

Dispelling Confusion about Marxist Determinism - Postliterate - Medium

By Postliterate

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Among many other aspects of Marxism, the theory of communist determinism has been often misrepresented for cheap potshots. The general misunderstanding is that Marxism contains incoherency with regards to the realization of communism as being simultaneously inevitable but also only possible by forceful change.

In truth, Marx and Engels did believe at different places in their writing that (1) communism, ultimately, *must* come about following capitalism to complete the grand dialectic of history, but also that (2) conscious and vigorous action is needed to affect this transition into communism. This much is true, but it would be a mistake to simply write it off as poor thinking on Marx and Engels' part (many have taken this alone to be proof that Marxism is more of a “secular religion” than a serious science [1]).

The supposed contradiction between determinist and non-determinist elements in Marxism is a contradiction between theory and practice, and it reveals that Marxism is not — nor can it ever be — a complete and established science in the way physics or mathematics is. But this isn't a bad thing.

The economist Yanis Varoufakis once elucidated the same issue → <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aK4OztueuE> regarding the field of economics. In his example, an economist could correctly predict that the market will crash soon with perfect models and calculations, yet if she were to

announce such a finding, people would respond in a way that would stimulate the market, and suddenly the market would do the opposite of what was predicted because of human action done in *anticipation* of the prediction. Can the initial prediction be said to have been wrong?

This applies readily to Marxist determinism. On one hand, with the cool detachment of analytic philosophers, we can predict that communism must inevitably follow capitalism and stop there. But, as materialists, we must also observe what happens when this theory comes in contact with the real world and how that affects the realization of the theory.

But M&E don't stop there; being of the continental philosophic tradition, they propose an *ought* to pair with the *is*. Communism is inevitable and knowledge of this could make it no longer inevitable, but, *in practice* it is desirable that the transition into communism be precipitated. The raw *theory* could say one thing, whilst the *practice* might be another. Really, this supposed error in Marxism reflects a problem as old as Kant's Third Critique (or older). So, if we see the inevitability of communism as a positive thing, it would only make sense to us, *in practice*, to contribute to its realization *in theory*.

I say these issues which render Marxism not a "pure science" are not a bad thing because economics suffers the same dilemmas and yet remains, like Marxism, an important contribution to greater societal progress and understanding. Furthermore, it is when we are able to leave the realm of pure theory and into practice that we can truly affect positive change in the world. As Marx famously wrote in *Theses on Feuerbach*:

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."

[1] Lewis S. Feuer, in his introduction to *Marx & Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, calls Marxism "the world's first secular religion." In all honesty, if brutal adherence to reason is, as Mark Fisher put it, "*religion in the best sense*," and Marxism contains many elements that

renders it not an objective science, such as hope and love for man and a synthesis of theory and practice, I have no problem adhering to this “religion” as both true and desirable.