

WEEK 2

Commodification & Alienation

Key thinkers: Karl Marx & Antonio Gramsci

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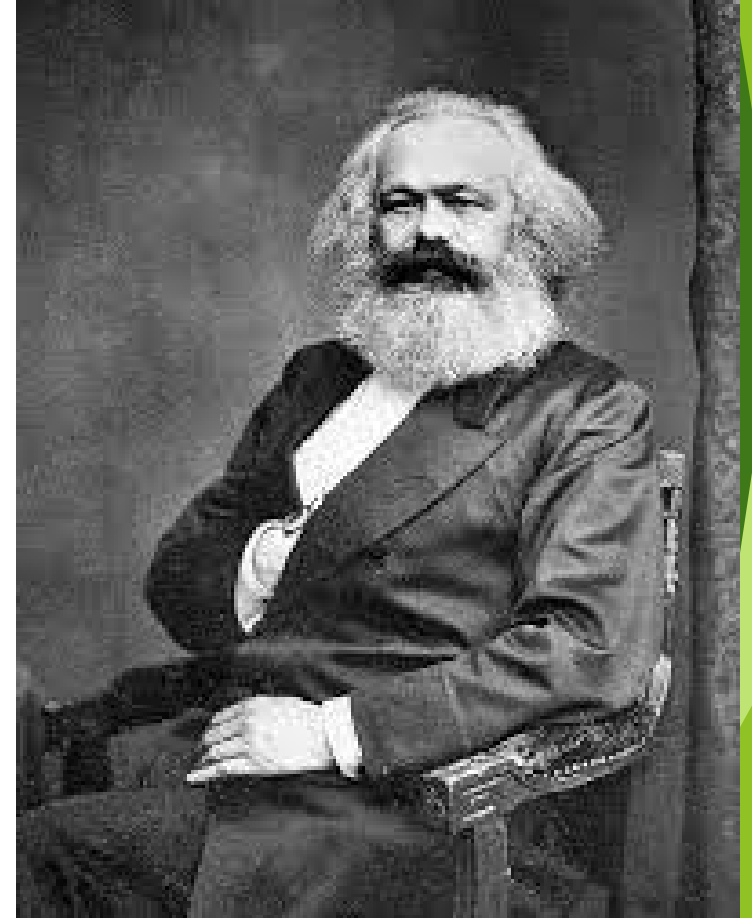
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Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Major work:

- ▶ *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*
- ▶ *The German Ideology* (1845-1846) - with Friedrich Engels
- ▶ *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) - with Friedrich Engels
- ▶ *Capital* (1867)



Theoretical system: historical materialism

(influenced by and breaking from Hegel's dialectic idealism)

- ▶ History as a dialectical process, a progress culminating in freedom and self-realization, a utopia free of conflict and exploitation
- ▶ Historical change is sparked by material existence
- ▶ Social change is driven by class struggle
- ▶ The dominant economic class controls the means of material production as well as the production of ideas
- ▶ Forces and relations of production are predetermined

Class and capitalism

- ▶ Class is determined in relation to forces of production
- ▶ Proletariat vs bourgeoisie; working class (propertyless wage earners) vs capitalist class (private property owners)
- ▶ Goal is to achieve class consciousness
- ▶ Capitalism carries a potential for self-destruction, ultimately leading to communism

Alienation

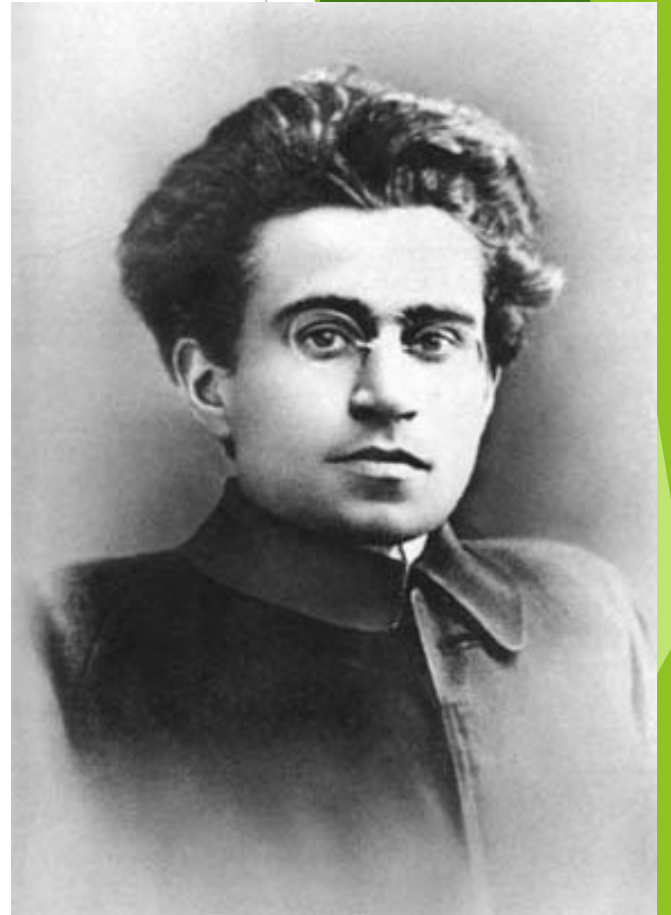
- ▶ Basic premises:
 - ▶ Humans are creative beings in nature
 - ▶ Work is essential expression of human nature
- ▶ Capitalism, based on the principles of private ownership, leads to alienation
- ▶ 4 types of alienation:
 1. Alienation in the object of production
 2. Alienation in the process of production
 3. Alienation from species-being
 4. Alienation between humans

Commodification

- ▶ Commodity as something that fulfills human needs
- ▶ Use-value and exchange-value of commodities
- ▶ Labor power as commodity
- ▶ Surplus value - the source of profit for the capitalist, and of exploitation for the worker
- ▶ Commodification of social relations - social relations are defined by commodities in capitalism
 - ▶ Fetishism of commodities - commodities appear to contain magical powers; conceals social reality of the object (the process and conditions of its creation)

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937)

- ▶ Member and general secretary of the Italian Communist Party
- ▶ Political activist - imprisoned in 1926
- ▶ Co-founder of *The New Order: A Weekly Review of Socialist Culture*
- ▶ *Prison Notebooks* - 29 notebooks of political and philosophical analysis (almost 3000 hand-written pages); published posthumously



Cultural hegemony and intellectuals

- ▶ Gramsci highlighted the role of ideas in establishing “hegemony”
- ▶ Cultural norms and ideas as a way of controlling and subordinating people
 - ▶ Hegemony established through “consent” rather than coercion
- ▶ Cultural norms are dictated by dominant social classes, and they are being reinforced as people are born into those cultural norms
- ▶ Traditional (i.e., professional) intellectuals vs organic intellectuals
- ▶ Organic intellectuals should question the ‘status quo’ and the existing social order for change to happen