hegemony. It views miserable conditions as contingent upon the hegemony of the capitalist interests and battles for the establishment of a counter-hegemony, titling the balance of class forces in favour of labour in capitalist society. The critique of society as a manifestation of capitalist hegemony leaves the category of capital not only entirely untouched, it also elevates 'capital' as a thing beyond critique. Capital thus appears to be no more than an economic mechanism that can be made to work for this social interest or that social interest - in the end, it is the balance of the class forces that decides for which social interests capital functions! Rather than touching the category of capital by thought it identifies social misery as a contingent outcome of an unfavourable balance of class

forces and calls for sustained social struggle to shift the balance towards the class tied to work, to secure a capitalism that works for the benefit of the workers, the downtrodden, miserable, and poor. Social misery is thus understood as an entirely avoidable occurrence. Misery and dispossession do not therefore belong to the conceptuality of capitalist wealth. They are the social consequence of hard-nosed class politics, and can thus be overcome by a determined effort of counter-hegemonic struggle.

Scientific Marxism does not think out of society. Instead, it thinks about society with an analytical grasp that, akin to a photographic representation of reality, identifies the capitalist social relations with their appearance. Its grasp of society is thus entirely faithful to the observable empirical facts that posit society in its immediate being, which 'is pure appearance...of a process running behind its back' (Marx, 1981: 64). As a science of economic processes without subject, it dissolves Man as the subject of her own social world into the 'substance' of her economic inversion. The illusions of such a consciousness turn into dogmatic immediacies' (Adorno 1990: 205). That is, the scientific critique of bourgeois society naturalises capitalist society as an historically over-determined manifestation of some trans-historical materiality of labour, implicates the capitalists for the defects of the established system of labour, and proclaims to know 'what needs to be done' to achieve a progressive labour economy. Whilst Althusser's theoretical anti-humanism leaves society untouched by thought, his practical humanism proclaims for progressive ends in abstraction from society, rejecting 'all discrimination, be it racial, political, religious'. It 'is the rejection of all economic exploitation and political domination. It is the rejection of war' (Althusser, 1996: 237). The humanisation of social relations is the purpose and end of the critique of political economy. However, the effort of humanising is confronted by the paradox that it presupposes the existence of inhuman condition. Inhuman conditions are not just an impediment to humanisation but a premise of its concept. Althusser's practical humanism manifests therefore the illusion of his science of society without a subject. It posits society as an 'as if' of civilised social relations, against which it measures the irrational, exploitative, discriminative relations of a bloodied world. Devoid of a conception of the

actual relations of life, his practical humanism belongs to a Left tradition that does 'not talk about the devil! Instead it looks on the bright site' (Adorno, 1978: 114).⁹

As argued by Horkheimer (1985b: 84) the blind spot of dogmatic thought is predicated on the idea that society is a process without a subject. It thereby accommodates its thought to those same 'objective conditions' that render the individuals mere personifications of economic categories, which its practical humanism denounces as 'exploitative', 'discriminative', 'violent', 'unfair' and 'irrational'.

By all accounts and purposes, and thankfully so, the historical materialism associated with the scientific Marxist tradition has run its course. However, its practico-analytical stance, that is, strategic approach to the perceived ills of capitalist society, appears undiminished and offers ready-made counter-hegemonic demands for social action. The dogma of the false society is that there is no alternative to it, that is, its falsehood is righteous. The 'practical humanist' endeavour to create a just and fair capitalism belongs to the concept of the false society. It proclaims that the false society can be righted and it is because of this that it becomes righteous, too. In its righteousness, it denounces the capitalist present abstractly and without further ado looks on the bright site, seeking the power of government for the sake of a just and fair regulation of the economy of labour. Its proclamation for a present future in which capitalism is made to work for the workers is entirely conventional in its strategic calculation of the electoral market place and dogmatic in its moralising condemnation of the existing state of affairs. The theory of hegemony belongs to the governmentality of capitalist society, which works on the principle that conditions ought to be better and can be improved by means of concerted action, political will, and robust government intervention into the economy.¹⁰

On Hegemony

For a hegemonic theory of society the notion of socio-economic necessity is an affront. It smacks of economic determinism, excludes the ideas of contingency and construction, creation and effort, and suggests dogmatic reduction of society to economic effect. Yet, the theory of hegemony is entirely founded on the presumption that the

economic structure of society is a natural phenomenon. It does not question the necessity of an economy of labour. It rather argues for a differently configured mode of wealth distribution. As a natural phenomenon, society is identified by its structural properties, the study of which characterises the domain of system theory. Complementing the structural perception of society, a theory of social action accounts for the behaviours and conflicts that characterise the subjective properties of human agency in the life-world.¹¹ In traditional social theory, society is seen either as a system of structural properties or as a world of social action, and the perennial question is therefore whether society as a system is dominant or whether society as a world of action is decisive. However, the idea that society exists twice, once as (economic) nature/structure and then as (acting) subject, reproduces in thought the appearance of society as a split reality of structure and agency.¹² The dualism of thought is however more apparent than real. Given the choice between society as structure and society as action, social theory unerringly sides with the mischief of society as a naturally structured thing, as system. However, society as a natural system that is independent from the human subjects who comprise society, cannot be comprehended as such; at best its effects can be analysed as instances of social contingency, which establish opportunity structures for the pursuit of distinct social interests at the expense of others.¹³

Hegemony is not a critical concept. Its grasp of society is traditional: it views society as a condensation of natural necessity in historically specific social forms. Hegemonic theory is characterised by the attempt at constructing a connection between society as system and society as action. It argues that the modality of the systemic forces is contingent on the balance of social power between the distinct social groups. The theory of hegemony is a stand-point theory - it looks at and judges society from a specific world-view, be the view of the ecologist, humanist, labourer or indeed the capitalist.¹⁴ It is usually associated with the progressive left, which made the theory of hegemony its own. Crudely put, it rejects the hegemony of the capitalist interests, demands the hegemony of the Many, posits its political demands as universal-human in character, argues for social struggle as the means of shifting the balance of class forces in favour of the supposedly universal interests of the

Many, and leaves the category of 'capital' entirely untouched by thought. What really does it mean to say that the class tied to work has to become hegemonic in capitalism? Is capital really nothing more than some economic means that is corrupted by the capitalist interests? In its practical dimension, I hold that the struggle for hegemony amounts to 'ticket thinking'. It views society as divided into competing social interests and undertakes to build up the capacity of its 'ticket' to articulate and present its particular 'group' interests as the general interest of society. The ticket requires brand recognition to bolster its claim that it represents the rightful demands of the social majority. Instead of concrete demands that derive from the specific 'group interests' the universal appeal of the brand depends on the articulation of powerful idealities that signify the purposefulness and righteousness of its course as incarnation of the general interest. Fundamentally the group comprises an ideality of social friends and presents a coalition of interest. It requires leadership to achieve cohesion, constant contestation with the declared social foe to establish purposefulness, and construction of a unifying theme of articulation to sustain its voice and make it heard. The politics of hegemony is as much about mobilisation as it is about demobilisation, representation and leadership. Akin to the idea of a plebescitarian leadership democracy it sets out to capture the 'masses' by projecting virtuous claims about the moral integrity and universality of their supposed interests, proclaiming that the coming of the 'democracy' of friends will make things good for them as the true national being. Innate to the politics of hegemony is the identification of an ideality of friends, which as such do not exist. They come together as friends by contesting the projected ideality of some supposed common foe - the capitalist, the banker, the imperialist. Economic argument and critique of economic categories is suspended. Indeed, the argument that in this society the employment of dispossessed producers of surplus value depends on the sustained profitability of their labour is anathema. It smacks of capitulation to the capitalist economic interests.¹⁵ Counter-hegemonic thought posits the people as righteous, demands government in the interest of the nation, requires the investment of money into productive activity to secure the employment and welfare of the dispossessed.

By putting forth a programme of capitalist transformation without thought about the conceptuality of capitalist wealth, ticket thinking looks on the bright side and proclaims falseness. In essence, its protest against a really existing misery that blights the life of a whole class of individuals is in reality a party political advert. It says that the struggle for the satisfaction of needs can be resolved by better government. The politics of this promise is regressive. It makes it seem as if social misery is not a condition of capitalist wealth. Rather, it sells the idea that misery is an entirely avoidable situation, which can be overcome by courageous politicians who oppose the interests of the 'self-interested elites' and govern for the benefit of the social majority. For the sake of electoral success, it discounts the critical insight that the dispossessed labourer is the essential precondition of the capitalist social relations. Instead, it argues that all would be well if only government were to stand up to the capitalist interests and their imperialist backers. This stance articulates an objective illusion. The illusion says that the profitable accumulation of money that yields more money does not really count; what counts is the satisfaction of human needs. It says that the failure to make a profit entails no threat to social reproduction; what counts is not profit but human beings. It suggests that the life of the class tied to work does not hang by the success of turning her labour into profit as the fundamental condition of achieving wage-based access to the means of life; what counts is goodness. It says that debt is not a mortgage on future surplus value; what counts is consumption. It rejects as absurd that useful things which cannot be turned into profits are burned; what counts is use-value production. The illusion of the epoch identifies what really counts and, yet, does not recognize the very society that it rejects abstractly. The reality of its illusion is the perpetuation of myth.

An anti-capitalism that leaves the conceptuality of the capitalist social relations untouched by thought only goes that far and the anti-capitalist signifier of the 'true democracy' of a national people, this rallying cry of anti-austerity against the governing elites, financial dealers, and the so-called capitalist institutions, requires socio-economic substantiation to achieve a sound connection with potential voters. In actual fact, the sales pitch that all would be well

if only government were to stand up to the capitalist interests, articulates a demand for sustained economic investment to secure employment and incomes. In this manner the struggle against austerity becomes what it had been all along, that is, a struggle for employment opportunities. The struggle for hegemony comprises the ambition of transforming money into productive activity, into productive engagement with workers. Indeed, it is true that for the dispossessed sellers of labour power access to the means of subsistence is governed by the profitability of their labour. That is the capitalist condition of their misery. The demand that government should invest in society to achieve conditions of employment as the condition of access to the means of live is most commendable. There is great tenderness in the demand that nobody should be hungry anymore. In the game of politics, this tenderness becomes however corrupted when made into a party political slogan that proclaims to know how to resolve the crisis of capitalist wealth in the interests of the dispossessed. The populist critique of the given situation is premised on misery and seeks to make misery count for electoral success. Its rebellion is entirely conformist in its recognition of the existing relations.¹⁶

The theory of hegemony does not recognise the conditions (*Zustaende*) of misery. It identifies deplorable situations (*Misstaende*). Deplorable situations call for resolution by means of a social activism that challenges This misery and That outrage, seeking to alleviate and rectify This and That. What however are the social preconditions that constitute the necessity of This poverty and That misery? Adorno (1972) rejects activism for this and that as a pseudo-praxis that struggles against this and that but leaves the conditions that render this and that entirely untouched. In this way, 'activism' is not only affirmative of existing society. It is also regressive in that it deceives itself that however bad the situation, it can be rectified by this or that policy, by this or that technical means, by this or that shift in the balance of social forces. The activism against this or that is delusional in its view of society. Indeed, its view of society is entirely moral in its condemnation of society. It demands that capitalist society should not care for profit. It should take care of the dispossessed. It deceives those whose interests it pretends to represent by arguing that a resolution to their plight is really just a matter of proper

government. In its essence, activism for this cause or that cause is a political advertisement for some alternative party of government. It transforms the protest against a really existing misery that blights the life of a whole class of individuals into a selling point for political gain. Ticket thinking feels the pain of the world and offers its own political programme as the means of salvation. Ticket thinking feeds on what it condemns. It condemns this miserable situation and that shortcoming with righteous indignation and an eye for power.

Only a reified consciousness can declare that it is in possession of the requisite knowledge, political capacity, and technical expertise not only for resolving capitalist crises but, also, to do so in the interests of the dispossessed. For the sake of progress, it barks in perpetuity and without bite. Instead, it sniffs out the miserable world, from the outside as it were, and puts itself forward as having the capacity, ability, insight, and means for securing conditions. The politics of hegemony describes the theology of anti-capitalism. Theologically conceived, it is devoid of Now-Time. Instead, it views the present as transition towards its own progressive future, promising deliverance from misery amidst 'a pile of debris' that 'grows skyward' (Benjamin, 1999: 249).¹⁷ At best, it transforms the protest against capitalism into electoral gain. At worst, it radicalises its stance into a moral crusade against the identified wrongdoers, with potentially deafening consequences.

Conclusion: On Governmentality¹⁸

Neither the capitalist nor the banker, nor indeed the worker can extricate themselves from the reality in which they live and which asserts itself not only over them but also through them, and by means of them. Society as economic subject prevails through the individuals. Money does not only make the world go round; its possession establishes the connection to the means of life. The struggle for access to the means of life is a struggle for money - it governs the mentality of bourgeois society. What a misery! In the face of great social wealth, the dispossessed sellers of labour power struggle for fleeting amounts of money to sustain themselves from one day to the next as the readily available human material for capitalist wealth. Indeed, making ends meet is the 'real life-activity' of 'living labour activity' (see Marx and

Engels, 1978: 154). Therefore, 'to be a productive labourer is...not a piece of luck'. Nor is it an ontological privilege. It is rather 'a great misfortune' (Marx, 1990: 644).

Nothing is what it seems. The struggle for money (as more money) governs the mentality of bourgeois society as, seemingly, a thing in-itself. The individuals carry the bond with society in their pockets.

In order to unlock the governmentality of money, the critique of the relations of production is key. For the buyer of labour power, profitability is a mean of avoiding bankruptcy. For the producer of surplus value, the sale of her labour power is the condition of access to the means of subsistence. The profitable extraction of surplus value is a condition of future employment. For the seller, the sheer unrest of life manifests itself in the compulsion to achieve a contract of employment, which entails not only a daily struggle for securing the means of subsistence by means of wage income. It entails also competition amongst the sellers of labour power to achieve and maintain that income. For the seller of labour power, competition is not some abstract economic law. Rather, it is experienced in the form of precarious labour markets and pressure to secure the profitability of her employer as the basis of achieving sustained employment. For the sellers of labour power, the freedom of contract entails the common class experience of labour market competition. Competition is not a category of social unity. It is a category of disunity. Class society exists in the form of individualised commodity owners, each seeking to maintain themselves in competitive, gendered and racialised, and also nationalised labour markets where the term cutthroat competition is experienced in various forms, from arson attack to class solidarity, and from destitution to collective bargaining, from gangland thuggery to communal forms of organising subsistence-support, from strike-breaking to collective action.

Innate to the existence of a class of dispossessed sellers of labour power is the struggle, collectively or against each other, or both, for access to the means of subsistence to satisfy (basic) human needs. The struggle of the working class is one for wages and conditions; it is a struggle for access to the means of life and for life. They struggle against capital's 'were-wolf's hunger for surplus labour' and its destructive conquest for additional atoms of

unpaid labour time, and thus against the reduction of their life to a mere time's carcase. They struggle against a life constituting solely of labour time and thus against a reduction of human life to a mere economic resource. They struggle for respect, education, and recognition of human significance, and above all for food, shelter, clothing, warmth, love, affection, knowledge, time for enjoyment, and dignity. Their struggle as a class 'in-itself' really is a struggle 'for-itself': for life, human distinction, life-time, and above all, satisfaction of basic human needs. The working class does not struggle for socialism. It struggles for making ends meet, for subsistence and comfort. It does all of this in conditions, in which the increase in material wealth that it has produced, pushes beyond the limits of its capitalist form. Every so-called trickle-down effect that capitalist accumulation might bring forth presupposes a prior and sustained trickle up in the capitalist accumulation of wealth. And then society 'suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence' (Marx and Engels, 1997: 18).

For the sellers of labour power, economic consciousness is an unhappy consciousness. This is the unhappy consciousness of the struggle for the means of subsistence. It is this struggle for subsistence that makes the working class the depository of historical knowledge. Instead of thinking about society with a claim to power, one needs instead to think out of society, out of the daily struggle to make ends meet, insurrections, revolts, strikes, riots, and revolutions, to recognise the smell of danger and the stench of death, gain a sense of the courage and cunning of struggle, grasp the spirit of sacrifice, comprehend, however fleetingly, the density of a time at which the progress of the muck of ages almost came to a standstill.¹⁹ Class struggle 'supplies a unique experience with the past' (Benjamin, 1999: 254). Whether this experience turns concrete in the changing forms of repression as resistance to repression or whether it turns concrete in forms of repression, is a matter of experienced history. There is as much experience of history as there is struggle to stop its further progress.

In conclusion, the dispossessed do not struggle for abstract ideas. They struggle to make a living. Proletarian language is dictated by hunger. The poor chew words to fill

their bellies' (Adorno, 1978: 102). Class struggle is therefore not a positive category. Rather, it belongs to a world that is 'hostile to the subject' (Adorno, 1990: 167). The critique of class society finds its positive resolution only in the classless society, not in a 'fairer' class society. Adorno's dictum that 'society remains class struggle' (1989: 272) does not express something positive or desirable. Rather, it amounts to a judgment on the capitalistically organised social relations of production, in which 'the needs of human beings, the satisfaction of human beings, is never more than a sideshow' (Adorno, 2008: 51). The judgement on existence entails the critique of existence. It holds that the abolition of hunger [requires] a change in the relations of production' (Adorno, 1976: 62).

I have argued that the theory of hegemony does not touch society by thought. Instead, it identifies a really existing misery with a claim to power. The struggle for hegemony feeds on what it condemns. Its critique of capitalism is dogmatic. It does not think in and through society. Instead, it thinks about society and how to make it work in the interest of the majority. In this manner opposition to capitalism is imbued by the governmentality of the capitalist social relations, according to which capital works for the benefit of the dominant social forces that act through the state. For the existing social relations, the thought of happiness without power is unbearable.

The critique of society entails critique of the constituted conditions of misery. Misery revolts. For the dispossessed traders of labour power, society really is a struggle for access to 'crude and material things'. No 'refined and spiritual things could exist' without them (Benjamin, 1999: 246).

Acknowledgments

The paper derives from a lecture at the Seminar 'Teoria Critica y Politica', held at the Centro de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales (Madrid). I am grateful to all participants for their helpful comments and advice. Particular thanks are to Jose Zamora and Silvia Lopez. Thank you also to the external reviewers and Watcharabon Buddharaksa for getting this paper into shape. The usual disclaimers apply.

Notes

¹ See also Alfred Schmidt (1969). For Schmidt, too, the Marx of 1844 does not illuminate the Marx of *Capital*. However, the Marx of *Capital* illuminates the Marx of 1844. Althusser's valid critique of the 'abstract humanism' of the early Marx does not imply that the Marx of the critique of political economy is anti-humanistic. Rather, the 'economic' Marx is the humanist Marx because his critique of capitalist society seeks to decipher the actual relations of life in their inverted form of economic things. The critique of political economy does not reveal transhistorical economic laws of nature nor does it argue on the basis of some abstract human essence that in capitalism exists in alienated form. The humanism of the late Marx lies in the conception of capitalism as comprising a definite form of social relations. On this point, see also Bonefeld (2014a) and Schmidt (1983).

² For a succinct critique, see Postone (1993).

³ As Clarke (1980, 1992) and Schmidt (1983) have shown, the tradition of Althusserian Marxism derives from classical political economy.

⁴ This is how Bob Jessop sees it in his neo-Poulantzarian account of state power (Jessop, 2008: 178).

⁵ This point is most strongly made by Horkheimer (1992: 246).

⁶ For a critique, see Arthur (1986: chapt. 10) and Bonefeld (2012).

⁷ On the conceptuality of capitalist wealth and critique of social relations, see Holloway (2015).

⁸ This further development of the idea of hegemony belongs to Bob Jessop (1985).

⁹ In our time, the bright site view condemns capitalism abstractly as neoliberalism, which is rejected as the ideology of the capitalist interests and as the manifestation of the capitalist social structures. The rejection of neoliberalism entails the demand for a non-neoliberal capitalism that is characterized by benevolent socio-economic objectives. This critique of neoliberalism does not conceptualize the social constitution of a free labour economy (see, for example, Brown, 2015). The freedom of labour is innate to capitalist political economy. Neoliberalism articulates the necessities of this freedom in theological terms. On this, see Bonefeld (2011, 2013).

¹⁰ As pointed out by Adam Smith, political economy is 'a branch of the science of the statesman or legislator' who govern in order to facilitate 'the cheapness of goods of all sorts' (Smith, 1976: 428, 333), that is, to increase labour productivity and price competitiveness in order that the accumulation of wealth 'rewards labour' with the prospects for employment and wage income. On anti-globalisation and the socialist demand for a politics of full employment, see Bonefeld (2006).

¹¹ On system and life world in Habermas' social theory see, Reichelt (2000).

¹² The so-called dialectics of structure and agency is not helpful. It explains neither structure nor agency. In fact, it moves in vicious circles as it hops from structure to agency, and back again, from agency to structure; and instead of comprehending what they are, each is presupposed in a tautological movement of thought; neither is explained. On this, see Bonefeld (2012).

¹³ On this in relation to structuralist tradition, see Bonefeld (1993).

¹⁴ See Heinrich (2012) and Bonefeld (2014a) for a critique of standpoint theory.

¹⁵ Elements of the argument about the populism the new left (in Spain) draw on Seguin (2015).

¹⁶ On conformist rebellion, see Horkheimer (1985a).

¹⁷ Now-time is Benjamin's conception of a time at which the progress of the muck of ages comes to standstill. Now-time rejects the idea of a present time, which heralds the future as its own being and becoming. On this, see Bonefeld (2014b, 2015).

¹⁸ The term governmentality was coined by Foucault (1991). It describes the function of government as a political practice of conducting the conduct of the governed. In the Marxist literature, Lenin offered perhaps the most decisive account of 'govermentability' when he posits that the post-revolutionary state will wither away 'owing to the simple fact' that socialist Man 'will become accustomed to observing [the elementary rules of social intercourse] without force, without coercion, without subordination, without the special apparatus for coercion called the state' (Lenin, 1918/1999: 51). For a critique, see the contributions to Bonefeld and Tischler (2002).

¹⁹ The notion of thinking out of history rather than about history, derives from Adorno's negative dialectics which argues that for thought to comprehend society, it needs to think out of society. For him, thinking about society, or about history, amounts to an argument based on hypothetical judgements that treats society as an 'as if', leading to dogmatic claims about its natural character. On this, see Bonefeld (2014). The idea of history as a standstill of progress is Benjamin's (1999).

References

Adorno, T. (1972). *Soziologische Schriften I*, In *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 8. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Adorno, T. (1976). Introduction (Adey, G. and Frisby, D., Trans.) In Adorno, T., Albert, H., Darendorf, R., Habermas, J., Pilot, J. and Popper, K. *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*. London: Heinemann.

Adorno, T. (1978). *Minima Moralia*. London: Verso.

Adorno, T. (1989). Society (Jameson, F., Trans.) In Bronner, S. E. and Kellner, D. M. (eds.) *Critical Theory and Society*. London: Routledge.

Adorno, T. (1990). *Negative Dialectics*. London: Verso.

Adorno, T. (2008). *Lectures on History and Freedom*. Cambridge: Polity.

Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and Philosophy ad other essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Althusser, L. (1996). *For Marx*. London: Verso.

Althusser, Louis and Balibar, Étienne. (1970). *Reading Capital* (Brewster, Ben., Trans.) London: New Left Books.

Arthur, C. (1986). *Dialectics of Labour: Marx and his Relation to Hegel*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Balibar, E. (1970). The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism, in Althusser L. and Étienne, Balibar, *Reading Capital*. London: Verso.

Benjamin, W. (1999). *Illuminations*. London: Pimlico.

Bonefeld, W. (1993). Crisis of Theory: Bob Jessop's Theory of Capitalist Reproduction. *Capital & Class*, 17 (2): 25-47.

Bonefeld, W. (2006). Anti-Globalization and the Question of Socialism. *Journal of Socialist Theory*, 34 (1): 39-59.

Bonefeld, W. (2011). Primitive Accumulation and Capitalist Accumulation: On Social Constitution and Expropriation, *Science and Society*, 75 (3): 379-399.

Bonefeld, W. (2012). Negative Dialectics in Miserable Times: Notes on Adorno and Social Praxis. *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 12 (1): 122-34.

Bonefeld, W. (2013). Adam Smith and Ordoliberalism: On the Political Form of Market Liberty. *Review of International Studies*, 39 (2): 233-250.

Bonefeld, W. (2014a). *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy*. London: Bloomsbury.

Bonefeld, W. (2014b). Critical Theory, History, and the Question of Revolution. In Brincat, S. (ed.). *Communism in the 21st Century: The Future of Communism* (pp.137-161). Los Angeles: Preager.

Bonefeld, W. (2015). Bringing critical theory back in at a time of misery: Three beginnings without conclusion. *Capital & Class*, 16: 1-12.

Bonefeld, W. and S. Tischler. (eds.) (2002). *What has to be Done?*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Brown, W. (2015). *Undoing the Demos*, Cambridge, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Callinicos, A. (2005). Against the New Dialectic. *Historical Materialism*, 13.2 (2): 41-59.

Clarke, S. (1980). Althusserian Marxism. In Clarke, Simon., Lovell, Terry., McDonnell, Kevin., Robins, Kevin. and Jeleniewski, Victor. (eds.). *One Dimensional Marxism: Althusser and the Politics of Culture*. London: Allison & Busby.

Clarke, S. (1992). Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology. London: Palgrave.

Engels, F. (1983). Anti-Dühring. *MEW 20*. Berlin: Dietz.

Foucault, M. (1991). Governmentality. In Burchell, G., Gordon, C. and Miller, P. (eds.) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (pp. 87-104). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Heinrich, M. (2012). *Introduction to the Three Volumes of Capital*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Horkheimer, M. (1985a). *The Eclipse of Reason*. New York: Continuum.

Horkheimer, M. (1985b). *Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft*. Frankfurt: Fischer.

Horkheimer, M. (1992). *Traditionelle und kritische Theorie*. Frankfurt: Fischer.

Holloway, J. (2015). Read Capital. First Sentence. *Historical Materialism*, 23 (3): 3-26.

Jessop, B. (1985). *Nicos Poulantzas: Marxist Theory and Political Strategy*. London: MacMillan.

Jessop, B. (2008). *State Power: A Strategic Relational Approach*. Cambridge: Polity.

Lenin, V. (1918/1999). *State and Revolution*. Lenin Internet Archive. Retreived 13 October 2015 from <https://www.marxists.org/ebooks/lenin/state-and-revolution.pdf>.

Marx, K. (1991). *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*. Urtext, *MEGA II.2*. Oldenbourg: Akademieverlag.

Marx, K. and F. Engels. (1978). The German ideology. In Tucker, R. (ed.) *The Marx-Engels Reader*. New York: Norton.

Marx, K. and F. Engels. (1997). *The Communist Manifesto*. London: Pluto.

Postone, M. (1993). *Time, Labour and Social Domination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Poulantzas, N. (1969). Theorie und Geschichte: Kurze Bemerkung über den Gegenstand des "Kapitals". In Euchner, Walter and Schmidt, Alfred (eds.), *Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, 100 Jahre Kapital*. Frankfurk: EVA.

Reichelt, H. (2000). Juergen Habermas Reconstruction of Historical Materialism. In Bonefeld, W. and Psychopedism, K. (eds.), *The Politics of Change* (pp. 105-145). London: Palgrave, .

Schmidt, A. (1969). Der strukturalistische Angriff auf die Geschichte. In Schmidt, A. (ed.), *Beiträge zur marxistischen Erkenntnistheorie*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Schmidt, A. (1983). *History and Structure*. Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press.

Seguin, B. (2015). Podemos and its crititics. *Radical Philsophy* (193): 20-32.

Smith, A. (1976). *The Wealth of Nations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.