

# Marx philosophy and the end of history

[Philosophy](#)



Karl Marx is, without a doubt one of the most influential thinkers to emerge in the nineteenth century, and the theories he proposed, have influenced various regimes in different parts of the world. His success is the result of the flexibility present in his theories to adapt themselves to the times. In his mid twenties Marx, turned away from philosophy and concentrated his attention more towards the economic and political aspects of the society. It was in the light of economics that he viewed the problems in society and sought to provide a remedy to it.

He viewed society not as an independent entity. Contrarily, he saw, society as a reflection of the progress made by History. The progress made by history always left behind a legacy in its trail. This legacy had a profound impact in the shaping of society. The validity of this statement can be proven, by citing the example of the poverty in the Africa Americans as the legacy of their history as slave labourers. However the direction of History was uncertain and could not be predicted. It was dictated by the economic factors present in society. The only certainty was that an, ' end of history' was inevitable.

In his theory on Historical Materialism, Marx carefully analyses the various factors influencing the different stages in the growth of society from slavery to modern day capitalism.

Thus the views of Marx can be summed up under, four basic principles.

Firstly, he believed that society followed a straight law of motion and underwent various phases in order to get to the final stage of Communism.

Secondly, the laws governing the society were purely economic in nature, for

the only thing that shapes society are the ‘ material tools of production.

Thirdly, he believed that these laws would continue to be in force until the end of History. Fourthly, the classes and the State would perish with the end of History. However this end would be brought about by a bitter struggle of one class against another.

It must be mentioned in this context, that Marx borrowed the concept of a dialectical history, with a cognate beginning, middle and end from Hegel.

Marx’s main concern was the ‘ State’, which he viewed as the main tool of exploitation. It is the State and its various institutions that are utilised by the dominant class to wield their power. He advocated that the State was the most powerful tool of exploitation, whose sole purpose was to represent the interests of the ruling class.

He chose to study the State through the annals of History.

To him only ‘ History’, could reveal the secrets at work behind the evolution of the state and determine its future shape. However, Marx did not consider History to be an open-ended process. Instead he saw a definite ‘ end in history’. This end would result in the downfall of Capitalism and ensue the coming of a new era of Communism.

An end in History did not signify an end to human life, it simply meant that there would no longer be any changes in the underlying principles or institutions for all the major problems had been solved and man’s major needs fulfilled.

Before we can elaborate on the ‘end of history’, as predicted by Marx, it is essential that we know what history is all about.

Marx claims that History has not progressed in a straight line. The coherent development of human societies through the ages has been a result of the various regimes that it has undergone. Marx thus traces the evolutionary process from, tribal based societies which were dependant on slavery and agriculture for subsistence, to theocracies, monarchies, feudal aristocracies, modern liberal democracies and finally to the technologically driven Capitalism.

In his study Marx points out that the fundamental element present in all these different societies is the ‘class’ system and the ‘means of production,’ which determined which class would be dominant in the society. The ‘Class’ and the subsequent ‘class struggle’ were the sine qua non of Marx’s theory.

History showed that the class who controlled the means of production was the dominant class in society. It is the tools of ruthless dominance and exploitation used by the dominant class to maintain their authority that would one day turn against them and spearhead the inevitable revolutions.

History has shown that every revolution brought about a change in the social structure. This change did not bring about an egalitarian order it simply replaced the old dominant class with a new one. The unequal social structure continued to exist. Every revolution just changed the composition of the oppressor and the oppressed.

The day that the society became classless would be the day that History came to an end.

This end was possible with the rise of Communalism. While proclaiming the advent of Communalism, Marx refused to give a cognate shape to his ideal society.

He claimed that the final shape of Communism would be the result of the different historical processes that society underwent. It was not a realisation of a predetermined moral idea.

When it came to classes, Marx outlined two major segments into which society was divided. They were the oppressed or the 'Proletariat' as he called them and the oppressor or the 'Bourgeoisie'. When the levels of oppression reached its penultimate point the oppressed class rose in rebellion and the outcome of this rebellion was a new society. Thus Marx stated, "The history of all hitherto existing societies has been the history of class struggle." The day history ceases to exist; classes shall also cease to exist.

Marx in his theories always stressed on the Historical aspect and asserted that every society contained within itself the forces of contradiction, known as the 'Thesis' and 'Anti Thesis'. When these two contradictory forces clashed against one another, a class struggle emerged that sought to change the shape of society and replace the existing dominant class with a new one. This change was not permanent but would cease with the end of history, and there would finally emerge a classless society where each person enjoyed the fruits of his own labour.

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In his theory on History Marx, points out that in a divided society the tools of production are owned by the dominant section of society who exploit the weaker classes in order to amass more wealth and gain strength. But, there would come a time, when the levels of consciousness would rise among the oppressed class and they would unite in a struggle against the oppressors.

History is replete with such examples. The slave society was replaced by the feudal society and the feudal society by the Industrialists or the Bourgeoisie. The coming of the Industrialist Revolution brought a boom in the industry and a new class emerged as the dominant section. They were the Capitalist class who owned the means of production.

Like its predecessors the Capitalist society also contained within itself the seeds of dissent. The Capitalists became the dominant class who usurped the means of production and relentlessly exploited the working class or the proletariat. It resulted in the alienation of the worker. The working class was denied of the fruits of its labour and while the rich grew richer the poor grew poorer. The chasm continued to widen with the increase in wealth in the hands of the Capitalists.

Despite the contradictions in the Capitalist regime, the ' Communist Manifesto' begins by praising the Capitalist system. It says that the Capitalist system has played a revolutionary role in History. It has shown what man's endeavours can achieve. It has accomplished wonders, which surpasses the wonders of the world. It has conducted exoduses, which have overshadowed all past crusades in the world.

Having praised the Capitalist system they go on to say that Capitalism by nature is based on ‘ competition’ and the ‘ market’. The same dynamics that propel capitalism will also be the reason of its downfall. When there are no more markets left to explore and exploit, the entire buying and selling cycle would collapse. Capitalism would suffer from the phenomenon of ‘ overproduction’ and would be brought down to its knees.

Harping on the ills of Capitalism, the Marxian philosophy, states that the Capitalist system would soon displace the smaller and individual producers. Marx went to the extent of saying that History would witness the replacement of indigenous farming with industrial and mechanised farming. Once this level of exploitation was reached the end of history would not be far away.

This exploitation would unleash an era of unemployment and misery among the working class. When living under such miserable conditions became unbearable, history would witness a revolution spearheaded by the working class. Thus what Capitalism produces above all is its own ‘ gravediggers’.

It is the working class that would lead the final revolution to successfully remove the yoke of Capitalism. But the end of History or Communism as Marx viewed it was not to be achieved easily. The intermediate stage between Capitalism and Communism was the ‘ Dictatorship of the Proletariat’. It was in this stage that the proletariat had complete control over the means of production as well as over the various institutions. The downfall of Capitalism, Marx claimed, would bring about the end of History.

The phrase 'end of history' indicates a society based on Communism. It is a classless and egalitarian society where every man has full right over the fruits of his labour. From the 'end of history' there would emerge the final shape of the society. It would no longer undergo any more transformations, since all the major ills plaguing its predecessors had been removed. It was a society where man attained true economic freedom.

Keeping in mind the fact that Marxism has a great deal of supporters it cannot be overlooked that the society Marx depicted in the end was more of a utopia rather than a reality. Though Marx's philosophy has stood the test of times his views on the 'end of History' is yet to materialise.

If we study the history of the world carefully we can see instances when the Marxian theory has borne fruit, but there have also been instances when the theory failed miserably.

The theory of Marx was put to the test with the Russian Revolution. The theory defended itself by proclaiming that Russian society had not passed through the necessary stages in order to qualify as a successful communist society. Though the country was growing rapidly the society was predominantly feudal in nature. It had not been through the phase of Capitalism.

The Soviet Union that was the glowing example of the success of Communism also faced failure. The downfall of the Soviet Union exposed the inherent corruption, inefficiency and irrationality present in the society. This picture of a communist society seemed to be absolutely contradictory to the egalitarian and classless society in a Communist Regime envisaged by Marx.

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The most important fact is that the 'end of history' is yet to manifest itself. With the ongoing scenario in the world Capitalism seems to have gained an even stronger foothold. Rather than an impending doom, capitalism is on a rise. The State that was supposed to wither away with the end of history is a far cry away.

The State seems to be playing an even more important role today. It is far more intervening in the ways of man than predicted by man. Instead of being a tool of oppression the State has helped in maintaining stability, law and order in society.

The end of history as envisaged by Marx is not easy to implement in practice. While envisaging an equal society Marx placed complete faith on the just and truthful nature of man. But man is by nature greedy. His wants keep increasing and to meet these wants he needs to amass resources. Thus, to think that man would be happy in his own little share would be a folly. It is inevitable that a man or a group of men would want to take over the reigns of power. Such a situation would lead to nothing but anarchy and chaos.

It is because of the above reasons that the end of history seems such a far-fetched thought.

The Marxian theory was not about right or wrong it was simply a theory of history. It followed the trends that had occurred in the past and on the basis of those sought to predict the future trends that would ensue.

In so far that the theory acknowledged the presence of exploitation and domination in history it stands fully justified. It is only when it comes to predicting an end to Capitalism that the theory seems to falter. It seeks to attain the unattainable.

In view of the above mentioned arguments, and in the light of the real world scenario, we can safely say, that, even though the political, economic and social institutions proposed By Marx are dead or dying away, his theory and influence on the world continue to exist.

## **Works Cited**

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