

CONTEMPORARY MARXIST THEORY

Week 9. Post-Structuralism and Post-Marxism

1. Laclau and Mouffe criticize Marxism for "economism," "class reductionism," and "essentialism." Explain what they mean by these charges. Are these problems inherent and unescapable within a Marxist theoretical framework, or can there be a Marxist theory that is non-economistic and non-reductionist? Explain.

2. The concept of "discourse" is an important one in post-structuralist and post-Marxist theory. What do Laclau and Mouffe mean by "discourse," and what role does it play in their analysis? What criticisms does Geras make of discourse analysis? In particular, why does he claim that it leads to "relativism"?

3. What do Laclau and Mouffe mean by the concept of "hegemony," and how do they use this concept to address what they see as the main problems of Marxist political analysis? How does the concept of hegemony offer an alternative to the more traditional notions of causality or determination in social science? What are the implications of Laclau and Mouffe's concept of hegemony for political practice? What criticisms does Rustin present of Laclau and Mouffe's concept of hegemony? In particular, why does he claim that it leads to "absolute voluntarism"?

4. Epstein describes the "real weaknesses in Marxist theory in relation to the movements of the sixties and beyond" as "its difficulty in explaining generational revolt, its failure to address the question of gender, its inadequacy in relation to race, and its lack of a theory of cultural crisis" (p. 41). How does post-Marxist new social movement theory propose to address each of these deficiencies (and especially the last one)? What weaknesses does Epstein identify in new social movement theory, and how, in your opinion, might these weaknesses be addressed?