



Unity of “Done” and “Undone”: Marxist Ecological Methodology

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Abstract

At present, the research on environmental philosophy methodology in our country still lies in the debate of “walking in” or “walking out of” anthropocentrism, it lacks of breakthrough on theory and due to that, we should return to Marx’s ecological methodology and use scientific Marxist ecological methodology to guide relationship between human and nature, to realize compromise between them, finally to solve the ecological crisis and build ecological civilization.

Key word: Marxism ; Ecological methodology; Unity

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INTRODUCTION

In Marxist philosophy, practice is the unique objective activity for human being. Practical activity is the intermediary agent of communication between human

and nature and its purposiveness generates inner scale also determines its necessary—do something for nature; however, people’s practical activity has to meet with basic characteristics and objective law of nature, which generates nature’s external scale and determines boundary of the practice—do nothing for nature. It’s just the purposiveness and regularity of practical activity determines this kind of unity of “done” and “undone” for nature.

1. DO SOMETHING FOR NATURE: NECESSITY OF PRACTICAL ACTIVITY

In order to meet material needs by self-body tissues, people has to transfer the material elements existed in nature into use value or social wealth for the specific purpose through the useful labor, it means people has to satisfy and guarantee its objective needs for the development through labor. As Marx said,

labor, as the creator of using value and useful labor is a kind of human condition which doesn’t transfer by social forms, it’s material exchange between human and nature, in another word, it’s natural necessity human lives could be realized. (*Complete works of Marx and Engels (the 23rd volume)*, 1972, p.56)

Biological, social and practical nature of human beings decided that we will do something for nature.

1.1 Necessity for Doing Something for Nature by Human’s Biological Nature

The biological nature of people determines that they have to contact with nature through labor and maintain survival. Besides, the development of labor just like Marx said,

first of all, it’s the process between human and nature, and it’s the process of material exchange through human’s involvement, adjustment and control. Human beings, as a natural force is antagonistic to natural materials, in order to occupy beneficial natural materials, people start to get his own natural force *moved—arms and legs, head and hands. Labor process...is* the general condition during material transformation between human and nature, is the eternal natural condition of human lives. (Marx , 2004, pp.207-208)

Hence, in order to maintain survival and development, people have to make continuous material exchange with nature through labor. Based on this, Marx and Engels consider that the difference between human and non-human doesn't lie in consciousness nor believes in religious, it should be production or labor. “Once people start to produce their own means of livelihood which decided by their bodies, they distinguish themselves from animals. When people produce means of livelihood, meanwhile they produce material life.” (*Marx and Engels anthology (the 1st volume)*, 1995, p.66). From that, we can see it is biological nature and naturalness that decide his inanimate or non-naturalism, in this point, Fromm's natural person paradox explained well, it's due to physicality of human, they have to do production or labor, while once they did that, they distinguished from animals and became real human. “Any nation will perish without labor, one year, couple of weeks, even kids are aware of that.” (*Complete works of Marx and Engels (the 32nd volume)*, 1974, p.541) Thus, biological nature of human determines that people will do something about nature, they cannot live without nature.

1.2 Human Sociality and Necessity of Doing Something for Nature

People are not isolated living, they are the existence of society. People's sociality is generated during natural objective activity and out of the needs of it. As Marx said

only in the society, nature will show its basis for human existence and only in the society, human's natural existence can belong to people's existence, for nature, human become people. As a result, society is a completed and natural unity between human and nature, it's real resurgence of natural world, people realized naturalism and nature realized humanism. (*Marx and Engels anthology (the 1st volume)*, 1995, p.75)

It's human's sociality that determine its necessity to exchange materials with nature and do something for nature. Besides, on the way of exchanging materials, Marx pointed out: “Socialized people, united producers will adjust their exchange with nature reasonably and make it under common control, they will exchange it with minimum force and in most worthy and suitable way for human nature.” (Marx, 2004, pp.928-929) In Cassirer's An Essay on Man, he emphasizes that human seems to have found a new method in adapting environment—symbol system, it enables reaction towards outside interrupted and delayed by complex process of thinking rather than act out directly and rapidly.

people are no longer living in a simple physical universe but a symbolic universe. Language, mythology, art, and religion are parts of this symbolic universe, they are different yarn knitting symbolic net and toe net of human experience. All the progress of human thought and experience makes the net more precise and firm. (Ni, 2007)

Thus, people are not living in a isolated physical universe but a symbolic universe, while each component of universe reflect the its social characteristics, people are

doing something for nature through the symbol system and get progress by experience learned from this process.

1.3 Eternity of Objective Labor and Necessity of Natural Ecological Change

Marx said:

the natural world which prior to human history is not the nature Feuerbach lived in: this is the natural world in addition of those coral islands newly found in Australia, we cannot see it today anywhere, so it's not exist for Feuerbach. (*Marx and Engels anthology [the 1st volume]*, 1995, p.77)

Here, the nature pointed out by Marx is not the natural world prior to human or has nothing to do with human alleged by feuerbach. It means that Marx stands on the position of materialism and focuses on “real nature”, it's humanized nature, which means people make association with nature through practice and change its form during practicing process, meanwhile, people inject their objective factors into nature's causal chain to make it run as objective human nature. Hence, human put their inner scale into nature to change its otherness and self-presence and to realize transition from “thing-in-itself” to “thing-myself” to nature. Practice is purposeful human activity, however, this “purposeful activity doesn't aim to oneself but achieve substantiality with external reality form by destroying the rules of outside world (aspects, characteristics and phenomenon).” (Lenin, 1990, p.183) As a result, “practice must change the natural material structure and form, ‘destroy’ its original state. Also due to the ‘destroy’ by practice, it makes up the essential difference between human and animal activities,” (Ni, 2007). while labor is the objective activity of human, objectification of human is the realization of labor. “Objective labor is the fundamental symbol between human and animal, human society and nature.” (Sun, 2008) Like Marx said, “animals simply use the external nature and their existence to make change in the nature; whereas people make nature serve for their purpose through the changes they made and dominate nature.” (*Marx and Engels Anthology (the 3rd volume)*, 1972, p.157). It's human's practical nature that determines this kind of transformation to nature is reasonable and necessary.

2. LEAVE SOME THINGS UNDONE TO THE NATURE: BOUNDARY OF PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES

Material exchanges are happening between human's working process and the nature, which are the main manifestation of humanized nature. However, natural material elements, as the possible use value, have their own material conversion rules themselves.

Human can only play its role just like nature itself in production, namely, human can only change the form of material. More than that, in the working process to change the form, human is always relying on the help of natural force. (Marx, 1975, pp.56-57)

It is nature's material conversion rules that decide humanity approach "leave some things undone to the nature".

2.1 Naturality of Human

Marxism believed that human came from the natural world, and was the outcome of nature's differentiation, and "the natural world was human's body that human had to communicate with to get rid of death." (*Complete works of Marx and Engels (the 42nd volume)*, 1979, p.95) In Aristotle's *An Essay on Man*, from the perspective of biology, he thought as far as humanity demands and practical benefits were concerned, humans relied on the natural environment they lived. They could not survive if they failed to adjust to their surrounding environment; in *The Selected Works of Feuerbach's Philosophic Works and from the perspective of humanism*, Feuerbach believed

the real humans were not abstract self-consciousness, but sentimental and had nature's quality. Thus, real humans always had the natural needs to eat, wear and live. Besides, they would definitely find their mates in the natural world; and the natural world was the existence form of all material elements. Humans could not survive without it. (G. T. Wang & Wang, 2009)

It can be seen that, since humans are inseparable from the nature, the nature cannot be separated from itself.

In human's material life, and the progress history of human history and consciousness, the natural world, as for human beings, is a dynamic partner. The emerging and development of ecological science and humanity ecological awareness are the best evidence to prove this point. The changes of natural world facilitated by humans themselves will decide the possibility of development of human's history and limits in return. (O'Connor, 2003)

On this basis, the nature records the natural attitude and self-knowledge of modern humans. From the perspective of human's strength and wisdom that natural records, buildings of various styles, and constantly extensive infrastructure construction give prominence to human's necessity to do something to the nature; from the perspective of human's misdeed that nature records, the intensifying shortage of water, exacerbation of dirty air, and recurrent natural disasters all warn that human's activities have their own limits---leave something undone to the nature. Consequently, humans should respect and treat nature well, do thing per natural rules, because for humans, protect the nature is to protect themselves, while harm the nature is to harm themselves.

2.2 Sustainable Development of Human Themselves

Human is a social existence, and the key of whether its development complies with sustainable development lies on whether the generational equity and intergenerational equity are implemented. Furthermore, generational equity and intergenerational equity stipulate the limits that humans can do to the nature, while the things humans shall not do meanwhile. As far as intergenerational equity is concerned, Marx thought

the relationship between human and nature, human and their history, all met enormous productivity, capital and environment

that the former generation passed to the following one. Although on one hand, these productivity, capital and environment would be changed by the new generation, but on the other hand, they also stipulated the living condition of the new generation itself in advance to make it acquire certain development and possess special characteristics. It can be seen that this point of view indicated that humans created environment, and similarly, environment created humans. (*Marx and Engels anthology (the 1st volume)*, 2009, pp.544-545)

As we can see that the humanity history is the successive replacement of all ages, and every generation implements object activities on the basis of inheriting natural resources, capitals and productivity that the predecessors leave to them. Therefore, the sustainable development of humans themselves decides that humans do something to the nature when they leave something undone to nature, taking others' and descendants' rely and demands on nature into consideration. Besides, Marx gave such an elaboration on land view that,

from the perspective of an advanced social-economic formation, some individuals' private ownership of land was the same as one's private ownership of another, which were both ridiculous. Even the whole society, one nation, and even if the total of all existing societies were not owners of land. They were just the occupants and users of land, and they should behave like good parents, passing the improved land to the decedents. (Marx, 2004, p.878)

Hereby, Marx believed that in socialist society or communist society, people were not owners of land, but barely possessed the identity of being the occupants or users of land, which decided that people's production activities should start from the overall interests of human beings, consciously use, protect and improve the land instead of arbitrarily plundering, abusing and destructive land. Only based on this, can the land resources be used permanently and comply with the survival principles of intergenerational equity, namely land could be passed to the decedents after one generation enjoyed, not only satisfying needs of modern people, but also not jeopardizing the viability of decedents and truly implementing sustainable development.

3. THE UNITY OF "DONE" AND "UNDONE" : PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES

As stated above, the purposiveness of human's practical activities determines that human must do something to the nature; but human's activities must respect the nature, so this basic characteristics and objective law determine that human must leave something undone to the nature. In the sense, Marxist methodology that deals with the relation between human and nature is the unification of "do something" and "leave something undone" to the nature. The generation of modern ecological crisis and survival crisis indicates that humans fail to handle the relation between human and nature. As to how to deal with this relationship, there exist two opposite views currently:

One is to “revere the nature”, the natural nonaction that non-anthropocentrism proposes; another is to “control the nature”, the reckless behavior that anthropocentrism proposes. The former is satirized by the academic filed as “ecological authoritarianism”, while the latter is criticized as “human chauvinism”. Apparently, neither of these two is not scientific methodology. Marxist ecological methodology sublates and amends above two methods.

3.1 The Sublation and Amendment of Marxist Ecological Methodology to “Revere the Nature”

Marxist ecological methodology is not the natural nonaction and to “revere the nature” that non-anthropocentrism proposes. Non-anthropocentrism advocates to obey the nature and revere life, also object to human’s practical behavior to nature from different extensions. But Marxism believed that the natural world would not satisfy humans automatically in real life, so humans were bound to carry out active activities to the nature world to meet their demands. The natural world without existence of humanity objectivity was not in existence, thus the nature world where humans lived was “real nature world”, and “humanized nature world”. Marx pointed out that

the nature world that came into being in human history, namely in the generating process of human society was the human’s real nature world; in hence, the nature world formed by industry--- although in a catabolic form, was the real and Anthropology’s nature world. (*Complete works of Marx and Engels (the 42nd volume)*, 1979, p.128)

It can be seen that, the “real nature world” that Marx focused on was “outcome of industry and social condition”, which was not generated by the natural nonaction that advocated to “revere the nature”, but a sort of “humanized nature world” (*Complete works of Marx and Engels (the 3rd volume)*, 1965, p.48), and the result of objectification of human’s essential strength, as well as the consequence of nature remaking by humans through abiding by laws of practice. However, laws of practice not only stipulate the size, range, scale and extent of things done to the nature, but also stipulate that of things undone to the nature. Thus, in the aspects of methodology that deals with relation between humans and the nature, Marxism held that “let nature take its course” did not mean humans should bow in worship trembly in front of the nature, nor do nothing and be guided by the destiny, but mean that humans shall obey the natural laws to do something. “The ethic awareness to revere life was definitely necessary, but it only came from practice and was bound by practice. After all, the first historical action that differentiated humans and animals was not because they had thought, but because they”started to produce the means of livelihood they required”; what we need to know is that people may not have the ethics consciousness of reverence for life at the start. “If the spirit have s bad start, it is doomed to be stuck in materials”; What we need to know is that thinking, rationality, spirit, ethics, and consciousness are not referred to the absolute spirit

and absolute rationality that independent of themselves at the start, but their own thinking, their own rationality, the thinking in the practice and the rationality in the practice. People are natural existence at first, “men who are realistic, visible, and stand on solid earth to breathe all the forces of nature”, and men who cannot be inseparable from the practice a day. It is thus clear that the opinion of leaving something undone that advocated by Marxist ecological methodology neither refers to attempt and accomplish nothing of tool rationality to nature. In this sense, the Marxist ecological methodology opposes negative inaction of nature and “positively: interaction of nature.”

3.2 Re-Domination of Marxist Ecological methodology on “Dominating Nature”

Marxist ecological methodology does not mean “controlling nature” recklessly advocated by anthropocentrism. When dealing with the relationship between human and nature, anthropocentrism thinks that human use themselves as the center and the purpose, use nature as the tool and the method. In other words, human rationality determines the principles of methodology of human dominating nature. Marxism thinks that

in practice, the universality of people is shown in changing the whole nature into the inorganic body of people, and people’s essential strength is displayed and confirmed by this. However, natural things such as environment, conditions, materials, etc. constitute human practical activities. Their physical, chemical and biological processes have their own natures and rules; they are independent of men and run independently, and directly restrict the development of the labor production process and the productivity. Therefore, man is also the passive and restricted being things. (Han, 2010)

It is thus clear that when human remakes the nature through practice activities, people’s thoughts and behaviors should follow the objective law. The allowable scope of the objective law is the greatest degree of freedom of human in nature. Just as Engels said: “freedom is understanding the laws of nature rather than being fantasy to get rid of them to be independent so that it can be able to plan to make the laws of nature to be certain purposes.” (*Marx and Engels Anthology (the 3rd volume)*, 1995, p.455) Lenin also pointed out that the outside world and the laws of nature were the foundation of people’s purposeful activities. Based on this, Marxism ecological methodology thinks that people’s survival state which requires both survival and struggling in nature determines their domination of nature, but human domination of nature cannot be indiscriminate. Human domination of nature cannot like dominating slaves advocated by Descartes. People’s labor practice must adhere to the laws of natural material transformation. Only people consciously treat nature on the basis of understanding and grasping the laws of nature can achieve the goal of scientific and rational remaking nature, constantly make the nature humanized, so as to adapt to, meet and safeguard objective requirements of their own development. In this sense, Marxist ecological methodology not only opposes

the inaction of people on the nature, but also opposes the indiscrimination of people on the nature.

3.3 Practice: Unity of “Doing Something” and “Doing Nothing”

In Marxist philosophy, practice is the specific objective activity for human. People obtain consumer goods from the nature through the material productive labor, and regard the nature as the element of their own lives and the basis of their existence. “Labor is the process between man and nature firstly and the process for people to cause, adjust, and control the material transformation between human and nature through their own activities.” (*Complete works of Marx and Engels (the 23rd volume)*, 1972, p.201)

From the perspective of material transformation theory, on the one hand, Marx pointed out the preexistence of the nature, and also emphasized that people’s labor practice must followed the laws of nature material transformation; on the other hand, Marx also pointed out that labor was the conscious practice activity that confirmed with purposes. In Marx’s opinion, practice is the medium that communicates the human and the nature. The purposefulness of people’s practice activities generated the inside dimensions of the people, and determined the necessity of practice activities—do something to nature; however, people’s practice activities must respect basic characteristics and objective laws of the nature, which generated the external dimensions of the nature, and determined the boundary of the practice activities--do nothing to nature. It is thus clear that Marxist methodology of dealing with the relationship between human and nature is the unity of “doing something” and “doing nothing” for people to nature and the unity of the inside dimensions of the people and the external dimensions of the nature. Namely, realize the inside dimensions of the people under the precondition of respecting external dimensions of the nature. In this sense, on the one hand, people should do something which should be built on the basis and the premise of doing nothing; on the other hand, people should do nothing which is built on the basis and the promise of doing something. Based on this, people’s “doing nothing” and “doing something” on nature are not only unified, but also complement each other. “Doing something” out of doing nothing can only make objects deviate from the right track, leading to “things going contrary to wishes” or “more haste, less speed”; likewise, “Doing nothing” out of doing something can only make objective activities lose subjectivity and motility, leading to the instinctualization and animalization of people’s activities. (Sun, 2008)

CONCLUSION

Marxist ecological methodology corrected the “go along with nature” of non-anthropocentrism, confirmed the rationality and the necessity of “doing something”

for people to the nature, denied the anthropocentrism ignored the objective laws of nature, blindly transformed the nature, and discriminated the nature, and confirmed the rationality and the necessity of “doing nothing” of people on nature at the same time. It is thus clear that it was the finality and regularity of practice activities that advocated by Marx that generated the Marxist ecological methodology. Using scientific ecological methodology can realize the “settlement” for nature, solve the ecological crisis, and build the ecological civilization.

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