Week 6. Analytical Marxism

1. Wright ("What is Analytical Marxism?", pp. 38-39) identifies four "commitments" that characterize Analytical Marxism. One of the most contentious of these is the first: "a commitment to conventional scientific norms in the elaboration of theory and the conduct of research." Contrast this position with the antipathy toward conventional science expressed by other schools of Western Marxism (e.g., Lukacs, the Frankfurt School) and present a case either for or against this first principle of Analytical Marxism.

2. Elster (pp. 460-463) argues that "functionalism is rampant" in Marxist social science, even though, in his view, "functional analysis has no [legitimate] place in the social sciences." How essential are functional forms of explanation in Marxist theory and what are their strengths and weaknesses? Critically evaluate Elster's defense of methodological individualism as a proper foundation for Marxist theory in light of the criticisms raised by Kieve and Wood.

3. Roemer's analysis leads him to the surprising conclusion that "labor can be just as exploited if it hires capital as it is if it is hired by capital," and he therefore rejects "the classical belief that the labor process is at the center of the Marxian analysis of exploitation and class" (p. 93). How does Roemer arrive at this conclusion? What criticisms do Kieve and Wood make of Roemer's method of analysis? Which side of the debate do you find most persuasive and why?

4. Wright ("Class Analysis, History and Emancipation") divides Marxism into three "conceptual nodes": (1) Marxism as class analysis; (2) Marxism as a theory of history; and (3) Marxism as an emancipatory normative theory (p. 17). Which of these three theoretical components of Marxism do you see as most problematic in the present era and why? Critically evaluate Wright's proposals for reconstructing each of these theoretical components and compare these with earlier revisions of Marxist theory by Western Marxists and neo-Marxists.