

The Marxist Method

STUDY BLOCK: PHILOSOPHY

STUDY MATERIALS

Philosophical Tendencies: Study Cards

A study guide with short definitions of major philosophical trends to help contextualize the Marxist Method and understand how it is distinct from other methods of understanding the world.

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The Marxist Doctrine, by V.I. Lenin

Philosophy tends to be an intimidating subject for most of us, but to put it in simple terms, it is merely the lens or filter through which we understand ourselves, our actions and the world around us. In this short text Lenin does a very summarized overview of dialectical materialism which is the philosophical approach of Marxism. Lenin refers to it as Marx's "world conception" and in a very succinct way describes the way Marx introduces this new way of understanding the world, in contrast with other approaches that were being discussed in his day.

While reading this text, ask yourself what Marx is proposing is the best way to understand reality and the world around us. For Hegel, studying the "history of ideas" was the means to uncover truth and to understand our world. If not "ideas" then what is Marx suggesting gives shape to our reality and what must we study to uncover the truth?

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"Prayers, Fighters- and Workers" from *Man's Worldly Goods* by Leo Huberman

This text offers an example of what it means to look at society and history from a dialectical, historical and materialist perspective. The subject of the book is the development of capitalism. In describing and explaining the transition from feudalism to capitalism Huberman focuses on the material conditions existent in both modes of production. He describes how the mode of production leads to specific property relations, class formations and ideological apparatuses.

As you read this chapter, contrast it with what you have previously learned about the way that capitalism developed.

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'Modernism' (Ch. 2) and 'Post-Modernism' (Ch. 3) in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, by David Harvey

Every economic system is accompanied by an ideological project, a set of ideas and explanations that make sense and sustain (as well as inform) the economic project. It can be said that the ideological project that has accompanied neoliberalism is 'post-modernism' - its ideas should be familiar to most of us as we have lived during a time where this way of understanding reality has become central. These chapters present a history of post-modernism and modernism, as they must be understood in relation to one another.

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"How Lenin Studied Marx" by Krupskaya

In this short pamphlet, Krupskaya elaborates Lenin's approach to studying Marx's works. She emphasizes that his approach was to "consult" Marx rather than to simply read his texts. She also elaborates Lenin's commitment to applying dialectical historical materialism in his studies. This text is a good reminder that we do not study Marx for the simple accumulation of knowledge, but rather to help us develop strategy for revolutionary action. Most importantly, it is a reminder that the way we study, and the kinds of questions we ask while studying are just as essential as the object of study itself.

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