

**Sociology 621. Lecture 4 & 5 Outline. Classical Historical Materialism
September 15 & 17, 2003**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 What is a Theory of History? What does it mean for “history” to be an object of theory?
- 1.2 Why Bother?

2. The General Theory of Historical Materialism & the Special Theory of Capitalist history

3. What precisely is the explanandum of the General Theory? Four-stage trajectory of human history:

- 1. *preclass society* → 2. *precapitalist class society* → 3. *capitalist society* → *post-capitalist nonclass society*

4. The core intuition of the General Theory

5. Functional Explanations

5.1 The basic logic of Cohen’s Reconstruction = intersecting functional explanations

- #1. The forces of production functionally explain the relations of production, and
- #2. The relations of production functionally explain the superstructures.

5.2 The structure of functional explanations: *A consequence of something helps to explain its existence.*

Example: rituals among the trobriand islanders

5.3 functional vs intentional explanation

5.4 functional explanation & functional description

5.5 Functional explanations & dispositional properties (skip in lecture)

5.6 Functional explanations vs epiphenomal attributions

5.7. Functional explanations in HM: necessary to reconcile two sets of seemingly contradictory propositions:

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 superstructure of a society is has the effect of contributing to the stability of the economic structure.	2b. The economic structure explains the nature of its superstructure.

6. Technological Determinism

6.1. Why the PF tend to develop: *scarcity + intelligence/creativity + rationality*

6.2 A functional Explanation for the emergence of classes.

6.3 A Functional Explanation for the Transformation of class structures.

6.4 The outcome of transformation: two processes

- 1. more or less *continuous* development of the forces of production
- 2. radically *discontinuous* development of the relations of production and corresponding superstructures.

6.5 Summary of Cohen’s argument

- 1. Compatibility Thesis.
- 2. Development thesis.
- 3. Contradiction thesis.
- 4. Transformation Thesis.
- 5. Optimality thesis.

7. The special theory of capitalist history: Theory of How Capitalist Contradictions → Socialism

