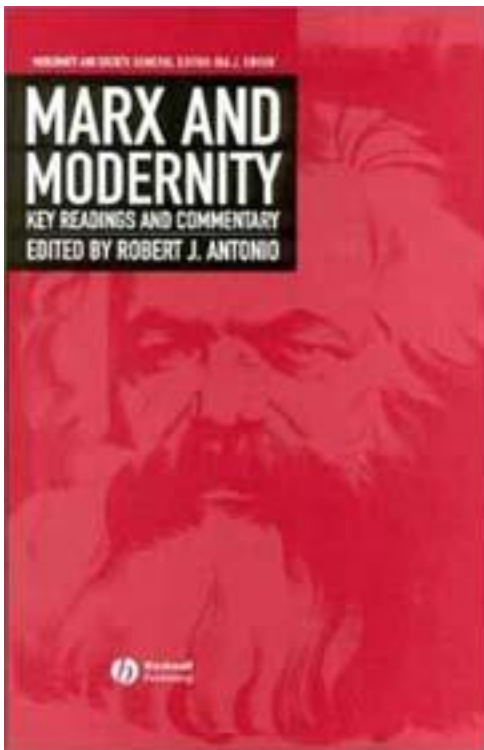


Review

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Antonio, Robert J., Ed. (2003). *Marx and Modernity: Key Readings and Commentary*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. 399 Pages. \$64.95



At the outset of this excellent collection of readings and commentary, Robert Antonio observes that Karl Marx's ideas have been pronounced dead in both social theory and political practice many times before, but they always seem to reemerge. *Marx and Modernity*, therefore, seeks to understand whether Marx's ideas died with the collapse of communism, or how and under what conditions they will reemerge to reinvigorate both social theory and political practice.

Marx and Modernity proceeds by addressing two central questions of contemporary social theory: First, what are Marx's essential contributions to our understanding of the elemental features of the modern social world? To what extent do Marx's analysis of value, commodity fetishism and capital accumulation mesh with contemporary analyses of modernity? Is Marx helpful today or, following some postmodernist thinkers, is he to be dismissed as the consummate modernist? Second, how pertinent is Marx's critique of capitalism and his analysis of class struggle to the basic political struggles occurring in the modern social world? To what extent are Marx's concepts of class struggle and revolution helpful to those who confront racism, sexism, ecological destruction, and authoritarian governments?

The book is comprised of three critical sections. The first is a fifty-page introduction by Antonio that strongly emphasizes the primacy of Marx's critique of capitalism in the evolution of his thought. The second section includes thirty-eight readings by Marx, some with Engels, that are, again, strongly focused on the economic analysis of capitalism. The final section of the book is a collection of fourteen contemporary essays that debate the political relevance of Marxist theory, the theoretical and political meaning of the anti-

globalism riots in Seattle, the polarization of classes and races in the information economy, and the question of how Marxist class analysis can be restructured to contribute to contemporary class realities, such as the emergence of the middle class and the underclass.

Marx and Modernity offers an unambiguous answer to the question of the relevance of Marx's critique of the modern social world: capitalism is a central feature of the modern world and Marx is one of its most important analysts and critics. Indeed, Antonio argues that Marx's extensive analysis of capitalism constitutes his main thrust, and is the facet of his work that has the most enduring theoretical importance and the most relevance for contemporary affairs. His selections of Marx's writings for inclusion in this volume certainly support that argument. While they frequently disagree with each other, the contemporary contributors to this book uniformly struggle with the problematics of Marx's critique of capitalism, attempting to apply or reject the application of his concepts to the economic structure of the modern world.

By contrast, however, Antonio argues that Marx's comments about revolution and communism are for the most part brief and sketchy. They do not have the same rigor or analytic or empirical foundation that characterizes his analysis of capitalism. Antonio also correctly notes that Marx's ideas about revolution and communism have been used to justify some of the most oppressive regimes and barbaric events in human history, perhaps because the political analysis was not as thoroughly developed as the economic and class analysis of capitalism. So, the question about the relevance of Marxist politics to the modern world cannot be answered as clearly or as easily as the first question.

The political divides of modernity appear to transcend the socialist project Marx envisioned. At least, it is not clear that Marx's analysis of conflict and revolution can easily inform or accommodate protests associated with ethnicity, race, gender and globalization. But Marx had a deep and sincere interest in eliminating unnecessary human suffering. He was clearly interested in emancipating individuals and society from both capitalist exploitation and political oppression. Antonio notes that Marx's political commitments helped structure his studies of capitalism. Thus, Marx's politics should be seriously studied, although it remains to be seen whether the class divides in the contemporary social world will revive his socialist project.

Without a doubt, many Marxists and others on the left will dispute the assertions about the ambiguity of Marxist political analysis in the modern world, but the discussion is important to all of those who believe that Marx's work is central to human liberation. The analysis included in *Marx and Modernity* can be fruitfully extended by the work of scholars such as Raya Dunayevskaya, who demonstrate that it is important to understand not just what Marx published, but also how he developed his ideas to fully understand their relevance for political struggles of today. It is important to note that *Marx and Modernity* does not include selections from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *Ethnological Notebooks*, nor the *Mathematical Manuscripts*. The inclusion of these works in a consideration of what is living and what is dead in the thought of Karl Marx is important because they reveal that he was every bit as concerned with the

struggles of women and races as he was with the industrial proletariat. From this vantage point, Marx was a humanist philosopher of revolution whose analysis of capitalism and modernity is not separate from, but is a component of, his broader political and philosophic interest in human liberation.