

Social Theory II

Week 7. The Marx-Weber Debate

1. Mommsen says that “Weber saw the roots of alienation, not in property relations, but in omnipotent structures of bureaucratic domination” (p. 242). Critically evaluate Weber’s thesis of the “omnipotence” of bureaucratic domination. What role does this thesis play in Weber’s assessment of the prospects for socialism? What implications does the collapse of bureaucratic socialism in Eastern Europe have for Weber’s thesis of the “omnipotence” of bureaucratic domination? How might a Marxist respond to Weber’s claims concerning the causes of alienation in industrial society?
2. Kellner describes critical theory as a modification of Marxist theory that drew heavily upon the classic Weberian themes of authority, rationalization, and domination. What affinities does Kellner identify between critical theory and Weberian social theory? What do you see as the single most important point of disagreement between critical theory and Weberian theory? Evaluate the relative merits of critical theory and Weberian theory on this point.
3. Giddens says that “power was never satisfactorily theorized by Marx, and . . . this failure is at the origin of some of the chief limitations of his scheme of historical analysis.” Drawing upon Wright’s summary of Giddens’ argument, discuss how Giddens’ focus on power relations leads him to reject the Marxist concepts of mode of production and the primacy of class. What does Wright mean when he says that the disagreement between Giddens and many Marxists on these issues “is at least partially of a terminological nature” (p. 21)? What arguments does Wright present in defense of the primacy of class? How persuasive do you find these arguments?
4. Burris says that “without always acknowledging the fact (or even necessarily being aware of it), contemporary Marxists have drawn heavily upon Weberian concepts in their effort to adapt classical Marxism to the conditions of late twentieth century capitalism” (p. 67). Identify and defend one instance of the incorporation of Weberian themes into Marxist class analysis that you think has been most positive and valuable for the development of Marxist sociology. Alternatively, identify and criticize one instance of the incorporation of Weberian themes into Marxist class analysis that you think has been most negative and detrimental.