

The background of the slide is a soft-focus photograph of a mountain range. The mountains are covered in green foliage and are partially shrouded in a light mist or fog. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. Overlaid on this entire image is a light gray grid of thin lines, creating a subtle pattern across the slide.

# Marx's Understanding of the Production-Distribution Relationship and its Contemporary Relevance

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# The Background Context: Mill on the Production-Distribution Relationship/Distinction

“The laws and the conditions of the production of wealth partake of the character of physical truths”, distribution is “a matter of human institutions only. The things once there, mankind, individually or collectively, can do with them as they like...The distribution of wealth, therefore, depends on the laws and customs of society” (1848, pp. 199-200).

“In so far as the economical condition of nations turns upon the state of physical knowledge, it is a subject for the physical sciences, and the arts founded on them. But insofar as the causes are moral or psychological, dependent on institutions and social relations, or on the principles of human nature, their investigation belongs not to physical but to moral and social sciences, and is the object of what is called Political Economy” (1848, pp.20-21).

# Marx's Critique of Mill in the Grundrisse

“The aim [of the economists] is, rather, to present production – see e.g. Mill – as distinct from distribution etc., as encased in eternal natural laws independent of history, at which opportunity bourgeois relations are then quietly smuggled in as the inviolable natural laws on which society in the abstract is founded. This is the more or less conscious purpose of the whole proceeding. In distribution, by contrast, humanity has allegedly permitted itself to be considerably more arbitrary” (1973 [~1857], p.87).

# Marx's Critique of "Vulgar" Socialists in the Critique of the Gotha Program

"Quite apart from the analysis so far given, it was in general a mistake to make a fuss about so-called distribution and put the principal stress on it."

"Any distribution whatever of the means of consumption is only a consequence of the distribution of the conditions of production themselves. The latter distribution, however, is a feature of the mode of production itself. The capitalist mode of production, for example, rests on the fact that the material conditions of production are in the hands of nonworkers in the form of property in capital and land, while the masses are only owners of the personal condition of production, of labor power."

"If the elements of production are so distributed, then the present-day distribution of the means of consumption results automatically. If the material conditions of production are the co-operative property of the workers themselves, then there likewise results a distribution of the means of consumption different from the present one. Vulgar socialism (and from it in turn a section of the democrats) has taken over from the bourgeois economists the consideration and treatment of distribution as independent of the mode of production and hence the presentation of socialism as turning principally on distribution. After the real relation has long been made clear, why retrogress again?"

([1875], 1978, pp.531-532).

# G.A Cohen: “Against Marx on Mill”

“We shall argue that Mill’s distinction between production and distribution resembles Marx’s distinction between subsocial and social dimensions of the economy” (2000, p.108).

“Mill’s generous concept of distribution covers the pattern of ownership of productive forces, so that Marx’s social relations of production are not suppressed” (200, p.109).

# G.A. Cohen, “With ‘Orthodox’ Rawls and Against Marx”?

“The Marx-inspired question is whether a society without an ethos in daily life that is in-formed by a broadly egalitarian principle for that reason fails to provide distributive justice. To that question, Rawls, being a liberal, says no: here is the deep dividing line between us” (2009, p. 2).

# Cohen's Legacy in Contemporary Political Philosophy

John Roemer: “The ethics of socialism should be reformulated, from being characterized as the elimination of exploitation, to being characterized as the elimination of distributive injustice” (2017, p.263).

Joseph Carens: “I leave aside questions about the ownership and control of non-human capital, except to assume that capital, too, is largely allocated through markets, whether we are imagining some form of market capitalism or market socialism or something in between like property-owning democracy” (2015, p.52).

Elizabeth Anderson and relational egalitarianism in Private Government.

# Contemporary Political Economy and the Struggle Against Global Economic Inequality

- Branko Milanovic (Capitalism Alone).
- Thomas Piketty (Capitalism in the Twenty-First Century; Capital and Ideology)—the presuppositions of “democratic modernity”).
- “Democratizing Work Movement”. Piketty is on board.



# Rethinking the Production-Distribution Relationship Today

- Not substituting a one-sided fixation on distribution with an equally one-sided fixation on production.
- We should focus instead on both justice in production and justice in distribution relationally (or, if you will, dialectically).
- There is a close relationship between how production is organized and its consequences for distribution.
- Compare the ratio of income inequality within worker-owned and managed cooperatives against capitalist-owned (private) firms.
- “Retrieving” democracy as an indispensable feature of socialism and a feasible version of “associated production.”