

Conclusion (Online Article)

Historical Note

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Content

Conclusion

In this collection of articles I presented Marxism as the method of immanent dialectical critique of social reality, carried with the purpose of becoming the revolutionary consciousness and politics of the proletariat. Marxism does not preach a utopian society that people should struggle for, but rather, it makes people conscious of the potential in existing reality that they need to actualize in order to succeed in their struggle for a rational and free society. This potential is the result of the self-contradiction of proletarian labor, and is the only possible guide for realistic revolutionary action because it is part of reality itself. (Lukacs 23)[1] “Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.” (Marx 162)

It is the dialectical method that defines Marxism, and not the particular conclusions of Marx and other Marxists reached by applying the method. A Marxist can and should examine, develop, and when necessary reject these conclusions. What he cannot do and stay a Marxist is to abandon the method itself. (Lukacs 1) Importantly, the validity of Marxism’s identification of the potential of freedom in the present, and by extension, the validity of the Marxist method as a whole, remains in doubt as long as said potential is not realized. In my view, Marxism’s comprehension of history and its critique of bourgeois social reality differ in an important respect. The former is plausible and carries explanatory power, but it can be nothing more than plausible: we can never know with certainty the weight of the historical factors determining past events. Marxism’s critique of bourgeois social reality likewise is merely plausible in the present, but it could be otherwise. If Marxism succeeds in becoming the social and political consciousness of the proletariat which in turn effects the transition to communism, Marxism’s critique of bourgeois social reality, i.e. the identification of revolutionary potential in capitalism that can be actualized by the proletariat, will be rendered true.

The real test of Marxism is thus whether it succeeds in becoming the social and political consciousness that changes reality. This is because dialectical materialism aims to be a theory with practical import – it does not aim to describe history and reality but to change it. We saw that for Marx anything that remains unrealized in a sense remains unreal, and this includes revolutionary theory. As he puts it in the 2nd Thesis on Feuerbach: “The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth — i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice.” (144) Only if the proletariat realizes communism through revolution will Marxism be vindicated.

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From the collection of articles "**What is Marxism?**"

[1] All page numbers are from The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd Edition, W. W. Norton & Company, 1978.

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