

Title: Comparing and Contrasting two philosophical approaches – Marxism and Critical Realism to one research: using critical thinking to identify the factors of “the mechanism of the self-directed labour skills” by analysing the situation of volunteering sectors in UK’s universities, then give some suggestions to Chinese higher education system.

Introduction

This essay will firstly compares and contrasts both Marxism and Critical Realism. Afterward, new knowledge produced can guide my research project, from which, self-reflections will be gained to benefit further researches.

Similarities:

1. Marxism and Critical Realism believed it is a dynamic and stratified world including objective and subjective parts, especially the interwoven part, in which, subjective initiatives can make changes.
2. Researches, in the interwoven part, will do some explanations basing on properties and relations.
3. From methodology, the mixed approach - induction and deduction can guide the research including ‘describing empirical events’ and ‘theorising the mechanisms’. (Edwards, 2014; Marx, 1845)

Differences:

1. To the belonging of ‘mind-independent world’:
Marx and Engels (1975) emphasises that ‘interwoven world’ should be one part of the objective world, yet, Critical Realism believes that this world is subjective and academic.
2. What is research? Marx, limited by his times, served work class but mentioned little about researches, so that ‘Praxis’ is almost equal to ‘research’; However, Critical Realism highlights language and discourse. Researches, to CRs, are much about the reflections of the objective and subjective world.

My research approach:

Exploring the mechanism behind ‘self-directed labour skills’ of HE volunteering students, I should critically use the mixed approach to identify the self-learning skills of labour. I should also put them into the objective world to test them by ‘the sole criterion - praxis’. In simple words, I should really participate in one project or create new activity for my research besides traditional methods. (Kilpaticks, 2010; Corden and Angela, 2004)

Similarities and differences:

Comment [S1]: Say clearly here what the research project you will be writing about and that you will be using Marxism and Critical Realism to answer the question.

Comment [JH(2)]: I have tried my best to make some changes. Though there may still be some mistakes, I enjoyed this process and improved my abilities through self-directed changing my assignment. Great thanks.

Similarities:

Firstly, the functions of research are similar between Marxism and Critical Realism.

Research, to Marxism as Critical Realism, is not a flat and static module to test knowledge already produced, but uses the subjective initiatives to find and create new knowledge.

'Praxis', basing on the interactions between the material and objective world, practises labour skill and does capitalist & classes' structure analysis of the social phenomena. From the 'first directly interwoven with material activity and the material intercourse of men', researches have been done and new knowledge comes out (the German Ideology: 167) (Hall, 2014; Feng, 2011; Lather, 1986; Edwards, 2014).

Secondly, to the interwoven part between objective and subjective worlds, Marxism and Critical Realism all thought that it should be included in their theories. Though the functions of the interactive part, to the two philosophical theories are different, it gives both Marxism and Critical Realism much more possibilities to make some changes and produce new knowledge.

Thirdly, on the level of methodology, the mixed research approach have been made to guide the practical applications in the two philosophes. Inductive compared with deductive approaches of researches, qualitative compared with quantitative analyses, practise compared with documentary reviews, are all used together during the research processing. (Thomas, 2014; Kumar, 1999)

Differences:

To the belonging of theoretical part of 'interactions between objective and subjective worlds', Marxism and Critical Realism have very different opinions.

Critical Realism gives another similar but different answer: the processes of research are what the thinkers use their understandings as from 'mind-independent world' to give the explanation of the problems produced by the objective world (nature sciences) or the mind-independent world (social sciences) influenced by both objective and subjective world (In critical realism, it is called 'mind-independent world' which exists independently beyond objective world and subjective world. (Edwards, 2014, pp. 2-4)

Contrarily with critical realism, though, in Marxism, socialists and communists have never been willing to admit that there is a third world independently existing beyond dualism, they all put them into the area of self-reflectivity of the subjective world controlled and determined by the material world especially economic base and the power of social classes struggle (Willmott, 2010). From Marxist's statement, it is clear that research is from the

interactions of the two worlds being included into the subjective world as a function of brain – the important material object, and the appropriate important part of the subjective initiative for human beings to explore new knowledge in order to change the world and boost the human civilization. (Lather, 1986)

To the definition of what is research, Marxism and Critical Realism have very different ideas. Simplifying the analysing of the two philosophical approaches of the definition of research, Marxism, limited by times, emphasised that it should be ‘praxis’ - the ‘directly interwoven with material activity’ () to formula research approach and produce new knowledge (Marx, 1845), meanwhile, As Platenkamp & Botterill’s (2012)statement about the application of Critical realism in tourism and Sims-Schouten, Riley and Willig (2013)’s finds in the subject of linguistics, Critical Realism thought it should be one review of ‘mind-independent world’ to guide the objective exploration especially by the way language and discourse analysis from the research using secondary documentary sources.(Platenkamp & Bottrill, 2012; Sims-Schouten, 2013; Edwards, 2014)

Comparing and contrasting Marxism and Critical Realism on the root level of this research – using ontology and epistemology to find research questions in my own research step

A research should begin along with the problems caused in the real world. How to answer it and what kind of style, tools can be used are like the Alice’s experience in the story (Thomas, 2013, pp. 2-3)

The first and appropriating step is to find the research questions in the real interactive activity of the subjective and objective world. As a young communist & Marxist in China, coming into the society of UK and then trying to find a research title to overcome the contradictions between eastern and western values, balance the different demands of both societies and meet my own interests in educational field, has always emerged into my mind. (Thomas, 2013, pp. 5-6) Though I am a Marist from mainland of China built by Marxist dialectical materialism and historical materialism, (Norman, 2011). From the nature of human beings to make enquire and explanation of our own world using logic, (Hempel & Oppenheim, 2008) I never close my eye to observe the world and accept new theories, knowledge and approaches outside eastern world. The reason is that thirsty for new knowledge is one human right on the level of educational fairness, which should be protected. From my research approach, it can

be strongly believed that reviewing Marx and Engels primary work <The Communist Manifesto> and <The German Ideology> and finding the original purpose, of which is to build a society where everyone is treated justly and enjoys the public welfare, not just the 'class struggle' or 'imposed democracy' misunderstood by some country, which is similar with the western countries' democracy. (Taylor, 1967). Basing on these theories learned both in China and here, it can be found critical realism enlighten the writer very much. It emphasises that the properties and mechanisms of the sum of the individuals are much important than individual jobs added together. (Edwards, 2014) It also emphasises that the function of empirical observations and evidences of every person's 'mind-independent world', to the whole society, plays much important roles in finding problems then solving them in the field of education, especially my interest - the mechanism of learning processes behind volunteering processes (Edwards, 2012). As a matter of fact, Marxism also emphasises the function of the whole is larger than every single part, however, in which it was emphasised that it is caused by the struggle of the two sides of the contradictions, especially the struggle of classes – different groups in different structures of society, of which the properties of the winner can reveal the properties of the whole. In other words, if one of the two side in the contradiction wins the game of the struggle, it will stand for the main function of the whole. (Marx, 1844; Norman, 2011; Hindess, 2011; Miller, 2011)

Finishing the comparing and contrasting on theoretical level of the central arguments, it will come to my own empirical acquisitions from the real life to identify research questions. Then the questions are all from empirical acquaints using the 'praxis' of (Marxism), or we can call it 'interactions' (intransitive and transitive reconciliation, which is from Critical Realism). (Edwards, 2014) Afterwards, one problem came out that: 'labour force and labour skills' is very important terms in the statements of Marxism. However, why, from the practice of volunteering in UK, the self-learning mechanism in the perspective of education can be found. This question always emerged in my mind. Volunteering processes are the natural learning processes of labour skills. Joining the volunteering organization – SCAN in Newcastle University gives the great helps for me to improve my labour skills such as taking care of children, gardening in allotment and doing some marketing in the campus. (SCAN, 2014) The very attraction is that during the processes of doing labours, there is no trading using money unless a real traditional capitalism country – UK should do. From Marx's view (1844), we usually call this kind of social pattern "communism society" or product distribution "From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs" society, or "reflectivity of public ownership". (Taylor, 1967)

Then, from critical realism's views and Marxists views, several research questions from research approach come out:

What are the properties and relations behind the whole volunteering organization?

Can we think it can awake the whole society to take part in the volunteering labour force and through it can we help UK and China – the different original civilizations of human beings make fast transition to the Communism society, which was described as the ultimate societies' dream of Marxism?

Can we say that volunteering processes, from nature, is pregnant with the new factors of the educational self-directed learning mechanism?

Labour skills and public ownership are two 'roll boosters' of the whole society of human beings.

Another group of sub-questions from this area are:

what is the definition of 'labour skills'? What is the self-learning mechanism? How can we know the sub-items of it? What is the role of Education especially self-learning cognitional mechanism of students' volunteers from higher educational system when they are doing the physical labours during volunteering processes?

If these assumption can be tested using research methodology, new knowledge will come out from both inductive (Marxist's empirical approaches) and deductive (from Marxism and critical realism) approaches. (popper, 2002; Hempel and Oppenheim, 1948, p.138)

It can be some contribution to the different ideologies in the societies of human being.

Critical Realism research approach as a vital supplement of Marxist approach to fill in his gaps:

CRs also trust secondary data especially documentary information materials (researches and studies gained from others' researches). Among those, linguistic information – language, discourse, communication and cultural influences have been re-practised into the world of research. We can imagine that in CRs' 'mind-independent world', the building materials, of which, is word, sentences, and person's true reflective meanings after experience some social phenomena. (Edwards, 2014; Bonviliain, 2011) CRs see languages as interactive 'empirical phenomenon' between people, which gives the possibility of analysis of the 'properties and mechanisms' behind them using emergence (continuous moving) and stratification (hierarchical and structure-directed) perspectives. One important research methodology of

CR is to analyse the processes of practising language – Case, interviews, and questionnaires (opened) are the ones they favour very much. (Edwards, 2014; Edwards, et al., 2014; Bonvillain, 2011)

The mechanism of self-directed volunteering research approach will be (integrating Marxist and Critical Realism together):

1. Using Critical Realism approach to do documentary searching to find secondary data of volunteering situation to find the key research point – ‘the mechanism of self-directed learning’ from ‘volunteering and public ownership’ situation;
2. Using the knowledge got from primary sources – Joining one activity and practising labour skills to get primary sources from Marxist’s inductive way;
3. Making interviews, questionnaires and experiments to test deductive knowledge from documentary analysis, and do qualitative and quantitative analysis to get new knowledge
4. Getting the new knowledge from both inductive and deductive approaches guiding by Marxism and Critical Realism
5. Re-putting them into practise in volunteering organization of the higher education system according to the up-to-date situations’ testing

Conclusion:

This research of volunteering sectors is one interactive process influenced by the volunteers’ subjective thoughts and the objective social environment.

Marxism can give the primary sources from really doing the activity and changing the objective world, however, it lacks the review of others’ emergent and stratified knowledge in ‘mind-independent world’. Critical Realism has done a lot about the level of theoretical models using language to find what are behind the social phenomenon - properties (functions) and relations. Unfortunately, CRs just stayed in the mind-independent world and have no confidence to face the true objective world; Marxism recognized practising, but lacks much subjective theories. If I can make a plan to join the different approaches together to practise them into a real research, new knowledge will come out.

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