

IS MARX A PRAGMATIST?**Tom Rockmore***Peking University*rockmore@duq.edu

ABSTRACT: This paper revisits the relation between Marx and pragmatism in arguing that Marx tries but fails to be a pragmatist in a general sense of the term not tied to any particular interpretation of pragmatism. The paper identifies Marx's normative conception of theory, and the outlines of that theory, including the conditions of its realization in practice in not only interpreting but also changing the world. In Marxian theory, a minimal view of changing the world is to bring about a transformation of capitalism, or a system of private ownership of the means of production, into communism, in which private property will by definition no longer exist, and above all men and women will be able to develop into fully individual human beings. Marx clearly intends his theory of the transformation of the modern social world to succeed not only in theory but also in practice. The paper argues that Marx's theory of the transformation of the world succeeds in theory but fails as a means to change the world in bringing about a successful transition to communism as he understands it.

"Pragmatism" is understood in many different ways. This paper revisits the relation between Marx and pragmatism in arguing that in the process of formulating his position Marx tries but fails to be a pragmatist in a general sense of the term not tied to any particular interpretation of pragmatism.

The possible link between Marx and pragmatism has often been explored with differing results. Dewey and Hook were two of the pragmatists most interested in Marx and Marxism. Many words and not a little blood have been spilt in the effort to characterize Marx and Marxism. Suffice it to say that this is a politically-motivated amalgam that need not detain us here. Others have examined pragmatism as a possible alternative to Marxism and explored the theme of their possible compatibility (or incompatibility) on various grounds. Still others have rejected the interest of such an endeavor. Rorty, who liked to style himself as a so-called leftist, suggested "that it would be a good thing if the next generation of American leftists found as little resonance in the names of Karl Marx and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin as in

those of Herbert Spencer and Benito Mussolini."¹ That is only slightly more favorable than Kolakowski's view of Marxism as the greatest nightmare of the twentieth century.

The relation of Marx to philosophy is routinely depicted in diverse ways. According to Kolakowski, Marx is a German philosopher. Since I believe Marx is a German idealist, I share a form of that view, which is certainly a minority opinion. Though Marx was trained in philosophy according to the standards of the day, for mainly political reasons few observers think philosophy played a lasting role in his position. Marxists of all kind routinely claim that Marx left philosophy for science, or again that he followed Feuerbach out of German idealism and philosophy to materialism.

Elsewhere I have suggested that pragmatism is one of the four main philosophical tendencies in the twentieth century.² I do not wish to repeat that argument here. Marx, who took a Ph. D. in philosophy in 1841, was professionally trained according to the standards of the day. Suffice it to say that I believe Marx is a philosopher committed to a generally pragmatic approach to practical problems. Through his concern with theory that changes the world, Marx was embarked on a generally pragmatic approach to concrete social themes well before pragmatism emerged as an identifiable philosophical doctrine.

On Marx and "pragmatism"

We can start by considering "pragmatism" in order to discuss Marx's relation to it. Fundamental concepts are difficult to define and definitions proposed, which imply different views of a single philosophical theme, rarely gain anything approaching unanimous acceptance in the debate.

¹ Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in America*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 51.

² See Tom Rockmore, *In Kant's Wake: Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Company, 2006.

“Phenomenology” might be an exception. Husserl, who did not know much about the history of philosophy, straightforwardly but naively claimed to invent phenomenology. His claim is widely accepted by his students. This improbable scenario is undermined by the fact that at different times he defended, with the same force, two highly dissimilar views of phenomenology: initially a descriptive view, and later an idealist view based on the transcendental reduction.

“Pragmatism” is, like other fundamental terms, understood in many different ways. Early in the twentieth century, Royce thought this term was the way that contemporary observers referred to German idealism.³ At almost the same time, Lovejoy famously identified no less than thirteen pragmatisms.⁴ This suggests there is no single overarching view of pragmatism, but rather a number of overlapping views.

There is no reason to think I can or even need to do better than Lovejoy in identifying still another way to describe pragmatism, a way that will or indeed even might create unity since, as in most philosophical tendencies, there is a large and in my view healthy measure of diversity. Though producing conceptual unity out of conceptual diversity might be worthwhile for some purposes, it seems unnecessary here. It will suffice at present to draw attention to the obvious link between Marx and pragmatism writ large, including the obviously pragmatic side of German idealism, without tying the sense in which the Marxian position is pragmatic to any single token of the type.

The early pragmatists, who had different, sometimes very different things in mind, arguably sometimes resemble selected German idealists more than other pragmatists. Peirce focused on a working definition of the real but Dewey was more concerned with the consequences of ideas. Marx is arguably closer in this

respect to Dewey rather than to Peirce. Marx was unconcerned with such familiar philosophical themes as whether we can know mind-independent reality as it is beyond appearance, the kind of question that still interested Kant. He was rather concerned with the practical consequences of theory. He was above all interested in formulating a theory that would bring about basic social change. In that sense, he was following up on Hegel’s insight that the role of philosophy consists in understanding what occurs from the perspective of the present since ideas are self-realizing.

The interest in pragmatism understood in the etymological sense as practice goes back to Greek philosophy. Everyone knows that pragmatism as an identifiable philosophical tendency suddenly sprang into existence in a series of seminal articles Peirce published in the 1870s. Peirce is concerned with inquiry understood as the struggle to overcome doubt through belief.⁵ This is an obvious restatement of the cognitive view Hegel outlines early in the *Phenomenology*.

Peirce, who is interested in a practical definition of the meaning of the “real,” settles for what is given in the long run in experience as the criterion. Marx is not otherwise than incidentally interested in capturing the real. His main concern in formulating a practically relevant theory is closer to Dewey than to Peirce, and closer to Hegel than Kant.

This Marxian view resembles Deweyan instrumentalism, or the effort to understand thought with respect to future consequences.⁶ Dewey’s insistence in his *Logic* on the pragmatic relation of theories to resolve specific problems⁷ -- the view of ideas

⁵ See “The Fixation of Belief,” in the *Essential Peirce*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, I, p. 111.

⁶ John Dewey, “The Development of American Pragmatism” (1925), in *The Later Works*, v. 2, edited Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984, p. 14. “Instrumentalism is an attempt to establish a precise logical theory of concepts, of judgments and inferences in their various forms, by considering primarily how thought functions in the experimental determinations of future consequences.”

⁷ John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, New York:

³ See Josiah Royce, *Lectures on Modern Idealism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964, p. 85.

⁴ See Arthur O. Lovejoy, “The Thirteen Pragmatisms,” in *Journal of Psychology and Scientific Methods*, January 1908.

as instruments or tools that guide our actions and can anticipate future results in terms of which they can be tested and evaluated -- is very close to Marx's conception of a self-realizing theory that, by implication, can be evaluated through its results.

Marx and self-realizing theory

Marx's claim to be a pragmatist lies in his famous insistence on self-realizing theory. Marxists routinely claim that at some undetermined time Marx left philosophy behind. Since he took a Ph. D. in philosophy with a dissertation on ancient Greek philosophy of nature in 1841, one could normally anticipate his later writings would be at least partially philosophical. In general terms, his position is based on a normative conception of theory with strong philosophical and increasingly economic dimensions.

The practical utility of philosophy has interested philosophers throughout the Western tradition. Marx focuses on the distinction between two types of theory: the widely known, shopworn kind of traditional theory that leaves everything in place and a very different kind of theory that, in his terminology, changes the world. In reacting against traditional theory, Marx has in mind a certain view of philosophy, exemplified above all Kant, perhaps also Hegel. Kant draws attention to the difference between a scholastic conception of philosophy that is logically perfect but useless and a cosmopolitan concept that is intrinsically related to the ends of human reason.⁸

Kant can be read in two ways. He can be interpreted as suggesting that a certain kind of philosophy is intrinsically useful. Since he says it would be exaggerated

to make such a claim about oneself, he can also be read as indicating that philosophy is finally not useful at all. Kant distinguishes between technically perfect, but practically useless systematic philosophy and cosmological philosophy that is intrinsically relevant to the so-called ends of human reason.

Later observers tend to deny Kant's cosmological view of philosophy as socially relevant as such. In different ways this Kantian view is denied by Fichte, who thinks, on the contrary, that socially relevant theory arises in and returns to practice; by Hegel, who thinks socially relevant philosophy must consider its own historical moment; and by Marx, who thinks theory must change the world.

Marx apparently holds a similar view about Hegel who supposedly uncritically approves what is as rational. He thinks Hegel is not part of the solution but rather part of the problem since he overlooks the Hegelian view that philosophy, as the conceptual grasp of the present, opens the way to a different future. This way of interpreting Hegel suggests philosophy seeks to change the world by realizing ideas. This insight is formulated in different ways, perhaps surprisingly by the French poet Victor Hugo as the claim that nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come.

The young Marx was centrally-concerned with the difference between practically-relevant and practically-irrelevant forms of theory. In the famous last or eleventh of the "Theses on Feuerbach," Marx alludes to a new kind of theory, which his position presumably illustrates, and which supposedly not only interprets but also and above all changes the world.

Marx's effort to rethink theory not as an end in itself but rather as a means to an end is anticipated in the ancient tradition by Aristotle and in German idealism by Fichte. The link between the Marxian and Aristotelian conceptions of practice is sometimes discussed.⁹ Marx's focus on practice distantly follows Aristotle, who

Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1938, p. iv: "But in the proper interpretation of "pragmatic," namely the function of consequences as necessary tests of the validity of propositions, *provided* these consequences are operationally instituted and are such as to resolve the specific problem evoking the operations, the text that follows is thoroughly pragmatic."

⁸ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 866-867, pp. 694-695.

⁹ See Nicholas Lobkowicz, *Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx*, Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1967.

considers the relation between theory and theory of practice as well as Fichte among the German idealists, and perhaps also Hegel.

Marx's rejection of theory that does not realize itself is perhaps more convincing as a criticism leveled against Kant than against either Fichte or Hegel. Unlike Kant, Fichte formulates a view of philosophy in which theory and practice are inextricably conjoined, hence inseparable. According to Fichte, theories, which are formulated to respond to practical problems, arise in practice to which they return. In other words, practice elicits theory, which, since it arises in response to practice, is intrinsically relevant.

Hegel makes a similar but more abstract argument in his view of ideas as self-realizing. Marx turns this conception against Hegel in suggesting that the latter, who does not criticize but rather celebrates what is, for instance the restoration of the monarchy as the supposed end of history, is politically complicit with the status quo. Though Marx clearly believes classical German philosophy and even philosophy itself prefers theory to practice, attention to practice, depending on how one understands "idealism," is central to at least some German idealist views of theory. The difference does not lie in the mere attention to practice, nor even in the link between theory and practice, but rather in the concern through self-realizing theory to change practice.

Marx's position and pragmatism

Any theory directed towards practice is at least in that sense distantly pragmatic. Marx's theory is arguably further pragmatic in a specifically Peircean sense. Peirce thinks a theory is pragmatic in his sense if it is meaningful, that is, if, to put the point informally, it makes a difference.

"Difference" can be interpreted in many different ways, for instance merely cognitively, as Hegel does in the *Differenzschrift*, his initial philosophical text. Marx can be read as rejecting any and all forms of theory that, in failing to change the world, fails in that sense to make a difference.

It is easy but not very interesting to evaluate theories against extrinsic criteria unrelated or even opposed to their supposed intentions. It is more interesting but also more difficult to evaluate theories against intrinsic criteria, or the aim for which they are supposedly formulated. The idea of making a difference suggests a practical way to evaluate Marx's theory. The criterion of practice, which Marx understands as changing the world, is intrinsic to a successful theory, including his own theory, as he understands it. We can measure the success (or failure) of Marx's position in not only intending on the theoretical level but in actually changing the world on the practical level.

The view that a theory can be evaluated against the background of its intrinsic intention, or the problem or set of problems for which it is formulated, is certainly not new. The difficulty lies in determining the aim of the theory. Kant, for instance, suggests authorial intent as the criterion of successful interpretation. He makes the supposition, which is obviously related to his important claim to know Plato's theory better than its author, that the intrinsic goal of a theory is unambiguously identifiable.

The plausibility of this assumption depends on the position in question. Kant, who features a holistic approach to interpretation, calls attention to the distinction between passages torn out of context that can lead to misunderstanding and, on the contrary, the idea of the whole.¹⁰ Several centuries of concerted effort have so far failed to lead to agreement concerning the critical philosophy understood as a whole. Fortunately Marx, though a difficult thinker, is less difficult than Kant. There seems to be no difficulty in inferring that his normative conception of theory points toward a theory intended to produce practical social change.

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, B 44, p. 123.

What is the intent of Marx's theory?

I have suggested that Marx's theory is generally pragmatic, that it at least generally resembles aspects of Deweyan and Peircean forms of pragmatism, and that it should be evaluated through its basically pragmatic intent. In order to evaluate the practical success of Marxian social theory, it is indispensable to describe the theory.

I believe Marx focuses on a later version of an ancient problem, or human flourishing in society. This problem, which is restated by Rousseau in the middle of the eighteenth century, is later addressed by a number of thinkers concerned with modern industrial society, including Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx and others. Rousseau's famous claim that human beings are born free but in fact in chains suggests that if not in theory at least in practice real human freedom still remains to be achieved in the modern social space.

Marx addresses this problem on the level of modern industrial society in different ways, initially through criticizing Hegel in a several of articles in the early 1840s, and thereafter increasingly through the formulation of an alternative theory of modern industrial society. Though he is concerned with a number of intractable difficulties in the modern world, for instance the inability to overcome poverty, Hegel holds that on the whole human beings flourish in modern industrial society. To put the point in other words, Hegel thinks that individuals recognize themselves, hence achieve meaningful social freedom, in recognizing themselves so to speak in the institutions of the modern world. Marx, who disagrees, objects that since human beings are alienated in capitalism, human flourishing requires a transition to what Marx calls "communism," a term he only infrequently uses, or again socialism.

If Hegel is a modernist with respect to human flourishing, then as concerns the same theme Marx can be said to be a postmodernist. Marxian postmodernism is unrelated to a short-lived, recent French aversion to general claims, including universals, meta-narratives, and

generalities. This aversion, which flared up recently, seemed for a brief incandescent moment to be at the center of the philosophical universe before just as quickly flaring out. Marxian postmodernism is more obviously related to the practical social conditions of human self-development.

Marx considers the general problem of the concrete social conditions of human flourishing in modern industrial society in an enormous bibliography. His impact since the second half of the nineteenth century has waxed and waned. Now, in the wake of the great recession, that at the time of this writing is still with us, especially in Europe, it seems once again to be on the upswing. As concerns human flourishing in modern industrial society, Marxian theory centers on the problem of the transition between two stages in the development of human society, more precisely from capitalism, a phase in which human flourishing is supposedly limited to the happy few, in recent language the fortunate 1%, but denied to everyone else, to communism, in which everyone will supposedly be able to develop as a fully human individual. According to Marx, capitalism is identifiable by the institution of private property that will no longer hold sway nor even exist in communism.

In Marx's corpus we can discern four main suggestions for the proposed transition from capitalism to communism, suggestions that are linked to conceptions of the proletariat, economics, politics, or critique. In an early article on Hegel, Marx suggested that the proletariat is the heart and the philosophers are the brain of the coming proletarian revolution. This Platonic view of the proletariat as unable to think for itself relies on the Hegelian view of the relation of masters to slaves. This crucial social opposition, or the view that slave is the master of the master and the master is the slave of the slave, supposedly will later lead, or must later lead to the victory of the proletariat.

Marx never later returned to his view of the proletariat as the heart of the revolution, which Lenin transformed into his theory of the party as the vanguard

of the revolution, and which became central to the success of the Bolshevik Revolution. Marx also did not develop the basic distinction between cultural superstructure and economic base, which he mentions briefly in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), but which was later developed by the Frankfurt School in the early twentieth century as the basis of so-called critical social theory.

Almost immediately after formulating his speculative theory of the proletariat as the motor of revolutionary change Marx began to formulate a second, very different, but still speculative account of the transition from capitalism to communism based on an alternative, non-standard conception of modern industrial society. In the very early theory of the proletariat as the motor of the revolution Marx relies on human intervention, more specifically the capacity of the philosophers to direct the workers in order to transform modern industrial society. In his alternative account of the economic component of modern industrial society Marx rather relies on the self-transformation of modern industrial society itself, that is, without human intervention either through influencing the the action of the proletariat or again through some version of the Leninist party. This is important since the Leninist view of the party, which is consistent with Marx's initial view of the proletariat as a revolutionary force is inconsistent with Marx's later turn to an economic analysis of modern capitalism.

Marx's economic model of modern industrial society is intended to identify a revolutionary moment independent of the proletariat but intrinsic to capitalism itself. Orthodox political economy is directed toward the view that the economic component of modern society is subject to periodic crises but on the whole stable in the long run. Marx views modern industrial society as subject to periodic crises in the short and middle term and terminally unstable in the long run. According to Marx, capitalism, which is prone to cyclical crises, will eventually be faced with an unmanageable crisis that in his picturesque phrase will burst its integument. "Centralization of the means of production and

socialization of labor," Marx writes in a famous passage, "at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. Thus integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated."¹¹

This calamitous event, whose necessity Marx deduces speculatively, will supposedly signify the death knell of private property, leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat, and finally through an unclear process to communism. Marx goes on to claim in various ways that the inevitable final economic crisis of modern industrial capitalism, which will occur with necessity, is merely a question of time.

Marx's theory of the economic destruction of capitalism depends on three mechanisms, including overproduction, underconsumption, in fact two versions of the same claim, and what Marx further awkwardly calls the law of the tendency of the decline of the rate of profit. Marx's central claim about the supposed tendency of the decline of the rate of profit, which is never formulated clearly, and which fails to take account of the increase in the rate of production, is that the need to increase investment results in a diminution of the rate of profit over time.

The controversial Marxian conception of the decline in the rate of profit has often been discussed. Certainly a reference to necessity [Notwendigkeit], which is a logical term, appears misplaced in a discussion of the long-term viability of an economic system like modern industrial capitalism. This latter view has been recently criticized by Piketty in a book that was an enormous worldwide publishing sensation but that I suspect is more often displayed on the coffee tables of the world than actually read, much less studied in detail. Piketty, who, perhaps strategically, claims not to have read Marx, points out there is so far no economic evidence for the decline in the rate of profit, hence, by extrapolation, no evidence

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, edited by Frederick Engels, Progress Publishers, Moscow, Volume I, XXXV, p. 750.

for the economic inevitable self-destruction of modern industrial capitalism.¹² This confirms Croce's suggestion more than a century ago that Marx, who never worked out his view of the falling rate of profit in detail, fails to see that further investment increases rather than decreases the rate of profit.¹³

On the likelihood of the speculative transition from capitalism to communism

I have described Marx's conception of theory as inseparable from practice, his overall aim in the transformation of capitalism into communism as well as the two main mechanisms through which he, as opposed to his followers, seeks to bring about the proposed revolutionary transformation of modern industrial society. It remains now to discuss the likelihood of the success not only in theory but above all in practice of the Marxian effort, extending throughout his entire corpus over some four decades to bring about the revolutionary transformation of modern industrial capitalism to communism as he understands it.

Marx's position concerns a prediction based on his alternative conception of modern industrial society about the necessary or at least overwhelmingly likely evolution of the modern world. Yet since, unlike Laplace's demon, we do not and simply cannot know everything about the present, there will always be, as Hegel suggests, a certain cunning of reason that impedes or even prevents us from foreseeing the evolution of the modern industrial society.

Marx's theory of the modern world is economic as well as obviously philosophical. The economic and the philosophical elements of the Marxian position are very different. From the economic perspective Marx's position is more often formulated in anecdotal and moral terms than through reference to the data bases in

vogue in the current version of economic science. From the philosophical perspective, as noted above, it is basically speculative. We recall that Kant speculatively deduces the cognitive subject, or in his terminology the transcendental unity of apperception, as the conceptual capstone of his theory of cognition.

Marx, who took a Ph. D. in philosophy in 1841, is often thought, especially by Marxists, to have rapidly left philosophy behind. This belief is the basis of the view, identified with Althusser, of an epistemic break in the development of his theory through the abandonment of an early philosophical for a later economic, hence scientific, or again materialist theoretical model. Yet though his position deepens and evolves, Marx continues to share the traditional philosophical interest in speculation, or the theoretical analysis of the supposed conditions under which a particular claim can be realized in practice. His main approaches to the transformation of capitalism into communism, that is, either through the revolutionary proletariat or the necessary failure of capitalism through an unmanageable economic crisis are both speculative deductions that presuppose the capacity to identify theoretically what must occur in practice.

As concerned the path leading from capitalism to communism, Marx's two main arguments are at best speculative, based more on the supposed conditions of the transformation of modern industrial society that he wishes to bring about than on solid economic data, rooted in his belief that, in virtue of what we think we know about modern industrial society, it is probable or even extremely probable that it will evolve in a certain direction. Though it is likely that modern capitalism will evolve, it appears less likely, if it is possible to learn from history, that it will evolve in the direction that Marx has in mind through either through the action of the revolutionary proletariat or through its auto-transformation into communism, hence less than likely that the rate of profit is or ever will decline to the extent as to force capitalism to its knees.

¹² See Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty First Century*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.

¹³ Benedetto Croce, *Historical Materialism and the Economics of Karl Marx*, translated by C.M. Meredith and with an introduction by A.D. Lindsay 1914, rpt. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1981.

Marx, who clearly sees the problem, apparently does not as clearly see the solution, and, to extend the point, perhaps does not see it at all. If Piketty is correct, despite the ever-increasing disparity of wealth, as well as the apparent inability of society to correct this phenomenon, and the related rise of social tensions of the most diverse kinds, there is currently neither any reason to believe that the institution of private property is likely to disappear into history, nor that capitalism will, in fact must, turn into communism. This did not happen in the Soviet Union and is not happening in China that currently features a form of state capitalism that has already produced almost as many billionaires as the US.

Both of the main ways that Marx suggests to transform capitalism into communism, hence to realize his theory in practice appear doubtful, unlikely, counterproductive, improbable as a means to reach its intended goal, or worse.

It is unlikely that the revolutionary proletariat will bring capitalism to an end for at least two reasons. On the one hand, when Marx was writing the proletariat, as he understood it through its projected role in his theory, did not yet exist. Marx's theoretical view of the proletariat is a quasi-philosophical speculative deduction, which corresponds to the need for a theoretical solution to a practical problem through a conception of the subject of social change, in this case the proletariat, that may or may not correspond to the practical situation as Marx perceived it in the 1840s and as it exists at present. It is unclear that the proletariat as Marx understands it for purposes of his theory ever existed. It is further likely that it no longer exists in the current version of modern industrial society. It is then not irrelevant that after his early references to the revolutionary potential of the proletariat Marx turned his attention in another direction.

Marx was arguably most concerned with the decline and fall of capitalism on strictly economic grounds. He devoted many years to the formulation of an alternative model of modern industrial capitalism that, unlike orthodox political economy, he regarded as intrinsically

unstable in the long run. Here, too, his argument appears not only unlikely as well as speculative. It does not follow that if as Marx and many others believe capitalism is cyclically prone to economic crises, that at some indeterminate future time an unmanageable economic crisis will emerge to destroy the institution of private property and capitalism itself. It is easy to believe that, as the phrase goes, this time is different,¹⁴ but more difficult to make a convincing argument. Though the great depression and the great recession have both wrought havoc in their wake, and though at the time of this writing the effects of the latter are still with us, more in Europe than in the US, capitalism as a whole seems unfazed, stable, unlikely on economic grounds to disappear any time soon. Further, the rise since Marx was active of an increasingly more important financial sector suggests that the Marxian model is increasingly out of date.

The alternatives to Marx's reliance on either the revolutionary proletariat or the necessary self-destruction of capitalism include the Leninist invention of the communist party and so-called critical social theory. The Leninist invention, anticipated in Marx, of the party as the vanguard of the revolution led to communist revolutions in the Soviet Union and in China. Yet neither revolution was successful in bringing about Marx's intended result of the full social development of people as individuals. Both Marxist revolutions relied, as Rosa Luxemburg brilliantly foresaw before the Bolshevik revolution, on a dictatorship of the party over the people as well as a dictatorship of one man over the party. The resultant stultification of individual liberty is not compatible with, but rather clearly incompatible with Marx's own theoretical vision of the liberation from capitalism, not as an end in itself, but rather as an indispensable means to realizing human beings in a future communist society.

¹⁴ See Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff, *This Time Is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Above I mentioned but did not discuss so-called critical theory also called critical social theory. There is apparently little if any practical potential for social change in critical social theory. Though it was initially inspired by the revolutionary Marxism of Lukács and Korsch, it has always relied in its successive iterations on the mere power of ideas.

In critical social theory this claim was weakened in at least three ways. To begin with, there is Pollock's suggestion that politics is not determined by economics but economics is determined by politics. This rejection of a fundamental pillar of the Marxian view of modern industrial society denies that Marxian theory correctly describes contemporary capitalism, hence turns away in theory, hence also in practice, from the practical possibility of basic social change. Second, there is the turn away from the economic dimension of society, most obvious in Habermas, but already clear in Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, hence a turn away from the Marxian conception of the motor of social change. Finally there is the severing of the Marxian view of the connection between theory and practice in returning to the Kantian view that practice is in all cases contained within theory. This suggests the impossibility of succeeding in theory but not in practice. This view returns in Habermas' consensus theory of truth according to which unconstrained dialogue must, as he claims, result in truth. This neo-Kantian view is

problematic for two reasons. On the one hand, there is no reason to think that if two or more individuals agree about a claim that it is true. On the other hand, agreement, which does not mandate social change, is in this respect irrelevant to the Marxian effort to bring about the transformation of capitalism into communism.

Conclusion: Is Marx A Pragmatist?

This account of Marx's relation to pragmatism identifies forms of pragmatism associated most prominently with Peirce and Dewey, Marx's normative conception of theory, the outlines of Marx's theory, including the conditions of its realization in practice. In Marxian theory, a minimal view of changing the world is to bring about a transformation of capitalism, or a system of private ownership of the means of production, into communism, in which private property will by definition no longer exist, and above all men and women will be able to develop into fully individual human beings.

Marx clearly intends his theory of the transformation of the modern social world to succeed not only in theory but also in practice. It is in the latter respect, for reasons given above, that it seems that the Marxian theory is not traditional but rather genuinely pragmatic. Yet though it succeeds in theory, it has so far and will presumably in the future continue to fail in practice.