Marxism as an Ideology or Science? – Seen Through the Lens of a Philosophy of Liberation

Introduction

The intent of this paper is to clarify and extend the primary underpinning tenets of the modernistic manifestation of the philosophy of liberation by casting a light of inquiry on a theoretical and teleological enabler: Marx and his refocusing and redefining of power, dependency, change, and freedom. Of most importance is to rediscover the significance of Marx to a philosophy of liberation as especially experienced in countries (or internal spheres) outside of the centralized political and economic power of continental Europe and North America – namely, to partly answer the question whether Marxism is destined to become a philosophical – ideological sublate, or face an organic, intellectual - practical reinvigoration as an incremental, radical ‘scientific discovery’ with the effect of nomologically decentering the dominate systems of economy and politics. That is, ontologically, forcing a permanent, radical redefinition of the ‘tenets of reason’ in the sphere of political economy and social reality.

The research underpinning the findings in this paper investigated Marx’s writings with respect to scholars of the philosophy of liberation, however, most of the critique focuses on the seminal works of Enrique Dussel. This paper provides an overview of liberation thought with relation to politics, economics, science and praxis ‘in the World of the poor and oppressed periphery’ - but overlaid with analysis derived from and connected to Marx’s writings.

The scope of this critique is primarily applied to the condition and viability of a philosophy of liberation today as a set of praxes and concepts, and the importance of determining the strength or weakness of Marxist thought enabling it. That is, whether Marxism simply exists, or is ultimately destined to exist, as a conceptual ideology or as a scientific movement, i.e., the logical, historical, critical framework of Marxism as a progression from philosophy.

The first bonds of subjection

This section provides a philosophical, reasoned, foundational approach to determining what the concept of liberation is in relation to human subjection and bounded freedom. It provides a starting point that will contextualize Marx’s sense of freedom and liberation in subsequent sections, as well as the modern development of a philosophy of liberation.

While speaking about paternal power and equality, Locke (2004, p. 29) wrote a paragraph that described the basic ascension of human bondage and liberation at the moment of birth:

“Children, I confess, are not born in this full state of equality, though they are born to it. Their parents have a sort of rule and jurisdiction over them when they come into the world, and for sometime after, but it is a temporary one. The bonds of this subjection are like the swaddling clothes they are wrap up in and supported by in the weakness of

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2 The author refers to ‘World’ in this article in the context of a philosophy of liberation as that consciousness and understanding imposed on the Cosmos by oppressors and as experienced by the oppressed. ‘Cosmos’ refers to the state of natural liberation, with humankind as nature, that both oppressor and oppressed are external to in experience and social system, but conscious of in mind.
their infancy. Age and reason as they grow up loosen them, till at length they drop quite off, and leave a man at his own free disposal.”

In this passage Locke is speaking to individual experience and the natural experience of being born from, and subject to, bondage that at the same time represses and preserves. Therefore, as an extension of Locke’s description in this individualist sense, humanity is born into a state of repression and liberation where the attainment of liberation as a process and pursuit of an ‘end-state’ is as natural, practical, and ‘in the World’ as the life it is contingent upon. The child is born to the family politic where paternalism subjects the weak, but liberation is intrinsic to the process of reason and eventually to bounded individuality and a type of existential equality. As the child obtains higher level reasoning, and adulthood projects their life from parental bonds to the bonds of others and the supra-bondage of society, liberation of the individual mind and body remain something other than an end-state of Cosmos. Locke’s term of ‘free disposal’ is further defined by him as ‘freedom within the law’ which carries with it the same intrinsic relationship between parent and child where subjugation (law) at the same time enables the pursuit of ‘equality’ through determining the limits of ‘freedom’ within subjugation. Locke (2004, p. 32) even elevates this relationship to a principle, one where the weak is governed “by his father’s understanding…till he hath it of his own”.

The ascension of liberation at birth projects itself from within the psychological and sociological change experienced by a person ‘in the World’. That World naturally becomes more opaque as reason increases and paternal bondage decreases. Equality is sought by engagement with society, the first sense of ‘Other’ outside the paternal unit defines changes that provide individuation, and then assimilation with the ‘Other’ in broader society’s beliefs, culture, and ideology. Equality is also hindered to the degree that the new adult is voluntarily bound to the paternal rule that has governed the majority of their life. Liberation in this sense does not change, nor does it provide freedom from bondage. It does, however, potentially enable cognizance of subjugation and the struggle for freedom from the World to Cosmos.

From this first ‘bond of subjection’ as a child and the awakening to the nomological subjugations of adulthood, comes societal cognizance. At the level of society, from global society, paternalism exists in history as ‘the understanding of the father’ – the ideology of power. This was identified by Shultz (2017, pp. 619) when he contextualized the limitations of Latin American global political status as “the difficulty faced by smaller powers in seeking status without the approval of great powers”. From the vantage point of the subjugated, freedom has immanent, profound meaning, and practical significance as it is being controlled by an external force. Indeed, as Camus (1988, p. 89) stated, “Freedom is the concern of the oppressed, and her natural protectors have always come from the oppressed”. Accordingly, Marcuse captured the notion of the oppressed protecting freedom as a profound act of liberation when he wrote,

“This “voluntary” servitude (voluntary inasmuch as it is introjected into the individuals), which justifies the benevolent masters, can be broken only through a political practice which reaches the roots of containment and contentment in the infrastructure of man, a political practice of methodical disengagement from and refusal of the Establishment, aiming at a radical transvaluation of values. Such a practice involves a break with the familiar, the routine ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding things so that the organism may become receptive to the potential forms of a non-aggressive, non-exploitative world” (Marcuse, 1969, p. 6).
The author posits this quote from Marcuse as a means of tying together important themes, both supra and infra. In the quote, Marcuse clearly identifies Locke’s ‘bond of subjection,’ as servitude, the freedom of the interior that can disconnect from external oppression, and the cumulative shift in values required to de-center the existing system and ideology. The quote also explicitly points to the enduring role of liberation as an intrinsic enabler, the ‘receptivity of potentiality’ for a ‘New World’. This also helps to set the liberationist context that sometimes gets lost on Marx. Was Marx a humanistic philosopher or an economist? Was he in favor of human freedom, or a scientific social revolution without a sense of individuality? Taken as a whole, Marx’s writing provides a continuum of thought from his early humanistic works to the later, more structured treatise of Capital. As identified in the following section, Marx provides a foundation for his later works by rooting his philosophy into the concept of ‘becoming’ which signifies the need to move from one state of freedom to another state of freedom where oppression is mitigated or removed.

**Marx: freedom and becoming**

Marx’s writings from 1842 to 1844 reflect influences from Hegel and Feuerbach and discuss philosophical topics such as religion, freedom, democracy, alienation, humanism and communism. Echoing Locke’s sentiments about attainment of reason and the elevation to freedom, Marx wrote that “a rational being cannot voluntarily cease being a rational being…” (eds. Easton and Guddat, 1997, p. 100) as a means of explaining that even rationality, as an attribute, is a limitation to freedom in the sense that an individual is directed by this attribute to act rationally. Demonstrating a qualitative difference between interior freedom and external freedom, Marx stated that freedom that is limited externally does not have effect on a sense of internal freedom. This is important in the sense that it reflects Locke’s assertion that the weak voluntarily rationalize their subjugation to power but have the interior freedom to discern the limitations to freedom that is controlled externally. In this sense, Marx makes the important distinction that although there are natural dictates to internal freedom and the attributes that comprise it, the “absence of freedom changes nothing in the animal and rational nature of the unfree and other men” (eds. Easton and Guddat, 1997, p. 100).

Marx at this period does seem to heavily draw upon Hegel’s vision of the state as an embodiment of highest reason, therefore the highest stage to enjoy individual and societal freedom in the confines of reason codified within consciously created law. However, Marx’s early writings also seem also to look toward a historical perspective that transcends the Hegelian view when he wrote “The entire movement of history is therefore both its actual genesis – the birth of its empirical existence – and also for its thinking awareness the conceived and conscious movement of its becoming…” (eds. Easton and Guddat, 1997, p. 304). This could be discerned as a philosophical turning point for Marx as a realization that the rationality of the state should be governed by thinking, and therefore, ‘becoming’. Thematically, although translations of Marx’s work do not explicitly identify ‘liberation,’ the presence of the concept in the texts as a philosophical principle is clear. His concept of ‘becoming’ from genesis is an indicator of an acknowledgement of liberation as an intrinsic force enabling change.

Marx’s later writings, such as “Grundrisse” and “Capital” in an analytical sense, take a decidedly more structured path in their treatment of capitalism and assertions of communist economic frameworks. The philosopher, Althusser, attracted significant controversy when he attempted “to construct a scientific form of ‘structural’ Marxism centred on Capital, bracketing Marx’s early works and their Hegelianism from consideration” (eds. Habjan, and Whyte, 2014, p. 86). Some Marxian scholars (e.g., Lewis, 1972) maintained that the insistence by Althusser
to negate the influence of Hegel on Marx’s later works was incorrect, and there is evidence that Althusser retracted his original position in his much later writings (Althusser, 2006). Interestingly, Althusser’s initial response to his critics was to downplay the early Hegelian influence on Marx by drawing from Bachelard’s term “epistemological break” which implied “a point of no return in theoretical history” (Althusser, 1972, p. 31). Althusser drew upon this concept as a means to underpin his assertion that Marx’s later ‘scientific’ economic writings were of such a nature or ‘break’ from previous writings that they essentially negated Marx’s previous, more humanistic, philosophical approach. The author of this paper must agree with critics that rationally identify themes of Marx’s concepts of humanism and of societal ‘becoming’ in his later works. However, it can be conceived that Marx’s work as a whole provides a type of ‘epistemological break,’ but one that did not break from concepts of human liberation, but from the largely unchallenged rationale and praxis of human bondage.

Enrique Dussel: practice and theory of liberation and the placement of Marxism

Dussel advanced the concept of liberation as codified within the development of a philosophy of liberation. Dussel’s writings, although thematic with Marxist principles, hardly places Marx at the center of liberation thought. In fact, Dussel’s early, but seminal book, ‘Philosophy of Liberation,’ relegated any mention of Marx to one section. In this section Dussel points to the analysis of dependence provided by Marx as a means to distinguish social realities of centralized power as opposed to peripheral peoples. He accounts for the value of Marxist thought in the context of enriching the ‘theory’ of Marxism by referencing it to ‘in the World’ examples of oppression and dependence on the oppressors. Without this, he warns that “Marxism degenerates into a new ideology, especially if it is not historically joined with the popular classes” (Dussel, 2003b, p. 171). [bold font added by the author] This dialectic between praxis and theory in Marxist thought was also identified by Feenberg (2014).

A review of Dussel’s work on liberation places Marxism within the referential continuum of liberation thought, and as one of the theoretical, iterative enablers for the formalization of a philosophy of liberation. His historical placement and definition of liberation thought has a starting point within praxis as a precursor to theory, thereby negating Marxism as a theoretical and defining principle of liberation. Indeed, Dussel defined a philosophy of liberation as “a critical philosophy self-critically localized in the periphery, with subaltern groups” (Dussel, 2008, p. 4). Dussel attributed the original conception and impetus of a philosophy of liberation to political praxis in 1968 liberation movements from which arose:

“…a critique of modern reason --the Cartesian subject on Heidegger's ontological criticism-- which in part permitted it to sustain a radical critical position. It [philosophy of liberation] was also inspired by the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, Adorno, and especially H. Marcuse's Unidimensional Man), which illuminated the political meaning of said ontology, allowing it to be more thoroughly understood (including the Heideggerian position in its relation to Nazism). In Para una de-strucción de la historia de la ética [1969]… I quoted the following text from Heidegger: ‘What do we mean by world when we talk about the darkening of the world? The worldly darkening implies the weakening of spirit itself, its dissolution, consumption, and false interpretation. …And I concluded by stating that it is necessary to say, "No to the modern world whose cycle is done, and yes to the New Man that today lives in the time of his conversion and transformation…” (Dussel, 2008, p. 4).
According to Dussel, a philosophy of liberation becomes, and is defined by the activity of liberation. Iteratively, the agents of liberation, Camus’s ‘natural protectors’ seek identity, communion, and context with reference to extant theory. The extant theory, such as it is, becomes part of the ‘Moment’ of praxis, the lived experience of ‘ontological nothingness’ and immanent oppression and death. The newly enlightened praxis obtains voice, a voice of liberation that unifies with the ‘Moment’ of liberation theory with historical-communal experience and theoretical indicators that provide categories for freedom, and expressed frameworks, such as Marx’s juxtaposition of the ‘voice of nothing’ and the centralization of power and its dominant sphere of economic and social subjugation… the prevailing ‘understanding of the Father’.

In 1990, fifteen years after writing the ‘Philosophy of Liberation’ Dussel revisited the significance of Marx with respect to global events at the time. The following quote from Dussel indicates his vision of a rediscovery of Marx, perhaps outside of the historical and practical interpretations previously placed upon his thought.

“Today it is fashionable to consider ourselves in a period of “post Marxism.” I think that especially in Latin America – but also in Europe and the United States – rather than being in a period of “post-Marxism” we are in a time of serious, measured, profound reencounter with Marx himself. In the “second century” of Marxism – if one considers the first to be from 1883 to 1983 – we will rediscover in Marx a source of scientific thinking that can be used not only for a critique of capitalism but also for a critique of actually existing socialism” (Dussel, 1990, p. 63). [bold font added by the author]

Interestingly, Dussel draws upon Marx’s use of ‘science,’ which is not defined as science in the normal sense. For Dussel, Marx defines science as the “critique of appearances” (Dussel, 2009, p. 188) where categories and observations are not taken at face value, but thoroughly analyzed, and brought from the abstract to the concrete. Here, again, Dussel draws upon Marx’s sense of science with relation to a philosophy of liberation.

[1] “Latin American Philosophy of Liberation has a lot to learn from Marx. Marx’s ‘science’ was the ‘Liberation Philosophy’ of living labour alienated in capital as wage labour in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century” (Dussel, 2009, p. 204).

[2] “Today, the ‘Philosophy of Liberation’ must also be articulated with the science of the alienated living labour of classes, peripheral, under-developed peoples, of the so-called Third World struggling in national and popular processes of transformation against central and peripheral globalized capitalism, at the beginning of the twenty-first century” (Dussel, 2009, p. 204).

[3] “The ‘new utopian society’, beyond capital, is still the most pertinent subject in Latin America, keeping a degree of ethical exteriority – as the future fatherland of the poor masses in miserable communities – which science as critique makes possible” (Dussel, 2009, p. 204).

The quotes above from Dussel are important as they provide a historical connectedness (literally stating that Marx’s science was liberation philosophy…) and therefore Marx’s work reflected the theoretical, critical expression of oppression and the praxis applied to obtain freedom. The second quote speaks to the ‘now’ of liberation philosophy and the science of
reification – the unpacking and naming of what was previously an abstraction, the ‘nothingness’ of the oppressed revealed. Lastly, the third quote projects liberation philosophy toward a new teleology, toward what the principles of liberation and the praxis of freedom are in their purest form, what is made possible. This final sentiment from Dussel mirrors Engel’s writing, “Society presented nothing but wrongs; to remove these was the task of reason. It was necessary, then, to discover a new and more perfect system of social order…” (Engels, 2015, p. 36). The ‘task of reason’ was the scientific approach applied to de-center prevailing ideology (the idea of the non-utopia)… to project another ‘understanding’ in opposition to ‘the father’.

Dussel’s teleological vision of the ‘new utopian society’ speaks to an ‘ethics of liberation’ which he called “the fullest fulfillment of philosophy” (Dussel, 2013, p. 224). He interpreted Marx as expressing a philosophy that does not simply analyze from within the prevailing system, but that is “transformative of norms, actions, institutions, ethical systems…” and “adopts the perspective of the victims and has a critical-ethical consciousness as its driving force” (Dussel, 2013, pp. 224). Transformative philosophy then can be “at the service of the analysis of the causes of their negation, and the transformative (liberatory) struggles of the oppressed or excluded” (Dussel, 2013, p. 224).

In the context of liberation, Marcuse defined the Marxian praxis of science and the theorization of philosophy well when he wrote, “…the original link…between science, art and philosophy…is the consciousness of the discrepancy between the real and the possible, between the apparent and the authentic truth, and the effort to comprehend and to master this discrepancy” (Marcuse, 1991, p. 229). The profound insight in Marcuse’s statement is his identification of a ‘noumenal relationship’ in the pursuit of freedom – that is, liberation enabling consciousness and control over reason (science), development of radical principles (philosophy), and the creativity of enlightenment (art).

**Findings and implications**

The disposition of a philosophy of liberation must not be seen as only reasoned praxis or theory, but the joining of the two, where, rationally, theory is not only enriched, but continuously transformed by the organic reason underlying praxis. At the outset of this paper the author acknowledged and posited a broader vision and mission within a philosophy of liberation, that, fundamentally, recognizes the contributions of Marx and his writings as a Moment in the development of liberation praxis and thought. This does not diminish the iterative role that Marxism plays in the development of liberation or its philosophy, but it does cast liberation as a reason for Marxist and other radical principles in the face of oppression.

The individual ‘naturalization’ of liberation, as alluded to by Locke, begins with the first breath of birth, and, as most acutely experienced at the level of society by ‘subaltern peoples’ ends with death as the least welcomed embrace of freedom. Interestingly, Marcuse spoke of naturalization when he wrote,

“The liberation of man requires the liberation of nature, of man’s natural existence. All science must be founded on nature. Theory is a mere hypothesis as long as the natural basis of theory has not been established. The new philosophy will succeed in ‘naturalizing’ freedom, the same that was hitherto merely an anti-natural and supra-natural hypothesis” (Marcuse, 1999, p. 270).
This quote provides a very insightful comprehension of liberation, formalized as a ‘new philosophy,’ as being grounded in nature. This grounding unfolds consciousness to existing truths in the World – the natural, ontological beckoning of liberation for the realization of human freedom. Liberation seeks understanding and then truth. A free mind then becomes sensitive to broader truths, truths found in every individual and society, that liberation praxis and theory apply to all of humanity, with more acute groundedness in those who are determined to be outside – the nothings of the periphery.

A philosophy of liberation, as an evolving understanding of natural truths, therefore, is not contingent on a manifestation of praxis, theoreticians, or events in the World. It is dependent on life, and the yearning for freedom that conscious and reasoned living dictate. More work needs to be done to discover the role of liberation thought in the primal, natural sphere of existence, human as Cosmos, inclusive of economic and social (in the World) realms. As a logical starting point, the most natural grounding of liberation, at the point and perspective of being, places the yearning for freedom at a ‘universal-organic,’ – assuming the natural position of liberation in life, and in spatial and temporal relations. Practically, this means broadening consciousness of liberation beyond the Marxist spheres of oppressor and the oppressed – as a recognition that both have been driven from the ‘natural’. Cesaire so painfully identified the inversion of the natural state of the oppressor when he wrote, “…we must study how colonization works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism…” (Cesaire, 1972, p. 35). At the same time the oppressed are de-centered and become unnatural, born into negation and systematic servitude. Both have lost the freedom of being – yet both have consciousness of liberation.

The author extends an understanding and vision of liberation praxis and theorizing beyond moments in time and place where such dominance, inequality and negation of being burn most painfully. In this way it provides a vantage point that Dussel does not concentrate on, in favor of defining liberation struggles and philosophy from the point of view of ‘political periphery’, such as Latin America, as opposed to the ‘unnatural periphery’ – inverted cognition of the human-Cosmos. Dussel points to liberation praxis as having an end-point of dialogue, where an openness of the oppressor may enable face to face validation of truth. This might be a recognition of an inherent dialectical process to obtain freedom, but may not require consciousness of decentered nature on the part of the oppressor. Critically, it is imperative for liberation ‘moments’ as organic, localized, or Cosmos of movements, to self-analyze (the science) and allow an ascension and integration of ‘voice’ (the philosophy) such that freedom is named, identified and created (the art) in the darkness of the World.

Conclusions

The findings in this paper indicate that Marxism currently exists as both a sublated ideology found categorically as remnants within a ‘new philosophy’ of liberation and a renewable, reproducible science attributable to a framework of ‘in the World’ and Cosmic orientation and grounding for a philosophy of liberation. The philosophy of liberation, the author concludes, is not contingent on extant radical theory, even Marxism, but is contingent to the Cosmos – as a defining praxis of peoples enabling reassessment and reassertion of the poor and culture outside of the spheres of economic and political dominance, and even political and economic significance.

Other primary conclusions of this paper are:
• humanity is born into a state of repression and liberation where the attainment of liberation as a process and pursuit of an ‘end-state’ (Cosmos) is as natural, practical, and ‘in the World’ as the life it is contingent upon.

• Marx provides a foundation for his later works by rooting his philosophy into the concept of ‘becoming’ which signifies the need to move from one state of freedom to another state of freedom where oppression is mitigated or removed.

• a philosophical turning point for Marx is a realization that the rationality of the state should be governed by thinking, and therefore, ‘becoming’.

• Marx’s work as a whole provides a type of ‘epistemological break,’ but one that did not break from concepts of human liberation, but from the largely unchallenged rationale and praxis of human bondage.

• A review of Dussel’s work on liberation places Marxism within the referential continuum of liberation thought, and as one of the theoretical, iterative enablers for the formalization of a philosophy of liberation.

• Dussel defined a philosophy of liberation as “a critical philosophy self-critically localized in the periphery, with subaltern groups”. Dussel attributed the original conception and impetus of a philosophy of liberation to political praxis in 1968 liberation movements.

• For Dussel, Marx defines science as the “critique of appearances” where categories and observations are not taken at face value, but thoroughly analyzed, and brought from the abstract to the concrete.

• Dussel interpreted Marx as expressing a philosophy that does not simply analyze from within the prevailing system, but that is “transformative of norms, actions, institutions, ethical systems…” and “adopts the perspective of the victims and has a critical-ethical consciousness as its driving force”.

• As a logical starting point, the most natural grounding of liberation, at the point and perspective of being, places the yearning for freedom at a ‘universal-organic,’ – assuming the natural position of liberation in life, and in spatial and temporal relations.
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