

Sociology 621 Lecture 5 & 6. Outline. September 21 & 26, 2011
Classical Historical Materialism

I. INTRODUCTION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR “HISTORY” TO BE AN OBJECT OF THEORY?

1. Negative answer: history as such is not a legitimate object of scientific theory
2. Positive answer: the overall trajectory of history can be explained
3. Contrast: historical materialism vs cosmology , evolutionary biology, individual organisms
4. Why Bother?

II. THE GENERAL THEORY OF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM & THE SPECIAL THEORY OF CAPITALIST HISTORY

1. What precisely is the *explanandum* of the General Theory?

preclass society → precapitalist class society → capitalist society → post-capitalist nonclass society

2. The core intuition of the General Theory

III. FUNCTIONAL EXPLANATIONS

- 1 The basic logic of Cohen’s Reconstruction
2. The structure of functional explanations: *A consequence of something helps to explain its existence.*
3. functional vs intentional explanation
- 4 functional explanation & functional description
- 5 Functional explanations vs epiphenomal attributions
6. Functional explanations in HM

1a. the level of development of the productive forces in a society explains the nature of its economic structure.	1b. The economic structure of a society has the effect of furthering the development of the productive forces
2a. The economic structure explains the nature of its superstructure.	2b. The superstructure of a society is has the effect of contributing to the stability of the economic structure

IV. TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM IN THE GENERAL THEORY OF HISTORY

1. Why the PF tend to develop
2. A functional Explanation for the emergence of classes.
3. A Functional Explanation for the Transformation of class structures.
4. The outcome of transformation
5. Five theses
 1. *Compatibility Thesis.*
 2. *Development thesis.*
 3. *Contradiction thesis.*
 4. *Transformation Thesis.*
 5. *Optimality thesis.*

V. THE SPECIAL THEORY OF CAPITALIST HISTORY