

Karl Marx – 200 years later

Recently, several countries celebrated the 200 th birthday of Karl Marx. In his writing, he targeted America and Britain hoping to change their economies. He failed. While America has had armed rebellion and soft revolutions, we did not follow the path Marx wanted for us. What happened?

It is important to look at the economic situation when Marx was writing, look at how America and Britain chose other paths, and see how Marx’s vision ultimately failed.

Karl Marx wrote the Communist Manifesto in the 1840’s. At that time, Britain was what Charles Dickens wrote about: segregated, brutal, and owned slaves. In America, our 1% were the Southern

Plantation owners who owned over 50% of the wealth in the country. The Dutch had massive colonies in the East Indies. Things were bad for ordinary workers.

But what happened? In both Britain and America, we had reform movements driven from a moral imperative. We elected “populist” governors and presidents such as Jackson, Lincoln, and Roosevelts who changed us..

Our representative democracy means that our governments cannot be totally dominated by those with wealth to the harm of the rest. Karl Marx could not see a Capitalist government that could act for workers’ rights, civil rights, and to protect the weak against exploitation.

In America, we had a bloody civil war against slave owning. But the later “soft revolution” of the early 1900’s and the

civil rights revolution of the 1960s were just as dramatic changes to society. In these cases, individuals speaking from a moral platform built on religion led much of the change. Karl Marx could not see any force in individuals speaking from a moral place.

Read through the Communist Manifesto. In it, a vision of masses of people is described. There is no room for the individual or the prophetic voice. There

is only the cold calculation of the psychopath bent on getting wealthy and the need for society to band together against such people. So, Karl Marx could easily see the steel barons of the early 1900’s and the oil billionaires of today trying to buy control of the government.

But Karl Marx could not see those with wealth working for the common good. He could not have seen Andrew Carnegie giving away the largest fortune in America nor Warren Buffet and Bill Gates giving away their fortunes. He could not have seen the thousands of fortunes donated to schools, and other public institutions. He could not have seen the wives and children of the rich risking their lives in civil rights actions.

Karl Marx failed to see that America could set the slaves free, could enact laws curtailing child labor, could break up trusts and corporations, could write laws to protect workers and unions, or could protect minorities.

Karl Marx failed to see a society where the wealthy work for a common good. His vision was based on a short period of time where exploitation of others was the norm. As we work together building a society based on mutual respect, we build something totally unseen by Karl Marx.

Working for The Common Good

The real danger of Artificial Intelligence

The story goes in WWII, the Russians trained some dogs to run bombs under tanks. But the German tanks smelled different so the dogs ran back under Russian tanks with the bombs.

Artificial intelligence has similar problems. AI systems trained to detect images are being fooled by small changes to the pictures undetectable to humans. The results are AI systems not recognizing stop signs, misidentifying individuals, and not seeing dangerous situations.

In theory, Artificial Intelligence is unlimited. In practice, it has major limitations.

What we call Artificial Intelligence are computer systems designed to see patterns out of the data given to “train” it. The current standard for AI is something called “Deep Learning”. Then, after the “training”, the systems are asked to make decisions on new data.

Because of the “training” aspect, all Artificial Intelligence systems have a limited set of knowledge. There are gaps to what the system knows. Because of the size of the system, we don’t know what it doesn’t know or what data was “ignored” by the training process.

Unfortunately, the patterns the AI systems see usually are not the same ones that humans use. Thus, a system might see a dog in an image when actually there was a taxi. The most advanced AI systems such as the IBM Watson system switch between very insightful answers and ones that are absolute garbage.

So, when getting an answer from an Artificial Intelligence system, we can’t know if it is a good answer or garbage.

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Risky World

Amazon’s Echo is reported to have captured a family’s discussion and sent it to a friend on their contact list. In other words, it “heard” commands to transcribe what people were saying and then send that. The risk is that Echo is listening all the time even when we are in an argument.

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