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The Generative Logic, Main Content and Contemporary Value of the Ecological Thought of Marx and Engels

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Abstract: The ecological thought of Marx and Engels is an important part of Marxist theory, and is the theoretical guidance and guide to action for the harmonious development of human and nature in contemporary human society. The ecological thought of Marx and Engels is formed on the basis of in-depth criticism and reasonable absorption of the natural thought of Hegel and Feuerbach in the context of the age of the advancing industrial revolution. Marx and Engels have important theoretical and practical value in contemporary thinking and solving ecological problems, as they demonstrate the priority of nature, the dialectical relationship between humans and nature, the capitalist system as the root of ecological crisis, and communism as the main content of achieving an ideal society of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

Keywords: The ecological thought of Marx and Engels; Harmonious coexistence between humans and nature; Contemporary values

1. Preface

Since the outbreak of global ecological crises in the 1960s, a series of people who are concerned about the future direction of human destiny have begun to think about ways to save from multiple fields. Ecologism and ecological movements have also developed worldwide. This not only demonstrates people's longing for a better life, but also highlights humanity's pursuit of sustainable development. As the earliest ecological philosophers, Marx and Engels, through their insight into the essence of human beings and the capitalist mode of production, deeply pondered the relationship between humans and nature, laying a philosophical foundation for rescuing ecological crises, and providing theoretical guidance and action guidelines for the development of human society in harmony with purpose and regularity.

2. The Generative Logic of Marx and Engels' Ecological Thought

Marx once said: "Any genuine philosophy is the essence of its own spirit of the times"^{[1][220]}, which shows that the generation of philosophy is closely linked and inseparable from the foundation of the times. Similarly, the ecological thought of Marx and Engels was not born out of thin air. It was formed on the basis of Marx and Engels' in-depth criticism and rational absorption of Hegelian dialectics and Feuerbach's old materialism in the context of the continuous advancement of the industrial revolution.

2.1 The Historical Background of the Emergence of Marx and Engels' Ecological Thought

From the mid-18th century to the 1860s, major capitalist countries in Europe completed the first industrial revolution, and the capitalist mode of production rapidly expanded globally, achieving rapid development of social productivity. However, with the continuous advancement of the Industrial Revolution and the acceleration of urbanization, problems such as the uncontrolled use of natural resources, the massive discharge of production waste, and the separation of urban and rural areas have also emerged, leading to serious ecological problems. Engels pointed out, "Regarding the phenomena that this astonishing economic change inevitably brings... all countries that have already or are undergoing this process have to some extent experienced such situations. Land depletion - such as in the United States; forest disappearance - such as in Britain and France, and currently in Germany and the United States; climate change and river siltation are probably more severe in Russia than anywhere else."^[2]In this context, Marx and Engels deeply analyzed the reality of ecological deterioration in capitalist society and mercilessly exposed the social harm caused by capitalist production relations.

2.2 The Philosophical Basis of Marx and Engels' Ecological Thought

The ecological thought of Marx and Engels was formed on the basis of criticizing and inheriting Hegelian dialectics and Feuerbach's old materialism. As the culmination of German classical philosophy, Hegel's dialectical thinking had a profound impact on the formation of Marx and Engels' ecological thought. Hegel believed that nature is a whole composed of different stages that are interrelated and mutually transformed. "One stage is bound to arise from another stage, and it is the closest truth to derive its other stage."^[3] In addition, he emphasized

that the material and motion of nature are inseparable, fully affirming the important role of human practice in nature. However, Hegel's view of nature is based on idealism, emphasizing the "absolute spirit". Everything is the alienation and externalization of ideas. In this way, humans and nature will inevitably become products of the "absolute spirit", and the relationship between the two will eventually move towards abstraction. Marx pointed out that "the nature that is abstractly understood, self-sufficient, and determined to be separated from humans is also non-existent for humans."^{[1]220} broke through Hege's view of nature under the "absolute spirit" and approached the understanding of nature from a materialist perspective. Feuerbach, as a 19th-century German philosopher, also exerted a significant influence on the formation of Marx and Engels' ecological thought with his old materialist ideas. Marx and Engels criticized Feuerbach's mechanism and intuitionism in his old materialist thought, while absorbing the basic viewpoints of his materialism. On ecological issues, Marx and Engels' ecological thought criticized Feuerbach for seeing only man's dependence on nature and ignoring man's subjective initiative as well as his social practicality. Marx and Engels adhered to a dialectical stance, fully affirming the important significance of practical activities for humanity, and pointed out that things should be understood as human sensory activities and as practices.^{[1]503} Marx and Engels, while criticizing Hegel and Feuerbach's natural thought, drew reasonable nutrients from them and ultimately formed a rich and profound ecological thought of Marx and Engels.

3. The Main Content of Marx and Engels' Ecological Thought

3.1 The Priority of Nature

Marx and Engels pointed out that "humans are products of nature"^{[4]374}. Nature existed before humans and is the foundation for human survival and development. Human beings should respect nature, conform to nature, protect nature, and coexist harmoniously with nature. They believe that the development of human society cannot be separated from nature, and human production activities must follow natural laws and cannot violate them, otherwise they will be punished by nature. Therefore, humans should regard nature as their inorganic body, and loving nature is loving themselves.

3.2 The dialectical relationship between humans and nature

Marx and Engels believed that there is a dialectical relationship between humans and nature. On the one hand, humans transform nature through labor practice to meet their own needs; On the other hand, nature also has a negative impact on human production activities, affecting the development of human society. This dialectical relationship indicates that humans must correctly handle the relationship between humans and nature, transforming and protecting nature, and achieving harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

3.3 The capitalist system is the root cause of ecological crisis

The essence of ecological crisis is the inevitable result of the contradiction between the unlimited profit seeking nature of capitalist production methods and the limited ecological resources. To solve this contradiction, it is necessary to "completely transform our production methods up to now, and together with this production method, to completely liberate humans and nature from the enslavement of capital"^{[4]1000}. From this perspective, Marx and Engels' ecological thinking has clear practical provisions, which regulate the interaction between humans and nature by transforming private ownership to constrain the disorderly proliferation of capital, and gradually restore a healthy and good metabolism between humans and nature.

3.4 The Practical Direction of Communism

Marx and Engels emphasized that "communism is the true solution to the contradictions between humans and nature, and between humans and humans."^[5] Communism is an ideal society that achieves harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. In communist society, people will break free from the pursuit of material interests and achieve true freedom and equality. At the same time, communist society will also achieve rational allocation and efficient utilization of resources, avoiding excessive development and waste of natural resources. In such a society, a dual reconciliation between people and between humans and nature can be achieved.

4. The Contemporary Value of Marx and Engels' Ecological Thought

4.1 Theoretical value

The ecological ideas of Marx and Engels have important theoretical value for contemporary society. Firstly, it provides people with a new perspective to examine the relationship between humans and nature, reminding people to respect, adapt to, protect, and coexist harmoniously with nature. Secondly, it provides people with a scientific methodology to study and solve ecological problems, that is, using the methods of dialectical materialism and historical materialism to analyze the root causes of ecological crises from the perspective of social systems and seek solutions. Finally, it provides people with an ideal social model to achieve harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, known as a communist society. These theoretical values have important guiding significance for the construction of ecological civilization in our contemporary society.

4.2 Practical value

The ecological ideas of Marx and Engels also have important practical value. Firstly, it provides people with a scientific guiding principle to promote the construction of ecological civilization, which is to adhere to the people-centered development concept and achieve coordination between economic and social development and environmental protection. Secondly, it provides people with an effective way to solve ecological problems by reforming social systems, abolishing capitalist systems, achieving communism, and fundamentally solving ecological crises. Finally, it provides people with a positive social action to promote ecological civilization construction, advocating green lifestyles, promoting green development, and building a resource-saving and environmentally friendly society. These practical values play an important role in promoting the construction of ecological civilization in our contemporary society.

In short, the ecological thought of Marx and Engels, as an important component of the Marxist theoretical system, has important guiding significance for us to understand and solve ecological problems. In the context of today's global ecological crisis, people should further study and study the ecological ideas of Marx and Engels, and contribute wisdom and strength to promote sustainable development of human society.

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