

first analysing the dominant forms of production and then moving to a discussion of the other constituent parts of the global order. He placed special emphasis on the internationalization of relations of production in the modern capitalist era and on forms of global governance which perpetuate inequalities of power and wealth. Developing a theme which was introduced by the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci in the 1920s and 1930s, Cox focused on the hegemonic nature of world order – that is, on how the political architecture of global capitalism helps to maintain material inequalities through a combination of coercion and efforts to win consent (Cox 1993).

The neo-Gramscian school approach to international political economy has been particularly interested in developing the study of the origins, development and possible transformation of global hegemony (Gill 1993b). Its members have analysed how hegemony is maintained through forms of close cooperation between powerful elites inside and outside the core regions of the world system and through the growing network of international economic and political institutions which are responsible for global governance (Gill 1993b; see also Cox 1983). The idea of ‘disciplinary neo-liberalism’ takes this form of investigation further by analysing the ‘new constitutionalism’ in which global institutions press national governments to accept the dictates of neo-liberal conceptions of the state, society and economy (Gill 1995). Crucial here are forms of global governance exercised through political ‘conditionality’ and international pressures to deregulate various sectors of the domestic economy and to permit the expansion of global capitalism. The analysis focuses on how transnational capitalist development, state structures and international economic institutions interact to generate a particular form of global hegemony and associated inequalities of power, resources and opportunities. It also focuses on ‘the resistances these engender’ (Rupert 2003: 181).

These approaches lend support to Halliday’s comment that ‘the modern inter-state system emerged in the context of the spread of capitalism across the globe, and the subjugation of pre-capitalist societies. This socio-economic system has underpinned both the character of individual states and of their relations with each other: no analysis of international relations is possible without reference to capitalism, the social formations it generated and the world system they comprise’ (Halliday 1994: 61; see also Rosenberg 1994). This is perfectly compatible with the realist argument that states often pursue their own agenda and act independently of dominant class forces, although it is a clear invitation not to exaggerate the autonomy of most states, especially under modern conditions of capitalist globalization which compel most of them to respect the power of global financial markets and institutions. Various analyses

of the development of the modern form of international relations over the last few centuries stress how little will be understood by relying on a realist explanation. The writings of Rosenberg (1994) and Teschke (2003) are powerful examples of how historical materialism is being used to show that geopolitical systems are anchored in particular productive relations and to analyse the ways in which the modern states-system and capitalist forms of production have developed together.

The upshot of these developments is that Marxism is no longer guilty of ignoring state power and the classical world of international relations, as realists understand it. Not that Marxists will concede for one moment that international relations can be reduced to rivalry between the great powers along the lines of Waltz's argument (see Chapter 3 earlier). During the Cold War, Marxists and their sympathisers were critical of realist arguments that strategic competition could be considered apart from the struggle between two radically different social systems and ideological perspectives, although this view had few adherents in the mainstream study of international relations (Halliday 1983). The collapse of bipolarity and the accelerated rise of the 'global business civilization' encouraged a reconsideration of Marx's writings on capitalist globalization. Marxism may appear less relevant given the revival of national security politics since 9/11, but its analysis of the relationship between capitalism and the state can still contribute to the study of global governance in a period when the subordination of many states to the dictates of global capitalism is so evident (Bromley 1999; Hay 1999). Marxism comes into its own when analysing the relationship between the states-system and global capitalism and when considering the structure of global hegemony. These are two respects in which it is best placed to contribute to the study of international relations (Gamble 1999).

Marxism has been influential in the development of approaches to international political economy which have a critical or emancipatory intent. Marx wrote about the origins and development of modern capitalism, but not as an end in itself: he was especially interested in the social forces that would bring about its downfall with the result that the mass of humanity would be free from domination and exploitation. Neo-Gramscian approaches work in the same spirit by focusing on the role of counter-hegemonic political forces in the global order – that is, on the various groups which are opposed to a world system which produces among other things massive global inequalities and damage to the natural environment. Mainstream International Relations theory has long been opposed to what it sees as manifestly 'political' scholarship, although its claims to neutrality and objectivity have been challenged in the critical literature (see Chapters 6 and 7 in this volume). Realism and neo-realism have been criticized on the grounds that they have a 'problem-solving'

rather than a 'critical' purpose. The importance of this distinction will be considered in more detail in Chapter 6 in this volume. It is necessary to introduce it at this stage, however, in order to make some observations about the idea of the reconstruction of historical materialism.

The distinction between problem-solving and critical theory was made by Cox (1981: 128) in conjunction with his much-quoted remark that 'knowledge is always for someone and for some purpose'. Put another way, political inquiry is never objective and value-free but supports, however unintentionally, particular conceptions of society which favour identifiable sectional interests. Cox argued that neo-realism is a version of problem-solving theory which takes the existing international order for granted and asks how it can be made to 'function more smoothly'. In the main, this means concentrating on the problems resulting from relations between the great powers. By contrast, critical theory asks how the existing global political and economic order came into being, and whether it might be changing. Following the example of Marx's study of capitalism, and mindful of his observation that 'all that is solid eventually melts into air' (Marx and Engels 1977: 224) critical theory focuses on challenges to an international order which will probably disappear one day to join the other dead civilizations; it concentrates on what may be the first stirrings of a more humane form of world political organization. The upshot of this argument is that mainstream international theorists were too quick to dismiss Marxism simply because of its economic reductionism and utopianism. What was missing from their account was any recognition of the fact that Marxism is not just a sociology of what is 'out there'; it is a consciously political account of forms of domination and the forces which are working against them. One of the main outcomes of the belated engagement with Marxism is that such considerations are now more central to the theory of international relations.

But Marxist-inspired political inquiry is only one strand of contemporary critical theory. Approaches such as feminism, postmodernism and postcolonialism have been concerned with patriarchy and with constructions of identity and otherness in national and global politics which have not been central dimensions of Marxist studies of world politics. However, Cox's version of historical materialism has taken account of the recent upsurge of identity politics associated with minority nations and indigenous peoples; he has also attached particular importance to analysing the political consequences of civilisational identities in the post-European world order. The normative vision which runs through Cox's writings on this subject moves beyond the Left's classical focus on reducing material inequalities. He states that 'a post-hegemonic order would be one in which different traditions of civilization could coexist,

each based on a different intersubjectivity defining a distinct set of values and a distinct path towards development'. 'Mutual recognition and mutual understanding' are seen as the necessary foundations of a just world order in which different cultural identities have their rightful place (Cox 1992b, 1993: 265).

The focus on culture and civilization overlaps with the project of reconstructing historical materialism associated with the writings of the Frankfurt School critical theorist, Jürgen Habermas. He maintained in the 1970s that Marxism was guilty of overestimating the importance of 'labour' for social structure and historical change and of underestimating the role of 'interaction' – that is, the forms of communication which enable human beings to live together. The achievement of Marxism was to be found in the 'paradigm of production', which made the ways in which human beings work on nature central to modern social and political inquiry; its main shortcoming was to fail to deal with the equally important question of how human beings use language to create orderly societies and how they have developed the principle that good societies should express the will of their members. For Habermas, the 'paradigm of production', which focuses on how human beings learn to control nature, has to be complemented by the 'paradigm of communication', which focuses on how human beings have developed the moral expectation that all individuals have the right to be involved in any decision making processes which can affect them. What was absent from its normative vision was the recognition that universal emancipation requires not only the reduction of class inequalities but the democratization of all dimensions of social, economic and political life (Habermas 1979; Roderick 1986). On this formulation, one can hear the echo of Marx's claim that the purpose of political theory and action is to understand and help create a world in which human beings can make more of their history under conditions of their own choosing.

The reconstruction of historical materialism led to a complex argument about the universal features of communication, and on this basis Habermas has built 'discourse ethics' or 'the discourse theory of morality'. The most straightforward way of explaining the discourse approach is that many human beings in the modern world have lost the belief that certain moral principles are right because they are anchored in deeper religious truths or because they rest on the authority of tradition. They see themselves as living in a morally diverse world where there is little or no prospect of reaching a consensus that there is a single moral code which is true for all. The philosophical question is whether human beings can agree on the importance of following certain neutral procedures which will make it possible for the exponents of very different world-views to live together. Habermas argues that the discourse theory

of morality provides the best answer to this question. Its key requirement is that all individuals must be prepared to bring their different ethical positions before the tribunal of open discussion. They should be prepared to listen to all persons and to respect all standpoints, recognizing that prior to dialogue itself there can be no certainty about 'who will learn from whom' or about the 'better argument'. The point is that through open dialogue human beings with different religious and cultural backgrounds and conflicting moral and political standpoints can explore the possibility of a consensus about the best lines of moral argument. If no consensus emerges – and consensus must never be forced – they are left with the task of finding a fair compromise between competing positions (Habermas 1990).

Two points need to be made about the outcome of Habermas' reconstruction of historical materialism. First, Habermas has long rejected classical Marxist claims about the primacy of production and the centrality of class conflict in any form of life. The idea of universal emancipation as the reduction and eradication of class inequality is superseded by a vision of the good society in which there is greater human understanding and in which no-one deprives 'the other of otherness' (Habermas 1994: 119–20). The logic of his argument owes much to the 'spirit' of Marx and Marxism but its 'letter' rejects what many Marxists regard as the essence of their position, namely the primacy of the paradigm of production. This raises the question of how those who are broadly sympathetic with Marxist critical theory should build on its legacy. We return to this matter in the next section. Second, notwithstanding his critique of Marxism, Habermas is still broadly committed to the Enlightenment project of creating a cosmopolitan world in which human beings enjoy greater freedom. Admittedly, this vision does not include a defence of classical Marxist ideals such as the abolition of private property, the end of the commodification of labour, the joint ownership of the means of production and so forth. It is a vision which takes account of growing cultural diversity and moral conflict in the post-European age, but it is a thin vision because Habermas says even less than Marx about the nature of the good society. What is offered is a vision of a world in which human beings rely on specific procedures to work out political principles which will enable them to live together.

It is a reasonable argument that one does not have to be a Marxist to support this vision of a 'universal communication community'. It is sufficient to be a liberal or to have a broadly liberal-democratic persuasion. For some writers, herein lies one of the main problems in this attempt to build on the Marxist tradition of critical theory. Like Marx and classical Marxists, Habermas is already committed to an essentially Western conception of society, in this case to a vision of radical democracy at

both the national and international levels which is rejected in many non-Western regions of the world (and, indeed, by many political movements within the West). The Eurocentrism of his discourse position is even more pronounced when it is recognized that the development of a universal communication community requires the removal of all 'asymmetries' in society – not just the elimination of gross material inequalities and an end to notions of racial or ethnic superiority but the dismantling of patriarchal structures which perpetuate the subjection of women (Apel 1980; see also Cohen 1990). All that need be added at this point is that many outside the West regard feminism as a Western ideology which is alien to their ways (for further discussion, see Chapter 9 in this volume). Complex debates surround these issues, as the later chapters in this volume will explain. But, it should be added, the questions which lie at the heart of these debates mostly concern those who are interested in the fate of Marxism and Marxist-influenced critical theory. They are less central to scholars who believe that historical materialism provides essential tools for explaining the relationship between the international states-system and the capitalist world economy or the structure and dynamics of global hegemony.

Marxism and international relations theory today

Until quite recently, Marxism was the dominant powerful form of critical social theory: it combined a powerful analysis of the development of human history with a detailed study of the evolution of capitalism and with reflections on how universal emancipation could be achieved through class struggle. Its attachment to the paradigm of production made Marxists vulnerable to the charge of neglecting racial, ethnic, religious and gender inequalities. Feminist and postmodern writers have developed new forms of critical social theory which owe very little to Marxism, and many reject the idea of universal emancipation on the grounds that all cosmopolitan projects contain the seeds of new forms of domination. They have the evidence of Marxism in power to support them. Efforts to reconstruct historical materialism and to import ideas from other traditions have taken place, as the development of Habermas' thought reveals. One question which arises out of these challenges to, and revisions, of Marxism is whether the perspective now has a special contribution to make to the future of critical international theory. The question is whether the initiative now lies clearly with approaches which are post-Marxist or outside the Marxist tradition.

One answer is that classical Marxism has been superseded by new forms of critical theory which have abandoned the idea that human history

can be reduced to one grand historical narrative moving towards a condition of universal emancipation. This argument can be traced back to the writings of Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) – the founders of Frankfurt School critical theory – who argued in the 1940s that the problems of Marxism were a product of the failures of European Enlightenment. They maintained that Marx and Marxism shared the Enlightenment view that the growth of scientific knowledge and technological know-how would lead to greater human freedom; in fact, they led to new forms of bureaucratic domination. In the 1970s, the French postmodern writer Jean-François Lyotard (1984) also argued that the belief that human history was a journey from domination and superstition to freedom and enlightenment overlooked the dark side of Western rationality and scientific progress. To a significant extent, these arguments were a response to Soviet totalitarianism and to Stalinism.

An additional point – although this is more controversial – is that Enlightenment thinkers were largely disparaging about non-Western societies (Vogel 2003). Leaving the debate to one side, there is no doubt that Marx and Engels were often condescending towards and contemptuous of non-Western societies. They were convinced that Western imperialism and the spread of capitalism were necessary to liberate the ‘historyless peoples’ from religious myth and the tyranny of tradition. It is important at this point to recall the way in which classical Marxists agonised over the role of national liberation movements in the struggle for socialism and the place of the nation in the future socialist world order. More recent strands of critical theory have been bolder to celebrate human diversity and cultural difference. In Lyotard’s case, the defence of the rights of the other is connected with the ideal of a ‘global speech community’ which has some parallels with Habermas’ position on discourse ethics and cosmopolitan democracy – which some see as an extension of the radical democratic ethos which exists in Marx’s writings (Carver 1998). Lyotard (1993) argues that all human beings have an equal right to ‘establish their community by contract’ using ‘reason and debate’. But, against Habermas, Lyotard stresses the dangers inherent in privileging some idealized notion of dialogue, specifically that radical diversity will be sacrificed in the course of striving for consensus.

Marxists will ask if these visions of a world moving towards greater dialogue and diversity deal with the issue of how material inequalities prevent the establishment of communities of contract and consent. The writings of Jacques Derrida, the founder of deconstructionism, deserve attention at this point (for further discussion, see Chapter 7 in this volume). In his analysis of the contemporary relevance of Marx and Engels’ *The Communist Manifesto*, Derrida (1994a, 1994b) defends a ‘new International’ on the grounds that ‘violence, inequality, exclusion,

famine, and thus economic oppression [have never] affected as many human beings in the history of the Earth and of humanity'. Defending the 'spirit of Marxism', Derrida (1994a: 56) argues for revising Marx's ideal of the 'withering away of the state'. This should be freed from earlier claims about socialist internationalism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The 'new International' should protest against 'the state of international law, the concepts of state and nation' and break with inherited assumptions about exclusionary sovereign states and national conceptions of citizenship. Derrida (1994a: 58) envisages new forms of political community in which the state no longer possesses 'a space which it ... dominates' and which 'it never dominated without division'. The emphasis here is on new political arrangements which are in some ways more cosmopolitan than their predecessors (because they are concerned with the right of all human beings to a decent life), more sensitive to cultural and other differences (thereby realizing one of the main aspirations of the Austro-Marxists) and more committed to the reduction of global economic inequalities, so keeping faith with the central tenets of classical Marxism (Linklater 1998). Derrida stresses, however, that those who work in 'spirit of Marxism' should devote more attention to analysing the state, citizenship, political community and international law.

We return at this point to the central criticism of Marxism in the mainstream literature on international relations, which is its failure to deal with the state, nationalism and war, or its neglect of diplomacy, the balance of power and international law. Realists and neo-realists have argued that geo-politics is more important than economic globalization, and that is why human beings continue to rely on nation-states for their security rather than strive to create new forms of political community. They stress that Marxist internationalism was broken on the wheel of power politics during the First World War; it has no real relevance to a world of states.

The argument raises fundamental questions about the purpose of studying international relations. Here, there can be no doubt that two world wars in the twentieth century, and the bipolar struggle which dominated the second half of the century, made it easier for realism and neo-realism to define the discipline. The recent revival of national security politics and the wars against the Taliban and against Saddam Hussein have encouraged the realists to argue that recent events have demonstrated once again that international politics is 'the realm of recurrence and repetition', the realm of politics that does not change in its most fundamental respects (Waltz 2002). They claim that in the 1990s some analysts of international relations were dazzled by apparent novelties – increasing levels of economic globalization, 'the obsolescence of force' and so on. These criticisms are mainly directed at

liberals although the neo-realist will maintain that they apply to Marxism as well. The fact that Marxism is not even mentioned in this context is a function of its virtual absence from the American study of international relations.

Those who make the case for taking Marxism seriously will not necessarily dispute these observations about the importance of national security politics, but they will invariably argue that a more comprehensive understanding of how the modern international system has developed over the last few centuries and at the present time cannot ignore the evolution of modern capitalism, its dominance across the world and its impact on international institutions and international law; nor can it ignore the structure and dynamics of global hegemony, the growth of economic inequalities and the changing fortunes of counter-hegemonic movements which defend visions of a more just world order. In part, this is an argument about how to understand the structure of world politics; in part it is a debate about how that structure produces 'winners' and 'losers'. In the 1960s and 1970s, some Marxist approaches replaced the humanism of the early Marx with dry structural analysis which lost sight of the ethical issues which are at stake in politics. However Marxism has always come into its own when combining the empirical analysis of global structures and processes with a morally infused commitment to understanding and challenging deep inequalities of power, resources and opportunities. Indeed, its belief that the concern with asymmetries and inequalities should drive the analysis remains a major achievement with lasting significance for the study of international relations.

Conclusion

Despite its weaknesses, Marxism contributes to the theory of international relations in at least four respects. First, historical materialism with its emphasis on production, property relations and class is an important counter-weight to realist theories which assume that the struggle for power and security determines the structure of world politics. This leads to two further points which are that Marxism has long been centrally concerned with capitalist globalization and international inequalities and that, for Marxism, the global spread of capitalism is the backdrop to the development of modern societies and the organization of their international relations. A fourth theme, which first appeared in Marx's critique of liberal political economy, is that explanations of the social world are never as objective and innocent as they may seem. Applied to international politics, the argument is that the analysis of basic and

unchanging realities can all too easily ignore relations of power and inequality not between states but between *individuals*. Dominant strands of Marxist thought have taken the view that one of the main functions of scholarship is to understand the principal forms of domination and to imagine a world order which is committed to reducing material inequalities. This critical orientation to world politics can no longer be simply 'Marxist' in the largely superseded sense of using the paradigm of production to analyse class inequalities. But it can nevertheless remain true to the 'spirit of Marxism' by combining the empirical analysis of the dominant forms of power and inequality with a moral vision of a more just world order. This critical approach can extend beyond the analysis of capitalist globalization and rising international inequalities to the ways in which states conduct national security politics. One of the failings of Marxism as a source of critical international theory is its ingrained tendency to focus on the former at the expense of the latter field of inquiry. Later chapters discuss whether other strands of critical international theory have succeeded in overcoming this limitation.