

“Marx’s political philosophy is a mixture of German Philosophy, French Politics and British economics.” Do you agree?

Marxism has certainly been influenced by German philosophers like Hegel and French politics like the example of the French revolution, French politics like the example of the French revolution and he has studied the capitalism of British economics. A synthesis of all these elements produces contradictions and uncertainties in the very large and complicated ideology of Marxism.

Marx’s dialectical philosophy was derived from George Hegel’s version of the dialectic. Hegel was an idealist, he believed that the metaphysical progress of man’s collective consciousness to understand itself was reflected in the sequential reality of history. This model begins with an existing element, or thesis, with contradictions inherent to its structure. These contradictions unwittingly create the thesis’ direct opposite, or antithesis, bringing about a period of conflict between the two. The new element, or synthesis, that emerges from this conflict then discovers its own internal contradictions, and starts the process anew. This is considered progressive because each stage in human development would be more advanced than the previous, similar to a human progressing from infancy to adulthood. These stages would continue until the conclusion of history is met, when man could attain self-consciousness and liberty. The freedom that was accomplished, according to Hegel, could only be true when all human beings were a adequately conversant that they realise the morality of law which everyone would follow without doubt. Hegel’s dialectic represents a necessary process of human development as a series of stages or civilisations. He believed that the human mind progressed in a dialectical way and thus affecting history, but this dialectical law was not supposed to apply to reality.

Unlike Hegel, Marx believed that he was in the penultimate stage of history and that the highest and final stage of history was still to come, because he was unhappy with Hegel’s view that he was already in the final stage. However, Marx did share Hegel’s theory that history was a single dialectical process proceeding through a series of necessary stages to a predetermined end, culminating in a final stage. Marx created his own theory called Historical Materialism, the belief that material circumstances shape who a person is, and these material circumstances alter over time and therefore so do the individuals within the society. His idea of materialism is said to be influenced by the another German philosopher Feuerbach. To Marx, these material changes in the state and socioeconomics throughout history (primitive communal, slave, feudal and capital states) represent changes in different productive relations and modes like the introduction of new technology to other more progressive ones.

Marx was influenced greatly by French politics as it endorsed his theory, along with England’s Glorious Revolution of 1649, that the dialectical process was moved on by revolution, rather than Hegel’s view of a more evolutionary process. In 1788, when the French had lost four out of five wars, the final war with Canada and an involvement with the American War of Independence which led to the bankruptcy of France. Before the French revolution, France was made from three estates and a king. The king could only tax the third estates, but after these wars were forced to impose a tax on the first and second estates. Revolution began when the upper two estates refused to pay tax and recalled parliament where they could achieve an almost certain victory as it needed two of the three houses.

Some of estates one and two defected to three, who refuse to go home until they are recognised at Parliament. Just as the third estate needed the help of estates one and two, Marx said that when Capitalism moves to Communism, the Proletariat will need the help of the Bourgeoisie.

Marx believed that economics change and develop over time through technological innovation and new financial methods which result in augmentation of trade and prosperity. However, Marx noticed that it was the workers who produced all of the wealth, but because the bourgeoisie controlled the means of production, the workers remained poor and the 'surplus value' went to the capitalist as profit. Marx saw that capitalist, unlike feudal lords, had to compete to better their adversaries. This meant that the capitalist had to create more at a lesser cost and this could only be achieved by developing new, cost effective machinery or reducing the worker's wage. As a result of these measures, Marx supposed that eventually less efficient capitalists would go bankrupt and join the proletariat. This caused the capitalist class to become smaller and richer resulting in the working class becoming larger and poorer. Mutual dependence and a 'class consciousness' among the proletariat was created because they were taught discipline and mutual dependence, whilst also being alienated. 'The Communist Manifesto' referred to the working classes as 'the grave diggers of capitalism', because of the need of the capitalists to 'teach' them with skills to overthrow the capitalist system. With the ever increasing proletariat were the intelligentsia, the proletariat would see reason to revolt against those who are exploiting them. These transformations produced tension and contradictions, like the recurring nature of industrial economics, with a 'boom' period followed by a 'bust' phase, producing an increasingly worse depression that eventually destroys capitalism. To Marx, the revolution of the proletariat was likely to begin in Britain because, at that time, it was the most advanced industrial state and this assimilated into Marx's theory on British economics.

It is quite amenable that Marx synthesised German philosophy, British economic theory and French revolutionary ideas into his philosophy. Marx used German philosophers like Hegel to produce his dialectic and another German philosopher Feuerbach that influenced Marx's idea of materialist and which he synthesised to make his 'historical materialism'. The idea of 'historical materialism' seems perfectly feasible and scientific when combined with historical examples of French politics like the French revolution. Marx uses the French revolution because it illustrates the transition of a feudal society to a capitalist. In addition to enforcing his previous idea of historical materialism, it also provides a foundation to the third speculation upon the economics of Britain. Marx examined workers' conditions and predicted a systematic development of innovation and new financial techniques which increase trade and prosperity but also create conflict and place strain on the society because they can no longer contain it. Thus, Marx establishes the final conclusion from capitalism to communism that is drawn from historical and scientific evidence. On this basis, it is clear that Marx's political philosophy is an amalgamation of these factors.