17.03. Introduction to Political Thought


I. Why read Marx today?

II. Background
   A. Personal
   B. Intellectual
      1. Rousseau’s conception of liberty
      2. Hegel’s philosophy of history
      3. British political economy

III. “Jewish Question”
   A. What is the “Jewish Question”?
   B. Liberal solution
      1. Separation of religion and politics
      2. Rejection of liberal solution in Germany in favor of assimilation
   C. Bruno Bauer’s critique of the liberal solution
      1. Separating religion and politics won’t remove barriers to political emancipation of Jews
      2. Jews must renounce religion in order to become equal citizens
   D. Marx’s critique of Bauer
      1. Against Bauer’s idealism: religion is merely symptom of underlying material causes; emancipation from religion impossible without addressing underlying material causes
      2. Distinction between political emancipation and human emancipation: Jews should be given political rights (contra Bauer), but ultimate aim is human emancipation

IV. Marx’s critique of liberalism and his ideal of human flourishing
   A. Liberal view of the individual: egoistic, public-private distinction splits the psyche
   B. Liberal rights founded not on relations between human beings but separation between them
   C. Liberal focus on state cannot safeguard real freedom
      1. Must look to oppression in civil society
      2. Political emancipation is not full human emancipation
   D. Marx’s ideal of human emancipation
      a. What distinguishes man from other animals: produce means of subsistence (*homo faber*)
      b. Conscious activity
      c. Collective activity

V. Alienation
   A. Structure of alienation under capitalism
   B. Four aspects of alienation
      1. From products of our labor
      2. From the activity of labor
      3. From our species being
      4. From other human beings
   C. How communist society ends alienation
      1. Abolish alienation by abolishing private property
      2. Marx avoids details of communist society

VI. Marx’s theory of history
   A. Influence of Hegel’s philosophy of history: accepts dialectical process but rejects content
   B. Materialism: not contradictions within systems of ideas but within modes of production
   C. Historical narrative from feudalism to capitalism to communism
      1. Every mode of production contains the seeds of its own destruction
      2. Division of labor shapes the evolution of the modes of production
      3. Proletarian revolution inevitable but not spontaneous, requires human action