

Marx’s Theory: Evolutionary or Revolutionary? An update of Gouldner’s statement on the distinction between Scientific Marxism and Critical Marxism

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Abstract

The purpose of this article in the field of the history of economic thought is to investigate from a scientific viewpoint whether Marx’s theory is evolutionary or revolutionary by analyzing some main texts of Marx such as *The Capital*, *The German Ideology* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. The idea to be hereby updated was first seen by this author in the book of Alvin Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms. Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory* (Gouldner, 1980). Gouldner confronts Scientific Marxism with its emphasis upon the laws of development against Critical Marxism stressing practice and critiques. This question has been addressed in some realms of non-Marxian economics as a critique of the scientific research programme of Marx and Engels. This is due to this is a fundamental Marx’s topic related to his method and to his use of dialectics in his quest for the overcoming of capitalism and ultimately for human emancipation. The result is that the ambiguity between both Marxist theories is related to the fastness of change and method, whereby Critical Marxism is nowadays more relevant. Section 1 is an introduction on the scientific problem at hand. Section 2 is about related problems. Section 3 is a brief analysis of key Marx’s texts. Section 4 updates Goldner’s insights. Section 5 gives open conclusions. References are listed at the end of the article.

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Introduction: The scientific problem

Marxism like any other vision about the world must be conceptualized and analysed to inquiry whether its ideas and perceptions are scientific or rational for detaching it from false consciousness and applications. This ample objective is undertaken by analysing some of the problems set by Marxism in terms of its scientific foundations.

The scientific problem at hand deals with the obtaining of objective understanding about the theoretical problems related to the bifurcation of Marxism in two strands: Scientific and Critical. This task was originally conducted by Alvin Gouldner in 1980, but this understanding can be improved with the aid of new developments in the fields of economics, sociology and philosophy, with an interdisciplinary strength.

Critical Marxism (revolutionary or historical) and Scientific Marxism (evolutionary) are rivals in terms of the solution provided to the problem related to the fastness of human emancipation once

Capitalism is overthrown. Scientific Marxism (SM) aims to adhere to rules and order for overcoming Capitalism by means of Socialism and then by Communism, based on the analysis of needs. For that purpose, SM studies the evolution of productive forces.

If the main issue is according to Gouldner studying the changes and its mechanisms in Marx, Critical Marxism (CM) considers contingencies, is voluntarist and aims to quickly re-establishing freedom after attaining equality. Its contention is that Capitalism effective as it is, produces alienation.

CM		SM	
Ethics-oriented	Humanist	Science-oriented	Positivistic
The young Marx	Ideological	The mature Marx	Progressive
Historical	Political	Physicalist	Universal laws
Voluntarist	Praxis-oriented	Deterministic	Technological

Table 1 : Main Differences in Bifurcated Marxism
Source: Based on Gouldner (1980).

In Gouldner's view, CM is based is a reconstructive critique of current society grounded on the formation of shared consciousness. The possibility exists for overcoming the current social structures and their impact on men. For that goal, CM interprets events in terms of vital values and hence advocates a revolutionary procedure as a remedy for these ills. Thus Revolutionary Marxism (almost French in spirit) is a bet for a sudden end to inequality.

SM on its part deals with unavoidable laws and is mainly interested on cognition. It stresses the role of technology for achieving the gradual evolution of economic systems, assessing the context of development before taking any action with productive forces at its core. It is atomistic and entails modernization in terms of needs emancipation. Science is hereby reified but its anti-historicity and abstractionism are criticised. It is dominated by natural relations and benefits from the socio-cultural universe in 2 main realms: The economic infra-structure and the super-structure.

Both stands differ in terms of their epistemological cores, according to Gouldner. Further it is hereby contended that both strands also differ in terms of metaphysical vision, especially about time considerations, but also in ethical insights and in political consequences (related to the type of actions to be undertaken).

Related scientific problems

Before studying some key Marx's texts and analysing Gouldner insights it is hereby placed the problem at hand in context. In other words, it must be investigated whether other types of bifurcation exist in Marx-Engels' vision. This means that CM and SM converge or cohabit. It is also interesting finding out if there is a gap between the young and the old Marx as enunciate by Althusser.

Other research paths in Marxist philosophy related to the problem at hand are investigating whether

Marxism is insulated from other (orthodox) epistemological research programmes, or even whether Marxism is applicable or minimized due to misunderstandings, misappropriations or ideological concerns. It is interesting to analyse whether Marxism is only normative, original or inverted with respect either to, for example, Hegel's or Feuerbach's insights.

The problem of practice in Marxism has been due to political failures in the countries where it has been applied in the early 20th Century. The contention hereby exposed is that the analysis of the bifurcation of Marxism into CM and SM is the key issue for grasping the essence of other problems in Marxism. Thus, the vision about this problem is holistic or organic, that is, the core and the heuristic organizing principles of Marxism and hereby analysed for that purpose.

The only statement that can be enunciated is that Marxism generates different interpretations and meanings, an insight which only proves its enduring legacy.

A brief analysis of Marx's texts

In Gouldner's perspective a representative text on critical Marxism about revolutions and evolution are the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 as they portray Marx's idealised anthropology aimed to explaining men destiny. Perhaps critiques would say that this book echoes Feuerbach's findings.

Other key texts in this issues on the impact of socialist revolution and his emancipatory effects on human emancipation are the Theses on Feuerbach (1844) and The German Ideology (1845). This is due to the emphasis these two books lay upon the assumption of a new historical-ideological achievement that leads to praxis, according to which human beings are the main agent for the attainment of emancipation, especially in economic terms. Universal concepts are essentially philosophical such as alienation, ideology and the like. According to these texts nothing is to be awaited upon. They correspond to the "continental" phase of Marx's thinking, when he was living and writing in

Germany, Paris and Brussels. Emphasis is laid upon ruling out old ideas through direct means.

This timely vision regarding sudden changes would later be taken by Rosa Luxemburg for supporting his ideas on spontaneous revolutions. Under this framework revolutions are achieved by means of a single isolated and definitive effort, even though Lenin would advocate scientific socialism, and Trotsky would ground his ideas on permanent revolutions.

It is widely considered that the watershed on Marxist thinking is 1847, when *The Misery of Philosophy* was published (see Nicholaus, 1968). According to Nicholaus, this text is the decisive point on Marx's scientific perspective. Still other authors consider that the watershed is the Manifest of the Communist Party (1848). However other experts consider that the key texts are A speech on free trade (1848) or even Wage labour and capital (1847).

Perhaps even more importantly *Das Kapital* (1868) is a scientific text full of definitions and new relationships with an emphasis upon technology, aiming to analyse the concepts of surplus, merchandise and money among others. This textbook corresponds to the "London library" age of Marx. In this context revolutions must wait for developments attained through piece-meal efforts based on applied knowledge.

At any rate, it is considered that this deterministic scientific approach was advocated by Engels. However, Marx's role is not considered in modern scholarship as only praising scientific socialism, which he only advocated in his mature years. Proof is that Engels wrote that Marx was pre-eminently a revolutionary (Engels, 1983). Actually, Marx was an impulsive revolutionary who acted after deep reflection. In this frame of mind both Gramsci and Lukacs are critical Marxists, whereas Althusser is a scientific Marxist.

The update of Gouldner's insights

Gouldner (1980) states in his introduction that his: "contention [is] that primary Marxism has a "nuclear contradiction," and that "it reproduces (at

least) two boundaried subsystems ... Scientific Marxism and Critical Marxism." No pretensions for originality exist in this insight regarding the choice of the topic in question. In Appendix One, Gouldner writes: "the thesis that ... there are two Marxisms (or more), is scarcely original to this writer (Gouldner, 1980)."

Gouldner (1980) attempts to identify both differences and similarities between SM and CM seeing both as part of a single unique message, that is both strands cohabit in both theory and practice. CM is labelled as ideological, whereas SM is accused for being both passive and positivistic. Is this all true?

The idea is to investigate which are the new theoretical and practical developments on the issue suggested by Gouldner. The goal is to assess the value of Marxist theory for modern times by identifying the relative strengths of both Marxist strands in terms of objectives and method as well as its consequences on politics and historical stages. Thus, both theory and methods are hereby analysed in dialectic terms, even though the former is related to human actions and the latter to natural laws.

For Gouldner, writing in 1980, CM and SM cohabited. However, SM is a small force in 2017 given the strength of Capitalism despite financial crises and growing inequalities. Hence, we depart from Gouldner's contention since the revolutionary trait he attributed to productive forces has not been materialized. Only the core of the theory survives and this refers to the obtaining of emancipation through practical knowledge. This means that CM is still alive, being a pioneer force in the emergence of critical realism contributing an organicist focus.

CM is also alive due to its wealth of reach and interdisciplinary focus, and hence we can conclude that Marx's core is revolutionary. This is due to its calls for attaining urgent freedom, a plea that can be extended to any marginalized group. On the other hand, both the economy and technology as considered by SM have been ideologically overcome, at least in (ideologically) practical terms.

However, such insights as surplus, a heterodox analysis of the labour market, and new conceptions of money and capital are still relevant. This can be deduced from a search on bibliographical sources on the topic in academic journals and conferences. In an opposing view Elwell (2013) states that Marx's core is evolutionary.

Gouldner (1980) exhibits a scarce understanding on Marx's opinions on the bourgeoisie and related topics in his final chapters. However, his insight on the mentioned bifurcation of Marxism in his 1980 book is worthwhile as he dissects the topic in an informed manner for synthesizing it and inviting to further reflections.

Open conclusions

What is the need for stressing in the 11th Thesis on Feuerbach that the point is changing the world, if humankind faces a evolutive process towards emancipation? It must be assessed then whether the driving force of history is either human will or natural law. In other words, it must be investigated whether the problem of freedom is more relevant than that of human needs, or in academic jargon whether events are human or scientifically generated.

When considering the bifurcation problem, the core of the Marx-Engels scientific research programme is analysed. In this respect, its basic assumption is investigating whether the road towards socialism is through human methods entailing quickness before rigid social and technological or natural structures about the gradual change of the social project of humankind.

The stress must be laid upon the identification of the relevance of the problem of alternative Marxism, that is these bifurcated Marxist visions, or whether that bifurcation has moved through dialectic phases (as stated by Gouldner), or even if whether the problem of possessing two visions has transcended into another dimension as adjusted by recent events. New developments in theory, empirical issues and practice related to the problem in question were investigated in this article if only about vision, methods and approach. CM is part of contemporary

philosophy and culture as it is embedded into the thought of various disciplines and fields. It can be inferred from previous sections in this article that the bifurcation Marxisms succeed each other as stated by Gouldner. As of 2015 CM prevails since it is an inquiry into the validity of social structures by means of a realist and universal epistemology. Marx criticised philosophy after discovering the relevance of political economy. Nevertheless this did not preclude him from advocating a proactive-voluntarist ethics.

SM being more rigorous in terms of predictions is not totally accepted as a part of technological modernism, although it is still being studied in academic circles. It is expected that Capitalism explodes but the only hint in this direction is financial crises, which were foreseen by Marx. Marx had also much to say on universal values based on evolutionary ideology.

Therefore, CM is still alive but living underneath the surface in some social unprotected circles, and perhaps more importantly it keeps on being studied due to his stress upon ideological and ethical issues. As current economics faces today a crisis Marxism offers a new scientific avenue for solving inequalities.

For arriving to these conclusions, the author of this article conducted inspection on 252 abstracts in relevant articles on Marx theory (see A Marx Bibliography on the website Marxists Internet Archive in references). The critical legacy of the research programme of Marx-Engels on emancipation is still of interest for economists, sociologists and philosophers. Nonetheless this does not mean that SM has not fulfilled the requirement of making some abstract concepts concrete, for instance the problem of decreasing profits in developed nations in recent times. This is evident in texts written after 1990s.

Does Marxism have a future? The huge bibliography on the topic indicates that it is not depleted, due to his unique vision on human emancipation. Although its core is alive it must acquire a more complete degree of applicability in

political events rather than in technical terms. It must be mentioned that whereas Bolsheviks preferred CM, Mencheviks advocated SM. However, Gouldner wrote that history is more than an idea (Gouldner, 1980).

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