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ABSTRACT

The question “What is Marxism?” is not as straightforward as it appears. There are different ways of answering it. One can study and describe what Marx himself wrote and said, but Marx’s views changed, and Marxism has had a life beyond Marx. Some try to define Marxism by specifying an agreed core of doctrines, others by its method, or by its practical commitments. Each of these definitions captures an aspect of the nature of Marxism, but none is without problems. Controversy still rages about Marx’s legacy and its contemporary significance.

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What is Marxism? This looks like a simple question, but it is not as straightforward as it appears. There are different ways of answering it, each with its own problems—problems that have become increasingly intractable as Marxism has developed.

Marx’s ideas were first presented in popular form in the “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” written jointly with Engels and published in 1848. It begins with the bold statement, “A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism” (Marx and Engels 1848). This was more an expression of hope than a description of the actual situation as it then was. The “Manifesto of the Communist Party” was written for the Communist League, a tiny revolutionary group that had just been formed in the ferment leading up to the revolutions of 1848. Soon after it was published the uprisings that erupted across Europe in that year were defeated. The Communist League and other revolutionary groups were smashed. Marx and Engels were forced to flee from Germany and settled in England. Recriminations and in-fighting ensued among the exiled revolutionaries, consuming what little was left of their political energies. Marx retreated from direct political activity to devote himself mainly to his studies in the Library of the British Museum. The spectre of communism had, it seemed, been extinguished and the bold vision of the “Manifesto of the Communist Party” refuted.

Gradually, however, radical activity revived and steadily grew. Socialist groups re-formed and re-organised, and Marx’s ideas began to spread. When Marx died in 1883, their influence extended internationally and was growing rapidly. The spectre had returned.

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Marxism after Marx

After Marx died, the international socialist movement was led by Engels until his death in 1895 and it continued to grow. World War I marked a turning point. Its outbreak precipitated the collapse of the international socialist movement as parties split from each other along national lines; its end saw the triumph of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. This revitalised Marxism and inspired the formation of communist parties committed to Marxism in many parts of the world. There was a great flowering of Marxist thought in many different areas,¹ and an explosion of creativity in the arts inspired by Marxism.²

Despite the constricting orthodoxy that was enforced on the communist movement during the Stalin period, the influence of Marxism continued to expand. Trotsky led an influential opposition, initially within the USSR and then in exile. Communist parties in many parts of the world played the leading role in fighting fascism, and they emerged from World War II greatly strengthened.

There was a second wave of communist revolutions in China, Korea and Vietnam. The influence of Marxism spread through Latin America after the revolution in Cuba in 1959, and to Africa where communist parties played leading roles in the independence movements in Angola and Mozambique, and in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. By the 1960s more than one-third of the world's people were living under regimes inspired by Marx's ideas.

After Stalin

After Stalin's death, splits and divisions emerged within the Soviet-led international communist movement and it began to break up. However, in the new freer atmosphere there was a flowering of Marxist thought. Humanist and other views which diverged from orthodox Soviet Marxism developed in Eastern Europe (Schaff, Kolakowski). Critical and creative forms of Marxism emerged in the West as New Left thinkers broke away from communist party constraints (E. P. Thompson, Perry Anderson). With the worldwide upsurge of radicalism in the 1960s a profusion of forms of "Western Marxism" proliferated, including humanist (Sartre, Fromm), structuralist (Althusser, Poulantzas) and analytical Marxism (Cohen, Roemer).

In the USSR and the Soviet bloc there was a brief period of liberalisation, but it was soon snuffed out and a long period of stagnation and slow relative decline ensued. And then, quite suddenly, communism in Eastern Europe and the USSR came to an end, not through revolution but relatively peacefully, through internal collapse. The whole political, economic and social edifice of Soviet Communism turned out to be a rotten shell which disintegrated as soon as its citizens were able openly to challenge it, although it was helped on its way, to some extent, by a newly resurgent capitalism championed by Reagan and Thatcher.

China, Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba continued to adhere to Marxist principles. China, however, changed direction soon after Mao Zedong's death. Deng Xiaoping's policies of "reform" and "opening" paved the way for a growing amount of private economic enterprise, and China's economy became increasingly integrated with the global capitalist system, throwing its Marxist credentials in doubt. There have been some more cautious moves in that direction in Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba too.

After the collapse of Soviet Communism and the changes in China, communism was widely dismissed as outdated and refuted. Fukuyama even proclaimed that its demise was the final refutation of the Marxist theory of history and the conclusive demonstration that capitalism and liberal democracy are the final stage of human development, the “end of history” (Fukuyama 1992).

These hubristic claims turned out to be short-lived. In 2008, less than twenty years after history was supposed to have ended, capitalism was plunged into a deep and prolonged financial crisis from which it has not yet fully recovered. The liberal, laissez-faire, free market philosophy which had come to have such strong sway over economic and political thought was discredited. Marx’s analysis of capitalism as volatile and inescapably crisis-prone was vindicated. Marxist ideas began to be widely studied and adopted again, and the idea of alternatives to capitalism came back on to the agenda. Marxism, it was clear, was not dead. Again the spectre had returned.

From Marx to Marxism

As I have been using the term so far, and as it is usually understood, “Marxism” refers to the system of thought created by Marx which provides the main theoretical basis for modern socialism and communism. The term is usually also taken to include the work of Marx’s lifelong collaborator and friend, Frederick Engels and the ideas and activities of Marx’s subsequent followers, derived from or based upon his work.

A dictionary definition of this sort is relatively uncontroversial. However, because of the way in which the influence of Marx’s ideas has grown and spread considerable problems arise when it comes to trying to specify what Marxism is in more detail.

Neither Marx nor Engels themselves used the term “Marxism” to describe their views, it was first employed by Marx’s opponents. Indeed, as Engels reports, Marx responded to its use by some of his French would-be followers in the 1870s by saying “*Tout ce que je sais, c’est que je ne suis pas Marxiste*” (“all I know is that I am not a Marxist” [Engels 1890a, 6]).³ Towards the end of Engels’s life, however, the term began to be used by the followers as well as the opponents of Marx, and it rapidly gained wide acceptance.

Questions about the identity of Marxism are raised even about the views of Marx himself. As is well known, these developed and changed considerably from his early works, written while he was still strongly under the influence of his Young Hegelian contemporaries such as Bruno Bauer, Stirner and Feuerbach, to his later writings. Althusser (1969) even went so far as to maintain that there is a sharp “epistemological break” in the development of Marx’s thought, and that his early writings are not yet properly Marxist; but this is widely disputed (McLellan 1973). However, it does raise the issue of which of the works that Marx himself wrote should be regarded as truly Marxist.

The problems of specifying what Marxism is are compounded when the spread of Marx’s ideas is taken into account. Engels was his first and most important follower. He worked in the closest collaboration with Marx, but this has not prevented the question being raised of whether Engels was a Marxist. Initially, Marx’s ideas were attacked and criticised mainly by those who rejected them. As Marxism spread and gained followers, however, disagreements and conflicts began to occur not only with its critics, but also among its adherents. Most notably, from the 1890s there were controversies around Bernstein’s “revisionism,” which Lenin describes as “a trend hostile to Marxism within

Marxism itself,” and regards as a sort of heresy and deviation from what he considered to be “orthodox” Marxism (Lenin 1969a, 26).

Since then, as I have outlined, Marxism has developed into a phenomenon of world-historical proportions. It has acquired innumerable followers and spread to every corner of the earth. It has been applied to new conditions, extended into new areas of enquiry, and developed in a huge variety of political and intellectual contexts. In the process, a profusion of different forms of Marxism have arisen. There are distinctive Russian, Chinese, Cuban, German, French, Italian, British and many other forms of Marxism, each containing within them a diversity of tendencies and theories. Moreover, there have been numerous attempts to combine Marxism with other schools of thought, giving rise to Hegelian, neo-Kantian, analytic, humanist, structuralist, existentialist, feminist and many other varieties of Marxism. Marxism continues to evolve and new forms continue to emerge.

The Idea of Orthodox Marxism

Thus, in the course of its history, Marxism has become divided into different, often conflicting, schools and tendencies. When Lukács wrote a celebrated essay in 1919 asking “What Is Orthodox Marxism?” there was still a sufficient degree of unity among Marxists to make the question meaningful. With subsequent developments, and particularly with the breakup of the international communist movement after the death of Stalin, the notion has become less and less meaningful. The field is now so fragmented that no single interpretation can plausibly claim to be the sole true—or even the main—heir of Marxism. Rather, it is clear that Marxism is a complex historical tradition which contains within it many different schools and theories, each of which can claim legitimate descent from and connection with the mainstream of Marxism. In other words, we must recognise that there is no longer a single form of Marxism. We must talk instead of “Marxisms” in the plural.

Does this mean that Marxism has simply dissolved into a myriad of disparate fragments, that it has been dispersed into a profusion of interpretations and tendencies, each merely different from and conflicting with the others? This is the view implied by Kolakowski (1978, vol. 3) when he calls the proliferation of Marxism after the Russian Revolution its “breakdown.” But this is a questionable way to regard an outlook which has grown and developed so dramatically, particularly in the wake of the victory of the Russian Revolution. It is more illuminating to see the multiplication of different kinds of Marxism as a sign of the growth of its influence and strength. For Marxism has thrived and prospered like a flourishing tree putting out a profusion of new shoots and branches; and these divergent forms, despite their differences and conflicts—indeed often because of them—are not mere disparate fragments, but parts of one historical development.⁴

In this respect, the way that Marxism has grown in different and conflicting forms is similar to the way in which Christianity, Islam or other of the great religions have developed and proliferated historically and given rise to different branches and schools, while at the same time remaining distinct and identifiable traditions. To look upon the development of Marxism since the Russian Revolution simply as its “breakdown” is just as debateable as it would be to see the Reformation as the breakdown of European Christianity rather than as a development of it.⁵

However, just because Marxism has grown and proliferated in this way, problems arise when the attempt is made to specify what Marxism is. What did Marx really say? Who are

his genuine followers? What is the correct interpretation of Marxism? What unifies the different forms of it as forms of Marxism? A number of different ways of answering these questions have been suggested.

What Marx Really Said

Since Marxism is, first and foremost, the system of thought created by Marx, any account of what Marxism is must refer to what Marx himself thought and did. The scholarly study of what Marx actually said, and of the historical context in which he worked, is an important field of study, particularly in view of the chaotic state of the manuscripts that Marx left and the chequered history of their subsequent treatment. It is extraordinary that so much of this work still remains to be done. Only a small fraction of what Marx wrote was published in his own lifetime. Since then, even the publication, let alone the interpretation, of Marx's manuscripts has been a political battleground. Despite, or rather because of, the political implications of many of these documents, definitive scholarly versions of them are only now appearing, a century and a half after they were written.

What has long been evident, particularly since the publication in the 1930s of Marx's early works, and what newly revealed manuscripts continue to show, is that Marx went on rethinking and changing his ideas throughout his life. The nature of these changes is the topic of major controversies which have important implications for the understanding of Marxism.

However, such scholarly studies cannot fully answer the questions about the nature of Marxism that I have been raising. For Marxism cannot be confined to what Marx said. Although it is rooted in Marx's own words it transcends them. It is a living outlook that is continually growing and developing. Other thinkers have adopted his ideas and applied them in their own ways to their own conditions—and in the process they have also inevitably changed them.

This process is not peculiar to Marxism, but this is the way in which all forms of thought develop. As Hegel says of the development of philosophy,

The disposition and activity of our and every age is to apprehend the science that exists, to make it our own, and, just in that process to develop it further and to raise it to a higher level. By making it our own we make out of it something our own, different from what it was before. (Hegel 1985, 10–11)

The effect of attempting to confine Marxism to what Marx was supposed to have actually said or meant is to separate and abstract Marx from the movement that he initiated and its historical effects, not only on his contemporaries but still today. When Marxism is tied too rigidly to “what Marx said,” it is made into a dead scholasticism. But it resists such constraints. Marxism is a living tradition. Its ideas are continually being renewed and extended to apply to new conditions.

An Essential Core

Some writers have tried to define Marxism by specifying an essential core of social, historical and economic theory. Indeed, it is often claimed that Marx himself provided a definitive outline of his core theory of history in his “A Contribution to the Critique

of Political Economy, Preface” of 1859 which Marx himself says presents “the guiding principle” of his studies (Marx 1859) and which has often been treated as a canonical statement of his views (Cohen 1978).

But Marxism resists any simple systematisation of this kind. Although the 1859 Preface has frequently been taken as a summary of the basic tenets of Marx’s theory of history, arguments have raged about the correct way to interpret it. Some argue for a determinist reading (Cohen 1978), others for a dialectical account (Lukács 1971; Gramsci 1971), while still others reject it as too simplistic to give a satisfactory expression of Marx’s views (Thompson 1978; Wood 2016). Even at the time they were written, Marx and Engels’s words were liable to what they regarded as misunderstanding, as Engels reports,

If some younger writers attribute more importance to the economic aspect than is its due, Marx and I are to some extent to blame. We had to stress this leading principle in the face of opponents who denied it, and we did not always have the time, space or opportunity to do justice to the other factors that interacted upon each other. (Engels 1890b, 36)

The idea that Marxism contains an agreed core of fundamental tenets is thus thrown in doubt by disputes about the most fundamental issues. Moreover, major new developments may involve more than the addition of new elements to the existing body of ideas, at times they may require a more radical rethinking of basic aspects of the theory.

For example, the longevity of capitalism and the changing character of the social classes within it over time have called for a fundamental rethinking of Marx’s analysis of it. And the way in which “actually existing socialist societies,” like the Soviet Union and China have been created and evolved has forced a fundamental rethinking of many of the views of Marx about the nature of postcapitalist societies and of socialism more generally.

As well as such radical changes, there must also be elements of continuity which link new developments back to Marx’s views and mark them as forms of Marxism; for although Marxism cannot simply be equated with what Marx said and wrote, this is the source and basis of Marxism, and reference back to this origin—no matter how disputed—is an essential part of what defines Marxism. However, the model of an unchanging core and subsequent additions is not a satisfactory way to describe how Marxism has actually emerged and grown.

Engels’s Marxism

Some try to use Marx’s own words, what Marx himself actually said, to distinguish what they regard as true Marxism, from the supposed simplifications and distortions of later followers and interpreters. Engels is often cast as the main culprit in this. His writings exercised a particularly important influence on later followers like Kautsky, Lenin and, through them, on the version of Marxism expounded by Soviet writers,⁶ and they are often criticised for misrepresenting and distorting Marx’s own views (Lichtheim 1961; Levine 1975; Carver 1983; Stedman Jones 2017; Rockmore 2018).

According to Stedman Jones, for example, “the invention of what came to be called ‘Marxism’ is initially in large part the creation of Engels in his books and pamphlets beginning with *Anti-Dühring* in 1878” (Stedman Jones 2017, 2). And although, as

Stedman Jones concedes, Marx, “apparently approved the whole of *Anti-Dühring*, which Engels read out to him, and even contributed an erudite chapter” (565), nevertheless, on some major issues, Stedman Jones maintains, “it is possible to discern a significant difference between the assumptions of the newly developing ‘Marxism’ of the 1880s and Karl’s [i.e. Marx’s] own views” (565).

Although one may question the particular points of divergence between Marx and Engels that Stedman Jones goes on to specify, he is undoubtedly correct on the general point: there are differences and divergences between Engels’s ideas and those of Marx. That is inevitable given that they are different individuals, with different backgrounds, educations, and positions in the world, writing for different audiences and applying their ideas to different issues and problems (Stedman Jones 1977).

But that is not the whole story. Throughout his lengthy biography of Marx, Stedman Jones insists on distinguishing Marx’s own ideas—“Karl’s” ideas as he calls them—from the Engels-inspired philosophy of “Marxism” as though these were entirely different. This is tendentious and misleading. Engels’s ideas and the sort of Marxism they had such an influence in forming, are not simply different from and unrelated to the ideas of Marx. Engels’s ideas are interpretations of Marx’s ideas, they are developments of Marx’s ideas, formed in the closest collaboration with Marx, they are a form of Marxism (Blackledge 2019).

This is the nature of all growth and development: it involves both identity and difference. To see only the difference of Engels’s ideas from those of Marx and not the aspect of identity and development, is both to misrepresent Engels’s work, it is also to treat Marx’s work as a lifeless and unchanging body of thought, cut off from the historical development of Marxism that Engels played such an important part in initiating. It is to treat Marx’s ideas unhistorically and abstractly—as frozen and dead.

This is in effect what Stedman Jones does. His aim, he says, “is to put Marx back in his nineteenth-century surroundings, before all these posthumous elaborations of his character and achievements were constructed” (Stedman Jones 2017, 5). But in this way Stedman Jones cuts Marx off from the Marxist tradition to which his work has given rise, and in turn, this tradition is severed from its source in Marx’s thought and attributed solely to other thinkers like Engels.

From the very start, evolving and adapting to new situations has been essential to Marxism as a living tradition. Even in Marx’s own hands, as we have seen, Marxism was not something fixed and unchanging. He was constantly revising and rethinking his ideas. Other Marxists then contributed to its development. They went on to extend and add to Marxism as I have already described. They too have had their own distinctive views and opinions. “We do not regard Marx’s theory as something complete and inviolable,” wrote Lenin (1969b, 34; italics in the original), “on the contrary, we are convinced that . . . socialists *must* develop it in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life.” The result has been a complex and evolving historical tradition made up of different and often conflicting views and tendencies.⁷

Method

To avoid the problems of trying to define Marxism in terms of a set of agreed doctrines, the attempt may be made to specify Marxism by its form rather than its contents, in terms of its dialectical method. This is what Lukács does.

Let us assume for the sake of argument that recent research had disproved once and for all every one of Marx's individual theses. Even if this were to be proved, every serious "orthodox" Marxist would still be able to accept all such modern findings without reservation and hence dismiss all of Marx's theses in total—without having to renounce his orthodoxy for a single moment. Orthodox Marxism, therefore, does not imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marx's investigations. It is not the "belief" in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a "sacred" book. On the contrary, orthodoxy refers exclusively to method. (Lukács 1971, 1)

This approach has the advantage that it recognises that Marxism is a changing and developing tradition, but in other respects it is fraught with problems. Marxism involves a specific account of capitalism and a materialist theory of history which cannot be jettisoned entirely without reducing it to a purely formal schema and making it—as Lukács does—into a stripped down version of Hegelian logic.

For example, Marx argues that there are fundamental contradictions within capitalism that will lead eventually to its being superseded and replaced by another mode of production. This is an essential aspect of the Marxist outlook. It cannot be discarded without abandoning Marxism. If capitalism proves to be "the end of history," the final and unchanging stage of human development, then Marxism will be refuted.

In the traditional formula, Marxism is made up of a historical, social and economic theory ("historical materialism") as well as an abstract philosophy and method ("dialectical materialism"). Elements of both these aspects are essential, and they are inseparable. By focusing exclusively on method, Lukács tries to discard the substantial historical theory. At the opposite extreme, G. A. Cohen and other analytical Marxists try to discard the dialectical method (Sayers 1984)—neither gives a sufficient account of what Marxism is.

Practice

Alternatively, the active, political commitment of Marxism to the cause of the working class and to communism may be taken to be its defining feature. Marxism does indeed involve active political commitment, it is not a merely scholarly enterprise, it unites theory and practice. However, there are different kinds of practice, and the political commitment it involves can take different forms.

The idea that theory and practice must be united in Marxism is sometimes taken to mean that in order to be a genuine Marxist one must be engaged directly in concrete revolutionary political activity (Molyneux 1983). That is questionable. Direct political activity is not the only valid kind of Marxist practice. Theoretical activity is also a form of practice. Working with one's mind, pen or brush as a teacher, writer or artist is forms of activity that can make important contributions to the cause of Marxism and should not be dismissed.

Theoretical work is sometimes discounted as being merely "contemplative" and "academic." Often it is. There has been a large amount of academic work since the 1960s that studies Marx and Marxism in a would-be objective and scholarly way. This has enormously enriched the tradition of Marxism and made a valuable contribution to the development of Marxism.⁸ Marxists should not disparage such work. Nevertheless, the academic study of Marx and Marxism is not as such a form of Marxism. However, there is also Marxist theoretical work—work which is committed to explaining,

defending and developing Marxism. Such work may sustain and enrich Marxism. It is false to suggest that direct political activity is the only way to do this.

Perry Anderson (1976) introduced the term “Western Marxism” to describe the sort of Marxist theory that arose after the Russian Revolution with the work of Lukács, Korsch, Gramsci, and the Frankfurt School. This form of Marxism, he argues, was the product of “defeat,” of the failure of the Russian Revolution to extend to other countries. It was characterised by its separation from direct connection with revolutionary working class political activity. It was purely theoretical, focused mainly on methodological issues and philosophy.⁹ The ideas of these writers, he implies, are purely academic and lack an essential ingredient of true Marxism.

At times, however, there is little effective revolutionary working class activity. This was the case in the 1920s as Anderson describes. It was also the situation in Europe after the failure of the uprisings of 1848. Marx then largely withdrew from direct political activity and concentrated on studying and writing in the Library of the British Museum.

At the present time, there are no effective revolutionary working class movements in Europe or North America. Is there no valid role for Marxism in such times? To draw that conclusion would be a mistake. There is still an important role for Marxist thinkers in keeping the tradition of Marxist thought alive and developing it. Indeed, in recent years—particularly since the financial crisis of 2008—Marxism has grown and led the analysis and criticism of neoliberal capitalism. It has created the intellectual climate and provided the theoretical framework for socialist and left movements to exist and develop. As a part of this, Marxist critical thinking and even purely scholarly work about Marx and Marxism have played a vital role.

Marxisms

In short, Marxism cannot be defined either by specifying an agreed core of doctrines, or in terms of its method, or of its practical commitments. Nevertheless, Marxism does have a distinctive and determinate identity, and each of these features captures some aspect of what Marxism is. As we have seen, it is made up of numerous different and often conflicting strands and branches. Given this, how can it claim to be a coherent and consistent outlook?

Each particular form of Marxism may be more or less consistent within itself, even though it conflicts with other versions. And it may involve strongly held views about what Marx said and about what Marxism is and ought to be. However, this leaves unresolved the problem of how to distinguish between what can and cannot legitimately claim to be forms of Marxism. I have defended the view that Engels was a Marxist. Is the same true of Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Khrushchev, Castro, Gorbachev, Mao, Deng Xiaoping, etc.? Where should a line be drawn?

There are different ways in which this question can be approached. Marxism can be looked upon from the outside as a historical phenomenon, in a scholarly and objective way. This is the way I have been viewing it so far. Looked at in this way, most or all of the figures just mentioned are usually considered as Marxists since they all claim to be following the ideas of Marx, and scholarly works on the history of Marxism standardly include coverage of them (Kolowkowski 1978; McLellan 1979). Because of the issues I

have been discussing, it is difficult to specify what is and is not to be legitimately included under the term “Marxism”; it is impossible to give criteria for a clear and precise boundary.

However, if one is approaching the issue from the inside as it were, as a Marxist who is committed to its aims and ideas, one must opt for a particular form of Marxism, and one must take a definite view about what is and what is not Marxism. This does not mean that one must claim to be in possession of the sole correct interpretation, and that all others are heresies and deviations from a supposedly single and indisputable truth. One’s understanding of Marxism may recognise its kinship with other versions and its connection with them as rooted in the same tradition of theory and practice. It is quite possible to hold that the version to which one is committed is the correct interpretation—true to the letter and spirit of Marxism—while at the same time recognising that other interpretations are also possible. To deny this is dogmatism and sectarianism—faults that have been all too common in the history of Marxism.

Thinking as a Marxist, in other words, one must draw a boundary between what is and what is not Marxism, even if one recognises that there are some variations in what constitutes genuine Marxism. Where this boundary falls will ultimately involve practical considerations about which forms of Marxism one can ally with, and this may well vary according to circumstances. In general and from a political perspective, however, for the sake of unity—particularly in times of adversity—it seems wise to be as inclusive as possible and, in Mao’s words, to “unite with all those who can be united with” (Mao 1977, 35).

Notes

1. For example, in philosophy (Lukács, Korsch, the Frankfurt School), social theory (Bukharin), political theory (Gramsci), legal theory (Pashukanis), political economy (Rubin), psychology (Vygotsky, Wilhelm Reich), linguistics (Bakhtin), etc.
2. For example, works by Eisenstein, Mayakovski, Brecht, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Malevich, Rodchenko, etc.
3. For the context of Marx’s saying, see <https://libcom.org/forums/theory/context-marxs-i-am-not-marxist-quote-09062009>.
4. Similar remarks apply to Anderson’s argument that the growth of “Western Marxism” was a response to “defeat” after the Russian Revolution, because communism did not spread into other European countries (Anderson 1976, 1983, 9–20). See further discussion below.
5. There is a lengthy discussion by Cardinal Newman (1903) of the problems for Christianity posed by the fact that it has developed historically and changed over the centuries. These problems are analogous in some respects to the issues I am discussing here.
6. According to Ryazanov, *Anti-Dühring* “was epoch-making in the history of Marxism. It was from this book that the younger generation which began its activity during the second half of the 1870s learned what was scientific socialism.” “All the young Marxists, who entered the public arena in the early eighties—Bernstein, Kautsky, Plekhanov—were brought up on this book” (quoted from Stedman Jones 1973, 19).
7. Wittgenstein’s (1958, 66–68) idea that some kinds of thing that lack a common defining property may be united by “family resemblances” may be helpful in this context, but it lacks a historical dimension which, I am arguing, is an essential aspect of the identity of Marxism.
8. For a recent article which usefully emphasises this, see Cheng and Wang (2018).
9. Most of Anderson’s work has this character as well, it should be noted.

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