

En Spricka i Språket

Marx och Freud - våra samtida

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Marx and Freud were very fashionable in the first half of the 20th century, now they have been relegated to the dustbin of history. The ostensible purpose of this short book is to open up the lid, retrieve them and dust them off and show that they are not only still relevant today, maybe even more so than they were when in fashion.

Both Marx and Freud have been criticized and eventually rejected because they have not been considered scientific. Popper especially take their theories as examples of unscientific ones, in the case of Marx because of the dogmatism with which his theses were pronounced (in glaring contrast to the humility of an Einstein), and in the case of Freud because of the impossibility of pinning him down, what is otherwise known as unfalsifiability. Popper flirted with Marxism in his early youth and was an assistant to the psychologist Alfred Adler later on. His experiences with both creeds was one of the major factors in his search for a criterion of demarcation between real science and pseudo science, especially when the latter has all the trappings of the former. The criticism and verdict of Popper has been rejected as merely positivistic, meaning intellectually narrow-minded not to say autistic. Popper deeply resented being confused with the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle, to whose meetings he actually never had access, although he maintained friendly relations with some of its members, notably Carnap¹ and his debut - *Logik der Forschung* - was published in their series of publications. Instead he bragged that he had exploded the conceit of the positivists from within. Of course one may define scientific in any way one wants, just as one may define intelligence at one's discretion, but personally I think that Popper's demarcation is very sound and that the notion of scientific it encapsulated is very fruitful and widening the concept would just muddle the waters². The problem is that the notion of 'scientific' has a lot of prestige and many are dying to appropriate it for their endeavors and hence for themselves. Science is characterized by both an intimate empirical anchorage and by daring, and more often than not, counter-intuitive theories, constrained by the former. The latter is very much stressed by Popper, while the former constitutes the vulgar notion of what is science, namely the careful systematic study of nature using the

¹ Although Carnap complained that while the difference between him and Popper was small, that between Popper and him apparently was enormous. Martin Gardner of *Mathematical Games* in *Scientific American*, was an assistant to Carnap in Chicago in the 40's and wrote to me very bitterly and disparagingly about Popper and in particular as he not being a nice guy, and as to the latter I have no reason to doubt him.

² Popper seems to be very controversial among philosophers of science, I once had an exchange with the author of one of the very short OUP texts on the subject and was admonished for taking a too sympathetic interpretation of Popper's view on induction, which seems to be the main bone of contention.

so called the 'scientific method' whatever that is, and already expressed by Francis Bacon in the early 17th century actually before the so called Scientific Revolution³. This is the source of the horrible expression 'scientifically proved'. True, science ultimately results in applications, admittedly its main *raison d'être* to the public and politicians alike, but from an intellectual point of view mainly interesting as potential falsifications. Thus philosophy is not science, in particular not Popper's view of falsification⁴. Furthermore social sciences is a misnomer, in particular economics, pedagogy and those nowadays so fashionable gender studies, have descending claims for scientific status. Strictly speaking science should, as it tends to be in Anglo-Saxon culture, be restricted to the natural sciences. True, in the humanities there are activities, which in their objectivity are pursued in the spirit of natural science, I am thinking of linguistics and the correlation and authentication of historical documents (some of it exploiting straightforward natural science applications), but especially the latter should perhaps be seen more as a forensic not to say 'legal' process done in a 'judiciary' spirit. In fact my favorite historian R.G.Collingwood sketches a science of history which is essentially forensic and differs from natural science by giving the pride of place to divining human thought and motivation. Whether mathematics is a science or not is a delicate question, Popper considers mathematics beyond falsification as deduction gives complete certainty (I tend to disagree with him on that point), while many scientists follow Russel and Wittgenstein and ultimately reject it as tautological (hence non-falsifiable and ultimately empty of any synthetic content), a categorical statement which I naturally strongly disagree with.

Thus even if we do not endow Marx and Freud with scientific status, that does not mean that they are worthless, on the contrary. Some of the arguments against their status as such are acknowledged by the authors. Marx had the misfortune of being hijacked by a powerful state and ossified into a rigid political dogma, presented as a scientific and philosophical perfect closed system⁵, and as a result when that state imploded, it was seen as the definite falsification of Marx and socialist economies. End of history. But not only that, in Western democracies Marx was highly fashionable in intellectual leftist circles and adherence to it was not primarily scientific but as if it would be a creed. As a result there arose concerns about the 'pure faith'. Marx words counted for more than his ideas, in science the personality of the scientist is irrelevant it is the potential of the ideas which counts. Freud was not officially adopted in the same way as Marx for obvious reasons, but he started the Psychoanalytic movement in which he was the towering figure. He had a host of strong-willed disciples with whom he eventually quarreled, the

³ Incidentally the view of Bacon, namely the objective patient observation of nature, shorn of any prejudices, will invariably reveal its secrets, is the one that still dominates among the general public and hence among politicians.

⁴ The American science journalist Horton wrote a book of interviews titled *Ironic Science*, in which he put the question to Popper whether his theory of falsification was falsifiable. Popper thought him an idiot and almost reached himself for the fire poker! Incidentally Popper's own attempts to do science were rather pitiful.

⁵ I recall my colleagues in Eastern Europe who had to suffer through courses and attend seminars on Marxism-Leninism and dialectical materialism, finding it a meaningless chore, maybe not unlike what we may suffer in the future concerning gender studies.

most famous being Jung. There was only room for one top-dog and dissenting voices were expelled. It was a movement, a kind of party, and it was essential for its survival for it to be cohesive and speak with one voice. After the death of Freud the movement continued, and there was a competition among his successors who would be best equipped to continue as custodians of his legacy. This is not how things work in science, for one thing authorities should be criticized not revered. According to Popper it goes back to Thales who encouraged criticism of his theses. One may argue that the introduction of strict deductive reasoning, which is the hallmark of Greek scientific culture, was not so much a matter of establishing absolute truth but to make reasoning more transparent and hence amenable to more detailed criticism, which is not mainly a matter of rejection but one of modification and improvement. Furthermore the tangible results of science are open to everyone to criticize and judge, this is what falsifiability amounts to in the democratic sense, while the psychoanalysts rejected any criticism from without, only if you were an expert were you entitled to an opinion. This goes against the spirit of transparency and accountability which permeates science. One may contrast Marxism and Freudianism with the influence of Newton and Darwinism (note that there is no such thing as Newtonism, nor Einsteinism for that matter). 'Let Newton be, and all was Light' wrote Alexander Pope. Newton effected a real revolution in Science. True he stood on the shoulders of giants, as he expressed with contrived modesty, no doubt referring to Galileo and Kepler (Copernicus had great symbolic importance but his actual contributions cannot be compared to those of Galileo and Kepler, contrary to uninformed opinion he did not in any way prove that the Earth revolved around the Sun) but he was head and shoulders above the rest. He was not isolated, the Royal Society was not his creation, and as the above mentioned Bacon testifies to there was already a tradition of curious inquiry established, picking up from where the ancient Greeks left. The ideas of Newton were immediately accepted by the burgeoning scientific community, contrary to the common misconception that genius is never recognized initially⁶ and exploited and developed for the next centuries setting up an impossible standard for general scientific inquiry. No one read Principia as if it was a sacred text. There was no need for it, the underlying ideas were clear enough to be independently pursued. Never before had mankind been able by pure thought to understand and explain so much and which gave it an unprecedented confidence and an entirely different view of itself resulting in the Enlightenment for which Newton became the shining icon⁷. What is striking is the objective character of the whole enterprise. Newton did not point to himself but to something outside to which he could not claim possession. One may argue that the ideas were in the air, and had not Newton appeared on the scene they would eventually have emerged anyway, although not necessarily through an alternative 'Newton' and maybe in a rather different form⁸. A particular example is the ostensibly independent development

⁶ Of course there are examples but they tend to be exceptions. The idea of genius not being recognized, gives heart to unrecognized people who believe that by virtue of their neglect they are geniuses. But of course anyone can hope for posthumous fame, it never leads to disappointment.

⁷ No doubt to a large extent through the propaganda efforts of Voltaire.

⁸ This touches upon the question as to what extent history is shaped by 'great' men (and women). In its particulars obviously, but what about its generalities? If there had been no Hitler, had there been no Second World War? That is not clear, but without Hitler there would have been no Dunkirk say.

of the infinitesimal calculus by Leibniz. Although relations between Newton and Leibniz were initially cordial they soon soured and Newton, who was not a very nice man but intensely pettily jealous of his achievements⁹, accused him of plagiarism. People on both sides of the channel took sides. The British were loyal to Newton's cumbersome notation, while continental mathematicians adhered to the superior notation of Leibniz, as a result the Newtonian baton left England and his legacy instead were developed on the Continent. This is of course an oversimplification, notation is important but not that important¹⁰ The whole episode is tragic-comic and but plays a very peripheral role in the history of science, but in cases like Freud and Marx such controversies take center stage.

Darwin was a naturalist and a visionary. As a naturalist he followed in the tradition of geologists and biologists coming into age during the 18th century and early 19th century. Among his precedents we have not only the grand French naturalist such as the encyclopedic Buffons, the superb anatomist Cuvier and the visionary Lamarck, to whom we should of course add Linnaeus, the archetypal naturalist indefatigably describing and cataloging the furniture of creation¹¹, but also the predominantly British geologists, among whom Lyell deserves special mention as a mentor. Darwin was foremost a naturalist and essentially all his work consisted in the meticulous study of the organic world, but unlike Linnaeus he had a vision. Evolution driven by natural selection gives to the whole organic world an overarching structure, and in the words of contemporary biologists nothing makes sense in biology except when viewed in the context of evolution. Darwin was very reluctant to go public, he knew how Lamarck's theory of evolution had been rejected by the establishment of the day because of its lack of empirical foundation, and he was not going to make the same mistake, thus he kept on procrastinating amassing more and more evidence. Eventually he was urged by Lyell, who himself was no evolutionist, to go public in view of Wallace who threatened to usurp him. 'The Origin of Species' written in a style and language accessible to the intelligent layman, was thought of as a single if extended argument. Evolution was at the time highly controversial, after all it was a far more penetrating argument against religion than the far more abstract Newtonian worldview¹². It is not unreasonable to assume that Darwin himself would have initially shied away from the implications of his vision¹³ and he was certainly aware of the religious pieties of his wife. Darwin did encounter a lot of opposition from the public, as he still does today, but the biological establishment quickly accepted it. The vision can be summarized in one simple slogan and one intellectual seductively attractive. I recall the beauty of it when I first

⁹ His contempt and hostility to Hook is abominable

¹⁰ A Gauss pointed out what matters are not notations but notions.

¹¹ Also including fossils, whose nature part dead (immobility) and part alive (structure) intrigued people for a long time.

¹² The world according to Newtonian mechanics is completely deterministic as expressed succinctly by Laplace, who claimed that an all encompassing intelligence knowing all the positions and velocities of all the particles in the universe at a given moment, would be able to in an instant to predict both the future and reconstruct the past, and hence make time obsolete. What would be more natural than to identify God with the all encompassing intellect?

¹³ Darwin was more radical than Wallace, who exempted the human brain from evolution, thus adhering to Cartesian dualism, as most of us deep down do.

encountered it, and was struck that this kind of elegant ideas could also be found outside mathematics. Intellectuals, such as Spencer, quickly took to it, dispensing with the empirical undergrowth, and today it has become something of a cliché, mindlessly repeated in both relevant and irrelevant contexts¹⁴. The theory of evolution and natural selection is not really scientific in the sense that it does not lend itself to easily formulated and testable hypotheses, its function is rather to give coherence and meaning and thus inspiration to biological research strongly guiding the kind of questions being asked. Popper for one thing was very inspired by it in his theory of how we achieve knowledge. By its meta-scientific status one can actually be an accomplished biological scientist without believing in it, and of course naturalists in the past did serious science without being aware of it.

Marx and Freud provide similar visions to that of Darwin, however, without having any comparable empirical basis. In a way they provide heads without having them sit on torsi. In a sense they reap the rewards without having done the work, just as Russell likened axiomatization to theft. And just as Darwin excited intellectuals with his vision, intellectuals were drawn to Marx and Freud, because they seemed to provide answers to questions not even asked. Such pleasures should, however, not be disparaged, we all crave coherent narratives.

I first heard about Marx in elementary school where we were told that theory behind Communism in the Soviet Union was refereed to as Marxism, so called after the German Marx. I was very surprised that the Russians acknowledged a non-Russian in that way, instead I had the impression that the Russians only acknowledged their own. Russia was of course very frightening and thought of the enemy par excellence, thus anything connected with it must be bad, in particular Communism. In the years that would follow I would pick up a few scattered things about Marxism which happened to trickle down. Such as Religion being the Opium for the people, that Capitalism, whatever it was, was bad. And of course class conflict and the eventual overthrow and the triumph of the dictatorship of the proletariat, with which I had no reason to identify. In my teens I was not particular interested in politics and the way to organize society, and hence I was excluded, not only by choice, from the Marxist discussions so fashionable in the 60's¹⁵. Mathematics, philosophy and science excited me much more and provided food for my intellectual development. Even psychology was closer to my heart, although, as I much later would learn I shared with Collingwood his rather ambivalent feelings towards it. How could psychology explain

¹⁴ It is one thing to have a superficial grasp of the theory, and quite another to appreciate what it really means. I have repeatedly been surprised by the inability of many biologists to express it lucidly. Maybe because of limited understanding.

¹⁵ I recall though giving a lecture in the Gymnasium in which I contrasted Revolution with Evolution. I was also resentful of the one-dimensional representation of political thought from the left to the right and envisioned two-dimensional variants. People on the left tended to have an intellectual conception of politics, and in particular thinking of it in a cohesive way in which many aspects were thought of being united and inseparable, while on the right, with which I prematurely identified with by having a sentimental attachment to conservatism, they may be seen as disparate. Incidentally the kind of conservatism which attracted me, I later realized had only a partial connection to prevalent political conservatism. What does political conservatism have to do with conservatism per se? The latter involves for one thing the conservation of the environment.

my adolescent 'soul'? Consequently my knowledge of Marx was not even superficial, and I have only read one work by Marx himself, and not a very representative one at that¹⁶, thus I can only rely on secondary sources in my comments. The most penetrating I have come across is Popper's criticism of Marx in the second volume of his 'Open Society and its Enemies'. While Popper's critique of Plato in the first caused much bad blood and resentment among the Classicists, his cutting down to size of Marx was largely ignored by Marxists. In spite of his savage intentions, he displays quite a lot of sympathy, even admiration for Marx and his moral compassion, which he sees as a rejuvenation of Christian Ethics. He also approves of his admonishment that philosophers should not be content with describing the world, they should also change it. And that Marx distanced himself to his Marxists followers, he adds to his credit. His main criticism of Marx is his conception of historical necessity which he rejects as mere historicism. So although he finds Marx analysis of Capitalism and its dynamism brilliant, he finds it obsolete as it pertains to unbridled Capitalism as it was practiced in the Victorian Age, but now society has changed since then. We will have occasion to return to this point. Now Popper's main critique concerns more technical aspects of Marx, and hence he implicitly admits that Marx is in fact falsifiable. He takes exception to the notion of a classless society, this is a Utopia according to him. Furthermore Marx put economics above politics, the latter being an effect of the former. This is wrong according to Popper. When the Bolsheviks took power in Russia, Marx economy gave them little guidance, and as we all know, Lenin had to throw up his hands and reintroduce NEP (Stalin would of course not give up so easily, something millions had to pay for). But most critical he is of Marx idea of intrinsic value (i.e. price), the idea that the real value of a commodity is bound up with the effort it takes to produce it. This lead Marx into a *cul de sac* out of which he was not able to extricate himself, in particular because of his limited mathematical skill and understanding.

In the senior author's biography of Marx, it is Marx the intellectual that takes pride of place and fascinates. While the followers of Marx were dogmatic, Marx was not, we are being told, in fact he constantly revised his ideas and opinions and rewrote his 'Kapital' innumerable number of times and never finished it¹⁷. This is of course a laudable attitude worthy of a true intellectual, on the other hand it undermines the authority of his theses, because anyone could potentially have been put on his head in some future (which never came to pass). Science is a collective effort and cannot be done in isolation, so instead of being a scientist Marx should be thought of as an artist. And as with artists they not only deserve but require close study, which is what Liedman has undertaken, and in his biography he is thus able to explode many myths about Marx and his sayings¹⁸. This is essentially a conservative approach going back to the roots, and also a humanistic one,

¹⁶ In fact 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' from which I mainly remember that Marx thought of French subsistence farmers as irrelevant to the march of history as the sacks of potatoes they produced to keep themselves, and no one else, alive. Of course this is also the book in which the often quoted saying occurs to the effect that what starts as a tragedy often ends in farce, apropos Napoleon and his ludicrous nephew

¹⁷ Something was fashioned out of his Nachlass by Engels, who botched the job being not Marx.

¹⁸ In particular the sense in which 'Religion is the Opium for the people'. It is not meant as a disparagement of religion, on the contrary it extols religion as the only source of solace to the downtrodden.

putting the artist and creator in the center; while in science the emphasis is on the forward looking and many scientists have consequently a very vague feeling for the history of their subject, in fact thinking of it as irrelevant¹⁹. In contemporary economics Marxist dogma has been replaced by market fundamentalism, which spreads into domains where it has no relevance, such as education. It is based on a superficial understanding of evolution and selection, and is also very amenable to mathematical manipulation. In the market economy each individual is presented as a greedy, calculating entity set out to maximize its benefits, whatever those are. This is of course a caricature of a human and cannot but inspire disgust in anyone whose main business in life is not to accrue material gains. However, the critique itself is somewhat unnuanced. A collective has emergent properties which are not present in the individuals. A good example is diffusion. There is always a flow from a denser medium to a rarer one asymptotically leading to a leveling. Each individual atom say in a gas moves randomly and is as likely to move to the right as to the left. But in a collective where say there is an abundance of atoms on the right, in total there will be more atoms moving to the left from the right hand side, than atoms moving to the right from the left hand side, just more or less tautologically by numbers alone, hence there will be a net influx from the right to the left. Economics is about collectives not individuals and thus the greedy individual becomes more of a figure of speech, such as the 'selfish gene' of Dawkins then something to be taken literally as it is often done in vulgar presentations (as well in the minds of many market economists?). The great crash of 1929 was a severe blow and resulted in a softening of capitalism as it was practiced. Keynesian thought about state intervention took hold as well a welfare concerns, and even in the States Socialist ideas got a foothold during the era of Franklin Roosevelt. But by Reagan and Thatcher in the 80's the climate changed, a change gaining further momentum by the implosion of the Soviet Union. Hence income inequalities became again much more pronounced, and today we are witnessing a return to the unbridled capitalism of the Victorian era, making Marx again, according to the authors, as relevant as he was a hundred and fifty years ago. This is a development which has not been economically inevitable but has been the result of political decisions and manipulations changing the rules.

While Marx never became completely dead, it is somewhat different with Freud. Still in my childhood and youth Freud was quoted with respect²⁰, nowadays psychology seems to pay little attention to him, and psychoanalysis, once so fashionable is now only practiced by a diminishing sect bound to die out. Freud has two aspects, one on par with Darwinism and Marxism, the other concerned with clinical practice. While the former is rather immune, the latter is much more vulnerable. What is psychological health and to what extent does psychoanalytic treatment contribute to it? The psychoanalysts seem to be on the defensive. The point of a psychoanalytic treatment is not so much to cure but to engage in an inner exploration, which can, and in fact ought to, take years, and whose main purpose is to provide insights, which the patient may or may not exploit to transcend his or her

¹⁹ It is symptomatic that in Big Science the shelf life of a scientific report is very short, and hence their reliance on books and libraries is more or less gone, unlike the case of mathematics.

²⁰ And even taught at school not only as a historical curiosity. In the days of sexual liberation of the 60's it seemed to be understood that the neuroses Freud were concerned with was just a symptom of repressed sexuality prevalent at the turn of the century Vienna, which is of course a very naive standpoint

neurotic imprisonment. As to Freudian theory, it has in recent decades suffered onslaughts from the feminists and from that point of view been more or less discredited, Freud no longer present to defend himself.

While my encounter with Marx was superficial and entirely second hand, I have read some of Freud. Especially his case stories are interesting, masterly presented as small detective stories presenting a mystery eventually to be authoritatively explained by the master. If one would be inclined to be sarcastic, one could point out that his analysis works even better for fictional characters than for real, and that Freud may have been more drawn to them than to real patients and their hum-drum concerns. I never read his 'Traumdeutung' through but enjoyed his treatise on everyday pathology, known as Freudian slips, mainly for the charming window it presented to an era long gone and hence so idyllic in retrospect²¹. In later years I was very much impressed by Freud's remark that a child who gets a sibling reacts by throwing out things out of the home, citing the child Goethe throwing out crockery to be smashed on the ground²², because when I as a child of four got my first and only sibling I was seized with an overwhelming impulse to do mischief, grabbed the keys of my father and threw them out from the balcony. I remember my father looking for them, maybe even in vain, feeling very sorry for him. But during my period of interest in psychology in my early twenties, an interest, or maybe rather concern, stemming from a (romantic?) fear of insanity, it was not Freud who fascinated me as much as Jung. While Freud tended to be reductive in true scientific manner, the visions of Jung were large enough to encompass the 'soul' as well, and his idea of the collective unconsciousness, I still find a very suggestive metaphor applicable to language and presenting a tentative alternative to Platonism in mathematics.

Freud thought very highly of himself putting himself in line with Copernicus and Darwin²³ and resented that he did not get the acknowledgment as a scientist that he craved. In particular he thought that the Nobel prize was his due and sought support from among others Einstein, who thought the one in literature may be in that case the appropriate one²⁴. Harald Bloom in his book on the Hundred foremost minds classifies Freud as a great essayist, rather than a scientist, a judgment I find quite apposite, because this is what Freud really does, exploring a subject through thought and rhetorics.

Now what does Marx and Freud have in common, apart from their former celebrity status, to justify the juxtaposition of the book? Both presented theories with existential ramifications. Marx was not only interested in the technicalities of economics but in what

²¹ The life of Freud and his bourgeois surroundings does appear very pleasant, and such a contrast to the tribulations of a Marx

²² I recently read through Goethe's autobiography 'Dichtung und Wahrheit' and did not really find that passage, at least not as explicitly described as in Freud.

²³ Copernicus displaced the Earth from the center of the Universe, Darwin Man from the center of creation, and he the individual conscious ego from the center of the Self

²⁴ The Nobel committee has traditionally been rather conservative and timid in its choices, and has been retroactively criticized for not daring to mention relativity theory in their laudatio for Einstein. What outcry would we not have had, had Freud been given the prize in medicine and physiology. As to literature that would have been much less controversial, he certainly could have defended his place along with Churchill and Russell, not to mention real blunders.

makes a life worth living dwelling on the alienation the worker invariably experiences. And Freud wrote of course on the alienation modern Civilization engenders in the individual²⁵. Thus one may in a more or less contrived way combine them both and try to make some kind of synthesis. Such efforts have of course been made, which leads us to the actual contents of the book, on which we have not really touched but which can be quickly summarized. It amounts to a survey of how both Freud and Marx have been criticized and received in the 20th century, along with brief references to later commentators on Marx such as Adorno, Sartre and Marcuse. Furthermore some considerable space is devoted to Breton and the surrealists, not surprisingly the extra-clinical influence of Freud has mainly been in the arts. However, this hardly succeeds in making a strong case for the revival of Marx and Freud, and I think that a stronger one can actually be made if more attention would be given to their ideas rather than to their position in the social world which runs the risk of degenerating into mere gossip (such as references to André-Salome²⁶), but that may never have been the ambition of the authors, and it is a cardinal sin in reviewing to fault the authors of not having written the book the reviewer would have wanted.

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²⁵ I read that book a few years ago and was rather disappointed finding it a bit superficial and not probing into the potentials of the subject

²⁶ An old biography of whom was reviewed a few years ago in these collections