

## Social Theory II

### Week 6. Analytical Marxism and Rational-Choice Theory

1. In “What is Analytical Marxism?” Wright identifies four “commitments” that characterize Analytical Marxism. Contrast these four commitments with the theoretical and methodological orientations of classical/orthodox Marxism as well as those of various schools of Western Marxism (e.g., Lukacs, Gramsci, and/or the Frankfurt School). Which one of Wright’s four commitments do you find most controversial or contentious for an avowed Marxist to espouse? Critically evaluate this commitment in comparison with the guiding principles of other schools of Marxist thought and present a case either for or against the commitment espoused by Wright.
2. Elster (pp. 460-463) argues that “functionalism is rampant” in Marxist social science, even though, in his view, “functional analysis has no [legitimate] place in the social sciences.” How essential are functional forms of explanation in Marxist theory and what are their strengths and weaknesses? Critically evaluate Elster’s defense of methodological individualism as a proper foundation for Marxist theory in light of the criticisms raised by Kieve and Wood.
3. Elster, Przeworski, and other Analytical Marxists often employ game theory as a general framework for explicating the underlying logic of specific theoretical claims or arguments. Critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of game theory as a tool of Marxist theorizing in light of the criticisms raised by Kieve and Wood.
4. Roemer’s analysis leads him to the surprising conclusion that “labor can be just as exploited if it hires capital as it is if it is hired by capital,” and he therefore rejects “the classical belief that the labor process is at the center of the Marxian analysis of exploitation and class” (p. 93). How does Roemer arrive at this conclusion? What criticisms do Kieve and Wood make of Roemer’s method of analysis? Which side of the debate do you find most persuasive and why?