

Engels' Threefold Inquiry into the Scientific Nature of Scientific Socialism : A Textual Study Based on Socialism: Utopian and Scientific

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Abstract: *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific serves as an introductory textbook guiding people to understand scientific socialism and stands as a paradigmatic work for the popularization of scientific socialism. Adhering to the method of unifying historical and logical perspectives, Engels poses three fundamental inquiries into scientific socialism: "Where does it come from?", "On what theoretical grounds does it stand?", and "How will it be realized?" Through these questions, he elucidates its ideological origins, theoretical foundations, and inevitable historical trend, thus comprehensively defining the scientific nature of scientific socialism. In terms of its origins, scientific socialism arises from the inheritance, critique, and transcendence of utopian socialism. In terms of its theoretical basis, dialectical materialism, historical materialism, and the theory of surplus value provide its scientific worldview and methodology. In terms of its practical foundation, the irreconcilable fundamental contradiction within capitalism determines that socialism will inevitably replace capitalism. A textual study of Engels' demonstration of its scientific nature helps to strengthen theoretical and path confidence in socialism with Chinese characteristics.*

Keywords: *Engels; Scientific Socialism; Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*

1. Introduction

In the late 1870s, scientific socialism was simultaneously confronted with the dual predicament of theoretical misinterpretation and practical challenges. To refute Dühring's distortion and attack on Marxism, and to stabilize the unity and solidarity of workers' parties across various countries, Engels extracted and revised the introduction, the first chapter, and the first two chapters of Part Three of Anti-Dühring, producing the classic work *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. In this work, Engels systematically expounded the generative logic and historical inevitability of the development of socialism from utopian to scientific. Centered on the threefold inquiry — "Where does it come from?", "On what theoretical grounds is it established?", and "Why is it inevitable?" — he unfolds a progressive, tightly connected argument that scientifically reveals the internal mechanism through which socialism evolves from utopian imagination to scientific doctrine, fully demonstrating the theoretical depth and scientific character of scientific socialist thought. *Origins of Thought: Where Does Scientific Socialism Come From?*

2. Origins of Scientific Socialism: Where Does It Come From

Scientific socialism, also known as modern socialism, "like every new theory, had first to start from the existing stock of ideas, although its roots lie deep in the material economic facts".^[1] Modern socialism first took the bourgeois Enlightenment thought of the 18th century as its theoretical embryo. The Enlightenment, with the light of reason, broke through the feudal patriarchal system and religious obscurantism. However, as the capitalist system gradually became established, the slogans of liberty, equality, and fraternity soon appeared powerless and hypocritical in the face of harsh class antagonisms. Therefore, the utopian socialists began to stand up, systematically criticizing the evils of capitalism and envisioning a beautiful blueprint for an ideal society. Engels highly praised the explorations of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen, calling them "the brilliant germs of new ideas which break through the fantastical shell everywhere and shine forth as the work of genius".^[1]

2.1 The Theoretical Contributions of Utopian Socialism

The historical contribution of the utopian socialists lies first in their profound exposure of the nature of the capitalist system and their vivid portrayal of social contradictions. With remarkable foresight, Saint-Simon discerned that the essence of the French bourgeois revolution was class struggle. He viewed capitalism as merely a modern form of slavery, with a handful of idle exploiters above and the vast mass of laborers oppressed below. From this, he proposed a future society led by industrialists in which everyone works. Fourier, with biting satire, called capitalism a "resurrected slavery," exposing the bourgeois slogans of democracy, freedom, equality, and fraternity as ornate rhetoric masking exploitation. He sharply pointed out the hypocrisy of state morality and law and presciently analyzed the roots of capitalist economic crises in overproduction, which he termed the "plethora crisis." Owen insightfully argued that "private property has been, and will always be, the source of countless crimes and miseries for humankind"^[2], summarizing that religion, private property, and the institution of marriage formed a "trinity" of social evils. He revealed the capitalist polity as a combination of ignorance, deception, and tyranny and emphasized that only a fundamental transformation of private property could liberate the working people—thus stepping into the realm of utopian communism. Secondly, their view of society and history contained valuable elements of dialectics and materialism. Fourier skillfully employed dialectical thinking, dividing social development into four stages: savagery, patriarchalism, barbarism, and civilization. He used production and its nature as markers to reveal the staged and progressive nature of historical development, foreseeing that capitalism would eventually be replaced by a higher form—a remarkably advanced insight for his time. Lastly, in envisioning future society, they produced many thought-provoking ideas. Saint-Simon proposed that "politics is the science of production" and predicted that politics would dissolve entirely into economics—an embryonic recognition that economics underpins politics. Fourier was the first to assert that "the degree of emancipation of women is the natural measure of general emancipation"^[1], a unique and pioneering view in the history of modern social thought that profoundly inspired later socialist and feminist movements.

2.2 The Theoretical Limitations of Utopian Socialism

While Engels highly affirmed the genius insights and theoretical contributions of the utopian socialists, he also, from the standpoint of historical materialism, pointed out their inevitable "utopian" nature. In their conception of history, utopian socialism exhibited a distinct idealist tendency, with its theoretical starting point remaining at the level of abstract reason. For example, although Saint-Simon emphasized that scholars and industrialists should bear the responsibilities of leadership and governance, he relied on the intervention of the "New Christianity's" sacred power to achieve this unity, betraying an idealistic and religious undertone and failing to grasp the objective laws of social development. In their understanding of transformative forces, utopian socialism was deeply influenced by the "great man theory" of history, pinning hopes for social progress on the enlightenment and example of a few "genius" leaders while neglecting the revolutionary role of the masses, especially the proletariat. They regarded the proletariat merely as an object of sympathy and charity, thus often becoming "lost" in the face of large-scale mass struggles, unable to find the true force capable of burying capitalism. Regarding the path to realization, they advocated for social reform through persuasion, example, and experimentation, lacking revolutionary decisiveness and scientific rigor. Saint-Simon, despite recognizing the class struggle essence of the French Revolution, regarded it as a "reign of terror." Owen hoped to promote social reform through experimental harmonious communities, but ultimately failed to escape the fate of defeat. In envisioning future society, although utopian socialism proposed humane ideals such as distribution according to needs and the liberation of women, these visions often carried unrealistic fantasy. As Engels remarked, "the more they work out their details, the more they necessarily drift off into pure fantasy."^[1] In short, "an immature theory corresponds to the immature conditions of capitalist production and the immature class conditions."^[1] At a time when capitalism was not yet fully developed and class antagonisms were not yet acute, utopian socialism could only remain an ideal blueprint in the minds of its proponents and could not become a real force for social transformation.

3. The Theoretical Foundation: On What Grounds Does Scientific Socialism Establish Its Theory

"A skyscraper rises from the ground." The reason scientific socialism stands firm and unshakable lies not only in the rich intellectual legacy of utopian socialism but, more fundamentally, in its foundation upon a scientific worldview and methodology. As Engels pointed out, the establishment of historical materialism and the formulation of the theory of surplus value laid a solid theoretical cornerstone for the

socialist movement and propelled socialist thought from utopian vision to scientific doctrine.

3.1 Dialectical Materialism Provides the Correct Way of Thinking for Scientific Socialism

The fundamental reason why scientific socialism was able to break free from utopianism lies in its grounding of socialist theory upon a concrete material basis. It abandoned the metaphysical and one-sided mode of thinking and instead employed dialectical materialism to investigate the universal connections and developmental laws governing nature and society. Ancient Greek philosophy, with its macro and holistic perspective, once revealed the universal interconnections between the natural world and human society, forming the embryonic stage of dialectical thinking. However, constrained by the limitations of its era, it could not delve deeply into the detailed laws underlying phenomena. Modern scientific research made tremendous strides in specialization and analysis, yet this success entrenched the dominance of metaphysical thinking in philosophy for a long time. Such an isolated, static, and fragmentary mode of cognition may be effective in examining isolated aspects, but when applied to the complex and dynamic realm of society and history, it inevitably falls into self-contradiction and rigidity. To break through the shackles of metaphysics, the German philosopher Hegel reasserted the internal connections and dynamic processes inherent in the development of things through his system of idealist dialectics, thus reviving dialectics at the methodological level. His remarkable achievement lay in "depicting the entire natural, historical, and spiritual world as a process, that is, as constantly in motion, change, transformation, and development, and in seeking to uncover the inner connections of this motion and development"^[1]. However, by taking the "Absolute Idea" as his starting point, Hegel embedded dialectics within an idealist framework, which rendered his philosophical system self-contradictory: it affirmed the ceaseless development of history while simultaneously claiming to have attained ultimate truth—an irreconcilable contradiction that ultimately led to theoretical self-closure. Marx and Engels critically appropriated and transformed Hegel's idealist dialectics by stripping away its "mystical shell" and preserving its "rational kernel," thereby establishing dialectical materialism as a new, scientific worldview and methodology. As a result, dialectical materialism not only reveals the universal laws governing the development of nature, human thought, and society, but also provides a solid philosophical foundation for the establishment of historical materialism and the theory of surplus value. This enables socialism to discard hollow fantasies and instead root itself in a scientific understanding of objective reality and the laws of social development, thus becoming a powerful ideological weapon for guiding the proletariat's struggle for liberation and for advancing social progress.

3.2 Historical Materialism Places Socialism Within the General Laws of Human Social Development

Marx and Engels applied dialectical materialism to the study of social history and thereby founded the theory of historical materialism, which thoroughly demolished the last stronghold of idealism in the realm of history and facilitated the fundamental transformation of socialist thought from utopian to scientific. First, historical materialism reveals the fundamental contradictions within society and scientifically elucidates the driving force behind human social development, thus demonstrating the historical inevitability of socialism replacing capitalism. Although utopian socialism keenly perceived the injustices inherent in the capitalist system, it attributed the impetus for social development to abstract reason and moral critique, failing to seek explanations within the mode of production and the material conditions of society. Consequently, it could not convincingly prove the inevitability of capitalism's demise. As Engels pointed out, "The ultimate causes of all social transformations and political revolutions... are to be sought, not in the philosophy but in the economics of the particular epoch"^[1]. When the capitalist relations of production become incompatible with the further development of productive forces, they inevitably hinder and fetter that development, leading to their own dissolution and paving the way for socialism, a higher form of social organization. Second, historical materialism reveals the decisive role of class struggle in social development, making clear that the proletariat can achieve its own emancipation and transform the old world only through class struggle and by overthrowing bourgeois rule. Unlike utopian socialism, which placed its hopes in the moral awakening of a handful of enlightened elites, Marx asserted that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles"^[1], with the sole exception of primitive communal society. Historical materialism not only exposes the regularity of class struggle but also points out the practical revolutionary path for the proletariat. Finally, historical materialism emphasizes that the masses of the people are the decisive force driving social development and profoundly articulates the historical mission undertaken by the proletariat. Only when the proletariat fully recognizes its status as the principal agent in the historical process can it develop into a conscious revolutionary force capable of overthrowing exploitative systems, achieving self-emancipation, and ultimately promoting the complete liberation of all humankind. This scientific

perspective effectively corrects the utopian fantasy of relying on individual moral enlightenment and highlights the necessity and historical initiative inherent in the collective action of the proletariat.

3.3 The Theory of Surplus Value Establishes the Economic Foundation of Scientific Socialism

At the macro level, historical materialism reveals the general laws governing social development; at the micro level, through a profound analysis of the capitalist relations of production, Marx and Engels developed the theory of surplus value, allowing the illuminating light of scientific analysis to penetrate the realm of economics and laying a solid economic foundation for the transformation of socialism from utopian to scientific. The theory of surplus value holds two significant implications for the development of socialism from utopian ideals to a scientific system. First, it exposes the economic roots of class antagonism. Under the capitalist system, capitalists, by virtue of their ownership of the means of production, extract surplus value through wage labor. The worker's labor power, as a unique commodity, has a use value that exceeds its own exchange value; wages do not fully compensate for all the value created by the worker. The surplus portion is appropriated by the capitalist without payment. This substantive exploitation hidden beneath a facade of "apparent equality" reveals the economic essence of class contradictions in capitalist society. Second, the theory points to the real driving force behind social transformation. The profit-seeking nature of capitalists compels them to extract ever greater surplus value, leading to the increasing concentration of social wealth, while the proletariat remains perpetually subjected to exploitation and oppression. As capital accumulates and industries concentrate, social polarization intensifies, class contradictions sharpen, and these inevitably develop into political struggles and ultimately social revolution. Marx famously stated that wherever there is oppression, there will be resistance. As the most advanced and revolutionary class, the proletariat will inevitably unite consciously, overthrow the capitalist system, reclaim the fruits of labor, and achieve complete emancipation. This theory not only demonstrates the economic inevitability of capitalism's downfall and socialism's triumph, but also affirms the justice and rationality of the proletarian revolution. In sum, the two major discoveries—historical materialism and the theory of surplus value—using scientific methodology and solid factual grounding, prove that capitalism is destined for extinction and socialism for victory. They have freed socialist thought from the quagmire of utopianism, turning it into a theoretical beacon and a powerful ideological weapon guiding the proletariat's struggle for liberation.

4. The Material Basis: Why is Scientific Socialism Inevitable

4.1 The Irreconcilable Internal Contradictions of the Capitalist Mode of Production

Unlike utopian socialists who wholly negated capitalism, Engels, adhering to the principles of dialectics, offered an objective and profound analysis of capitalism from the perspective of historical development. On the one hand, he pointed out that the bourgeoisie broke the fetters that feudalism had imposed on productive forces, replacing handicraft workshops with large-scale industry, thereby advancing the mechanization and scale of social production and greatly increasing labor productivity. At the same time, institutional arrangements centering on free competition, the free movement of labor, and the legal equality of commodity owners expanded domestic and foreign markets and strengthened the integration of the world economy, thus laying a solid material and institutional foundation for humanity's progress toward modern civilization. On the other hand, Engels incisively revealed the inherent and irreconcilable fundamental contradictions within the capitalist mode of production. With the development of capitalism, the preparation of means of production, the production processes, and the resulting products all become highly socialized. This large-scale socialized production demands new relations of production characterized by the social ownership of means of production, yet the ownership of products remains locked within the old framework of private ownership. This creates the fundamental opposition between "the socialization of production" and "the private ownership of the means of production." This contradiction both embodies the requirements of individualization and privatization and, objectively, pushes towards the socialization of the means of production, constituting a fundamental contradiction that capitalism itself cannot overcome. This contradiction, Engels noted, "already contains the seeds of all modern conflicts" and manifests concretely on multiple levels. In terms of class relations, it is expressed as the irreconcilable conflict of interests between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, leading to the concentration of social wealth in the hands of a few and an intensification of polarization—"the rich grow richer, the poor grow poorer." In terms of production relations, it appears as the contradiction between the organized production within individual factories and the anarchic state of production in society as a whole. Under the capitalist system of private ownership, each enterprise, driven

by the pursuit of maximum profit, constantly innovates technology, increases labor productivity, and strengthens internal management to survive competition. However, individual enterprises lack the means to coordinate and foresee overall social demand and market supply, resulting in general production that is unplanned and blind. In terms of consumption, the contradiction manifests as the ever-expanding productive capacity conflicting with the relatively shrinking purchasing power of the proletariat. Due to the extraction of surplus value and the relative suppression of wage levels, workers' consumption lags behind the growth of productive capacity, causing overproduction to coexist with insufficient effective demand: on the one hand, commodities accumulate and supply exceeds demand; on the other hand, large numbers of workers face unemployment and poverty, with overall purchasing power severely constrained. As a result, periodic economic crises become inevitable.

4.2 The Contradictions of Capitalism Give Birth to the Inevitability and Realistic Path of Socialism

With the advanced development of large-scale socialized production, this fundamental contradiction continues to evolve and expand through its various manifestations until it reaches an irreconcilable degree, thereby periodically triggering economic crises. When the institutional shell of private ownership can no longer contain the ever-growing socialized productive forces, the unlimited expansion of production inevitably clashes sharply with the relatively limited market demand, resulting in recurring cycles of overproduction and crisis that force capitalism onto a path of self-decline. To fully liberate productive forces and meet social needs, it is necessary to transcend the system of private ownership of the means of production and establish a new form of social ownership. However, although the bourgeoisie continually attempts to regulate and postpone crises through measures such as joint-stock companies, monopolistic trusts, or state capitalism, all these "remedies" are nothing but provisional adjustments within the framework of capitalist economic relations. They never address the root contradiction and cannot reverse the historical tendency toward self-dissolution. On the contrary, these forms objectively further advance the socialization of production, providing ample material conditions for the emergence of socialism. What is especially significant is that capitalism itself not only nurtures the socialized productive forces that ultimately undermine it, but also fosters the revolutionary subject capable of wielding these forces: the modern proletariat. As the most revolutionary and organized class, the proletariat is tempered within the system of large-scale industry, developing a high degree of discipline and cooperation, while modern means of transportation and communication greatly strengthen its internal connections and collective consciousness, enabling it to gradually mature into a real force for transforming the old world. The fundamental interests of the proletariat are inherently at odds with the essence of the capitalist system. Only through revolutionary means—by overthrowing the bourgeois state apparatus, taking control of the means of production, and realizing the socialization of these means—can the proletariat achieve its complete emancipation. Therefore, the inherent and irreconcilable contradictions of capitalism not only foretell its inevitable historical demise but also profoundly generate the practical driving force and necessary path toward socialism.

5. Conclusions

In summary, through his threefold inquiry into scientific socialism, Engels fully demonstrated the profound scientific nature of this theory, enabling us to systematically grasp its historical evolution, theoretical foundation, and essential connotation, thereby fostering a comprehensive understanding of Marxism. In the context of the new era, a deep exploration of the theoretical essence of scientific socialism holds significant guiding value for strengthening the communist ideal and conviction, enhancing the consciousness in building socialism with Chinese characteristics, and advancing socialist practice. In today's world, although the development of capitalism has far surpassed the conditions at the nascent stage of utopian socialism, the contradictions between productive forces and relations of production, as well as between capital accumulation and social equity, remain pronounced. The new round of technological revolution and the intensification of globalization have further exacerbated imbalances in distribution and social conflicts, while various forms of "new utopianism" lacking a scientific basis—such as anti-globalization, populism, and extreme nationalism—frequently resurge. In the face of such a complex and volatile domestic and international environment, we must adhere to dialectical materialism and historical materialism as our fundamental methodological guide, base our actions on objective reality, respect objective laws, rely on the people, and scientifically comprehend the new developments and emerging contradictions within contemporary capitalism. We must continuously innovate and improve socialist relations of production, firmly ground our ideals in solid reality, guard against repeating the mistakes of utopian thinking, and ensure that the cause of socialism with Chinese

characteristics advances steadily and endures over time.

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