

# Marxist View of Nature and Its Contemporary Value

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**Abstract:** Marxist view of nature is an important part of Marxist philosophy, and its connotation can be summed up into five parts: The first is the opposition and unity of man and nature; the second is the unity of natural and social productive forces; the third is the material transformation of man and nature; the fourth is the root cause of the ecological and environmental problems in capitalist society; the fifth is the solution to the ecological and environmental problems in capitalist society. The Marxist view of nature is still of great significance to the development of today's society, so it is particularly important to examine the multidimensional view of Marxist view of nature and explore its contemporary value.

**Keywords:** Marxist view of nature, Man and nature, Ecological civilization

## 1. Introduction

Philosophers have always interpreted the world in different ways, and the problem is to change it. The task of transforming the world is divided into two parts: transforming society and transforming nature. Therefore, Marxist philosophy can be correspondingly divided into transforming society and transforming nature, and Marxist view of nature is a theory about transforming nature. Marx's humanized view of nature expounds the process of human society transforming nature through practical activities, and its task is to study how to use and transform the realistic nature reasonably. The Marxist view of nature occupies an important theoretical position in the Marxist philosophical system, and also has important contemporary value. This paper will discuss the Marxist view of nature from four aspects: its basic connotation, multiple dimensions and contemporary value.

## 2. The basic connotation of Marxist view of nature

### 2.1. The opposition and unity of man and nature

The relationship between man and nature is the core of all views of nature. The Marxist view of nature takes practice as the intermediary, combines philosophy, economics, ethics and other multidisciplinary perspectives, and regards man and nature as a large system of opposition and unity. The unity of man and nature is mainly manifested in four aspects: the first is man's dependence on nature. Nature is a necessary prerequisite for the survival and development of human beings. Nature provides human beings with living space, natural means of living (sunshine, air, water, etc.) and natural means of production (coal, oil, natural gas, etc.).[1] Without nature, human beings would not be able to survive. The second is the dependence of human practice on nature. The practice of making history is carried out with the help of the objective existence of nature, and the formation and development of human production mode and life style are closely related to the natural environment. The third is the humanization of nature. Human practice divides nature into natural nature and humanized nature, infuses human purposeful factors into it, and promotes the continuous transformation from natural nature to humanized nature. Finally, practice makes man and nature interact with each other and form a unified whole system. The law of nature restricts the practical activities of human beings, and human beings should transform the nature according to their own needs, so that the nature will develop in a direction beneficial to human beings. The interaction between human beings and nature reflects the unity of the initiative and the mobility between human beings and nature.[2]

The unity of man and nature is based on the opposition between man and nature. Practice makes man separate from nature and antagonize it. Man is not only the existence of nature, but also the existence of society, which is the root of the opposition between man and nature. Human sociality and initiative make people take a self-centered attitude towards nature and wantonly transform nature. With the development of society and scientific and technological progress, the benign opposition relationship between human

and nature gradually develops into a vicious confrontation relationship, which eventually leads to environmental deterioration and survival crisis.

### ***2.2. The unity of natural and social productive forces***

Natural productive forces are the sum of all kinds of natural forces that exist in nature, are closely related to human production and life, and can affect production activities. Marx believed that production is the unity of natural production and social production, and real productive forces are the unity of natural and social productive forces, which interact and restrict each other. The effect of natural productivity on social productivity is shown in the following aspects: first, it influences human's own development by providing human survival materials; The second is to create labor means and labor objects for the reproduction of human society through the reproduction of nature; Third, it affects the quantity and quality of the object of labor. The effect of social productive forces on natural productive forces is shown in the following aspects: social productive forces are the productive forces that make natural productive forces come true, change natural productive forces greatly through human's practical activities, and realize efficient utilization of natural productive forces through rational allocation of resources.[3]

### ***2.3. The material transformation of man and nature***

The concept of "material transformation" originated from German physiologist Sigwart, which refers to the material metabolism and life cycle of animals and plants in living organisms in order to maintain their life. The Marxist concept of "material transformation" is derived from the German founder of agricultural chemistry, Liebig, on the basis of his "law of restitution", defined material transformation as the universal exchange of material, energy and information in nature and human society. Marx believed that labor is the intermediary and bridge of material transformation between man and nature. He pointed out in "Das Kapital" that "labor is first of all a process between man and nature, a process through which man adjusts and controls the material transformation between man and nature with his own activities as the intermediary." [4] Human labor, on the one hand, is restricted by the objective laws of nature, on the other hand because of its purpose, so that nature as the object of labor and labor data and passive existence. Therefore, the material transformation between man and nature is essentially the interaction between man and nature based on labor.

### ***2.4. The root cause of the ecological and environmental problems in capitalist society***

Marx and Engels analyzed the root causes of ecological environmental problems based on the reality of capitalist society in his works such as Das Kapital, Dialectics of Nature, German Ideology, and The Conditions of The Working Class in England. From the perspective of epistemology, the economic base determines the superstructure, which is restricted by the science and technology and social development at that time, and people's understanding of nature is not enough. It has not only failed to see clearly the position of human beings in nature, failed to recognize the objective relationship between human beings and nature, failed to "deal" with nature in a correct way, and failed to foresee the impact of its own behavior on nature and society. From the perspective of class and society, the greedy nature of the bourgeoisie determines that capitalists only pay attention to economic benefits in economic activities. The pursuit of surplus value makes them plunder resources madly and promote environmental deterioration, while the serious inequality of wealth distribution accelerates the process of natural environment pollution.

### ***2.5. The solution to the ecological and environmental problems in capitalist society***

Firstly, the relationship between man and nature is reevaluated from the perspective of cognition. Reducing environmental pollution is the premise of realizing the harmonious development between man and nature. Secondly, the development of science and technology is an effective way to reduce industrial waste and improve environmental quality. Third, coordinating the production of means of living with human production is an effective way to save natural resources, reduce domestic excreta and improve environmental quality. Fourth, only by adjusting the social structure, realizing the integration of urban and rural areas and the balanced distribution of large industries can environmental pollution be reduced. The last and most important point is to reform the mode of production and the social system. Under capitalist production conditions, harmonious coexistence between man and nature cannot be achieved. To truly solve the contradiction between man and nature, we must replace the capitalist system with the communist system.[5]

### **3. The multiple dimensions of Marxist View of Nature**

#### ***3.1. Marxist view of nature based on materialistic dimension***

From the perspective of materialism, Marxist view of nature means that Marxist view of nature insists on thorough materialism and affirming the objectivity and priority of nature. The objectivity of nature means that nature exists outside people's subjective consciousness, and both in-itself nature and humanized nature have objective existence. Man is the product of the long-term development of nature. Human production and development cannot be separated from nature, and human society is only the manifestation of different forms of nature. The priority of nature is reflected in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844: "Without nature, without the sensible external world, the worker can create nothing." Nature provides the raw material of labor for human beings. Only when labor is combined with natural materials can it create use value. As William Peidi said, "Labor is the father of wealth, land is the mother of wealth"[6] and nature is the first source of wealth. Not only that, the quality of natural conditions is closely related to labor productivity. Good natural conditions can often promote the improvement of labor productivity, while bad natural conditions will often hinder social production, or even stop social production.[6] The Marxist view of nature reveals the primacy of nature and the dependence of man on nature, which determines that man must respect nature, treat nature well and live and develop according to the objective laws of nature in order to realize the harmonious coexistence between man and nature.

#### ***3.2. Marxist view of nature based on epistemological dimension***

From the epistemological dimension, Marxist view of nature refers to the humanization of nature from the perspective of practice and cognition. It is the humanization view of nature based on practice, which has practicality and social history. The purposeful practice of human beings reflects the conscious initiative of human beings. The nature participated in by human practices is the existence of human objects, and the nature changed by human beings in practice is also called "humanized nature". Practice establishes the subject and object relationship between man and nature. Through practice, man becomes the subject of understanding and transforming nature, and nature becomes the object to be recognized and transformed by man. Marx emphasized the humanized view of nature in practice and revealed that the relationship between man and nature is a dialectical unity based on practice. The social history of Marxist view of nature is reflected in the fact that the conceptual understanding of nature is a process of historical evolution and will develop continuously with the deepening of human practice. In ancient natural religions and folk religions, the narrow view of nature was dominant, holding that nature was a completely alien force, and people could only submit to the rule of nature. In the industrial age, the materialized view of nature, which emphasizes man over nature, takes a dominant position and regards man as the ruler of nature and nature as a tool to achieve man's purpose. In the future communist society, a harmonious view of nature will be formed. Human beings will regulate and control the material transformation process of man and nature through practical activities, and plan the harmonious coexistence of man and nature.[7] Therefore, in the process of understanding and reforming nature, we must proceed from the angle of harmonious coexistence between man and nature, and correctly handle the relationship between man and nature.

#### ***3.3. Marxist view of nature based on the dimension of historical view***

From the dimension of historical view, Marxist view of nature refers to the nature, human and history as an organic and unified whole, emphasizing that nature is the premise of historical development and history is the result of natural development. From the development of human history, we can find that all production is the individual in a certain social form, with the help of this social form to occupy the nature. The relationship between man and man and the relationship between man and nature is the premise of each other, and the relationship between man and nature is reflected through the relationship between man and man. The relationship between man and man makes the nature change according to the purpose of man, so the relationship between man and man determines the relationship between man and nature to a certain extent. The objective relationship between man and nature develops continuously with the dynamic process of material transformation between man and nature, and labor forms and objectified labor products also develop continuously with this process and historical development. In the process of understanding and grasping nature, it is necessary to conform to the trend of social and historical development and realize the organic unity of nature, human and social history.

#### **4. The contemporary value of Marxist view of nature**

##### ***4.1. Marxist view of nature and contemporary science***

“In Marx's view, science is a revolutionary force that has played a driving role in history” [8]. Science and technology are the means for human beings to understand and transform nature, as well as an effective way to realize resource recycling and reduce environmental pollution. With the continuous development of modern science and technology, new production tools and technological methods have been created, so that all kinds of waste materials which could not be used before have gained new use value in new production forms. Marx believed that human beings should actively understand and transform nature to find more use, so we should vigorously develop science, use science and technology to explore and transform nature, and realize the recycling of natural resources on the basis of making full use of various properties of things. At the same time, the development of science and technology should be combined with the social system to realize the harmonious coexistence between man and nature.[9]

##### ***4.2. Marxist view of nature and contemporary practice***

Marx put forward the thinking mode of practice, which broke the traditional thinking mode of subject and object dichotomy, and looked at the relationship between man and nature from the practical activities of real people. Practice is the way of human existence, the existence and development of human beings require continuous transformation of external nature, in the practice of human beings are doomed to make nature alien and objectify. In modern times, the confrontation between man and nature has led to the shortage of natural resources and the global ecological crisis. In addition, there are also confrontations between people and nations, and the crisis of nature is manifested as the crisis of mankind. "Will man kill Mother Earth, or will he save her? If the growing power of technology is abused, man will kill mother Earth; Man can make her young again, if he can overcome the wanton greed that leads to his own destruction. And human greed is making the great mother's fruit of life - including human beings and all the creation of life to pay the price. This is the riddle of the Sphinx facing mankind today." [10] Global warming, species extinction, desertification, deteriorating relations between countries and competition for resources are all ringing alarm bells. Human beings do not exist in isolation from nature, they exist in nature, we must correctly understand the relationship between man and nature, rationally adjust the relationship between people, act according to the objective laws of nature, resist the excessive conquest of nature. Only by treating nature correctly can we develop in harmony with nature.

##### ***4.3. Marxist view of nature and contemporary ecology***

The productive forces of human beings have made great progress in conquering and transforming nature. However, when human beings are intoxicated with their own "civilization", the exploitation of nature has caused increasingly serious "alienation" between human beings and nature. The simple one-sided use of science and technology to conquer nature and plunder, so that nature has carried out a large-scale revenge on human beings: environmental pollution, ecological imbalance, energy shortage, traffic disorder, population expansion, food shortage and a series of problems, all the time plagued human beings. In 1972, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment put forward the slogan "There is only one Earth ", and the Declaration on the Human Environment pointed out that "mankind has also reached a historical turning point in which the world must act together to deal with environmental problems and adopt more prudent treatment", reflecting the change of man's arrogant attitude towards nature. A good ecological environment is the basis of human survival and development, and also a sign of social civilization and development. The nature of the natural environment itself determines that all mankind must work together to create a good ecological environment. [11]

#### **5. Conclusion**

The construction of ecological civilization is an essential part of the Marxist view of nature. We should adhere to the Marxist view of nature as the guidance in ideology, avoid the thinking mode of metaphysical treatment of man and nature, and grasp the unity between man and nature. In the method, we should adhere to the method of system theory, correctly handle the relationship between the whole and the part, and realize the comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development of man and nature under the background of the world and the thought of systematic difference and coordination. In terms

of planning, we should take a broad view of overall planning. In terms of development mode and strategic layout, we should make overall plans and scientific plans, and jointly build ecological civilization from the aspects of philosophy, economy, politics, science and technology, system and behavior.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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