

Review Article

Defending Human Value: To Rediscover Marx and Marxism

Chen Yan

China University of Political Science and Law.

*Corresponding Author
Chen Yan

Abstract: Marxism was always criticized for its overlook for human value. However, it is a misunderstanding of Marxism and Marx himself. Terry Eagleton, in his book *Why Marx Was Right*, listed and refuted ten prevailing misreading towards Marxism respectively. Eagleton rediscovered the human-value-oriented feature of Marxism by using his unique critical logic, and proposed further argument in terms of politics, humanity and economics. This paper seeks to analyze the critical logic of the argument by Eagleton, and straighten out his view on Marx and Marxism.

Keywords: Marxism, critical logic, human value.

I. INTRODUCTION

The interpretation of the book *Why Marx Was Right* is never something fresh, and the research of Marxism on human value is far from novelty, however, the author creatively downs the ten seemingly irrelevant points of refutation to the root of Eagleton's theory on Marxism in this book, defending human value. Because of its originality, some opinions are personal-constrained and unconvincing, which deserves readers' understanding.

II. The Critical Logic Reasoning of Eagleton

The book *Why Marx Was Right*, as an analysis-of-argument essay, is imbued with the wisdom of critical reasoning. The book lists ten chapters in which the author reveals ten common prejudices towards Marx as well as Marxism, and reputes them respectively in his logical reasoning, which is not that perfect and needs introspection. Thus, it is meaningful to have a critical analysis towards his critical logic reasoning.

In brief, all these can be generally divided into two parts: premise and statement. Premise is the background of statement; and statement is the conclusion of premise. And there is the logic bridge linking these two elements (Killoran, 2006: 8). This seemingly simple reasoning is actually the originator of almost all various derivative forms of inference, including the famous syllogism.

The valid argument towards the inference statement is divided into three methods: first, to question the validity of premise, such as the adequacy of data collection or the source of evidence; second, to question the suitability of statement, such as applying for exaggeration; third, to cut off the logic bridge providing the possibility of linking two parts. Besides, there are lots of forms of seemingly correct invalid argument include shifting the topic, attacking the rival's other opinions, questioning the validity of rival's position, etc. Eagleton's critical logic throughout the book is confined to that as well.

Marxism is criticized to have created material deprivation when put in practice, and Eagleton refutes that capitalism has also led to no less famines than Marxism in reality; Marxism is criticized to have given rise to riots and upheavals when carried out, and Eagleton rebut that capitalism has also generated social turbulence as well. Such refutation is actually invalid in the strict sense. However, resting on such refutation has never satisfied Eagleton. It is obvious in the first example that premise refers to the fact that almost all the nations that choose Marxism inclined to break out the famines, and statement is judgment that Marxism is imbued with the defects of material deprivation. To start with, Eagleton questions the validity of premise by stating that it is never Marx's intention to realize Marxism in the nations lacking in material foundation, thus it is not the Marxism itself to blame. Then, he cuts off the logic bridge by stating that those so-called

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Marxism enforced in many socialist countries is not the real Marxism in reality. He explains that in the whole book by clarifying the misreading of Marxism. "We have to admit that the critical logic of Eagleton lacks coherence despite of its profound social meaning in it"(Fang Yu, 2006: 5). That is to say, the refutation is not that obvious, even some obscure in some way in that the whole underlying critical logic is revealed to readers gradually throughout the whole book.

III. Defending Human Value: To Rediscover Marx and Marxism

The theoretical foundation of Eagleton is human-value-oriented Marxism towards the ten misreads. Starting from this, he progresses further argument in terms of politics, humanity and economics, which clarifies a real Marx and the real Marxism.

3.1 In Political Demension

In terms of political section, Eagleton mainly refutes two mainstream fallacies on Marxism. The first is of its obsession with class struggle; the second concerns advocating violent political action. On such criticism, Eagleton argues in details respectively. However, be his argument unassailable as appears, there is still some underlying ambiguity or contradiction, which is never that convincing.

3.1.1 Debate over Class Struggle of Marxism

Some people hold that social mobility nowadays has eliminated the cliché of class struggle. What's more, "the working class which they fondly imagine will usher in socialism has disappeared almost without trace"(Eagleton, 2011: 174). That is to say, the archaic theory of class struggle by Marx is only a thing to the past.

Eagleton refutes this opinion by clarifying the value assessment of class position irrelevant with discrimination, which gives the support that the theory of eliminating a class or another by Marxism is only sheer nonsense. What's more, the doctrine that working class has perished lacks solid evidence, considering the fact that the structure of class has evolved all the time. Actually, the concept of the working class has greatly extended to salesmen and intellectuals, and nowadays is stronger than ever with the booming of the third world. However, the extension of this concept is probably Eagleton's personal opinion, which deserves further demonstration. Marx did not object capitalism blindly just like drugs or smoking, but pointed out the merits of it as well, one of which capitalism bestowed to the world is the working class, stepping to the historical stage in accordance with the interests of bourgeois, but growing to an awesome social power, competent enough of replacing the status of bourgeois, which is also imbued with ironic colors in the conception of history from Marxism. Marx favors the working class not because of the unique merits they share that enable them to shoulder the history responsibility, but the

particular position they stand in the whole productivity model which provides them with a clear picture of the whole mechanism as well as the technical and political visions to shake off the existing yoke to realize the actual interests to individuals, namely, the humankind liberation transmitter.

By analyzing the underlying critical logic beneath words, it is possible to clarify the position of Eagleton on Marxism. To start with, he soothed the discrimination hue towards class as well as class struggle. However, he also emphasized that class struggle does not equalize eliminating bourgeois. Eagleton applied his dialectical thinking to view Capitalism in terms of its merits and demerits. And last, Eagleton further explained the suitability of practical situation for working class to accomplish its historical mission.

3.1.2 Fallacy of Violent Revolution Imbued With Marxism

Some anti-Marxists hold that Marxists "reject a sensible course of moderate, piecemeal reform and opt instead for the bloodstained chaos of revolution" (Eagleton, 2011: 193), and what's more, "this is one of several senses in which Marxism and democracy are at daggers drawn" (Eagleton, 2011: 193).

On that point, Eagleton gave his refutation that it may be common to acknowledge revolution as a brutal thing glutted with violence, whereas see to social reform as a civilized cause brimming with holy hue, however, it is not the real case all the time in reality. The civil rights movement in the United States, for example, named as social reform, yet involves death, riot and brutal repression. Actually, "in the colonial-dominated Latin America of the 18th and 19th centuries, every attempt at liberal reform sparked off violent social conflict" (Eagleton, 2011: 193). Some revolution, by contrast, has been relatively peaceful, just like velvet. "Not many people died in the Dublin uprising of 1916, which was to result in partial independence for Ireland. Surprisingly little blood was split in the Bolshevik revolution of 1917" (Eagleton, 2011: 194). There is no doubt that brutal civil war ensued right after the Bolshevik wrested political power, however, the real reason is never the defects imbued with Marxism itself but the brutal attack by national right-wing forces and foreign invaders towards the new order of Communism as the White Movement. "It is no clarifying the exact reason leading to bloody revolution of Marxism (Huang Shiquan, 2011: 71)". Marx only regards revolution as a method instead of so-called ultimate end. Moreover, even Marx himself admitted that some revolutions had to last even hundreds of years which could never be solved simply by brutal turmoil.

The unique logic specialty Eagleton applied in this section is giving the counter-examples, getting rid of the inherent thinking yoke about revolution and social reform. He further listed other important elements, which may guide the masses to touch the nucleus of true causes contributing to the brutal revolution around Marxism.

3.2 Defending Human value

In this dimension, Eagleton divides humanity into two sectors, spiritual world and human nature, in both of which exist fallacies respectively.

3.2.1 Misreading the Spiritual Worldviews of Marxism

In terms of spiritual world, many people hold that Marx believed that nothing exists but materials. And “he had no interest in the spiritual aspects of humanity, and saw human consciousness as just a reflex of the material world.” And “he was brutally dismissive of religion, and regarded morality simply as a question of the end justifying the means.” “There is an obvious route from this dreary, soulless vision of humanity to the atrocities of Stalin and other disciples of Marx” (Eagleton, 2011: 142).

What the world is made up of, material? Or spirit? Discussion like this never draw Marx’s attention, considering ignorant of which, he is more of a romantic thinker than a cold theorist. In contrast, the fallacies about Marx are simply what the materialists advocate in Enlightenment Movement of 18th century, placing human beings into a passive position, which are regarded as the pure ideology by Marx. Marx never agreed with these, instead, he put great emphasis on the autonomy of humanity, imbued with democratic hue. In that sense, Marx is more of an anti-philosopher than a philosopher in that he questioned ideas in his own theories, and although he managed to maintain rational himself, he never looked upon reason as the ultimate end of the world. What’s more, Marx holds that our thinking is formed with the transformation of our world, which is the requirement of our bodily needs. It is the phenomena Marx described as dissimilation that if theorists only regard reality as a thing of nature, unexplainable quality and independence of self-movement, and are totally unaware of the fact that reality comes out of the hands of human beings. Thus, Marx holds that our ideal thinking is closely related to the material life, in contrast to which some idealists are ignorant, the relationship between material and spiritual world, totally compatible with Marx’s belief. That is why, when philosophers like Locke and Hume start from our senses, Marx probes into where our senses themselves are from. In some sense, human beings are the objects of material world, partly belonging to nature and partly belonging to history, in the meantime they are the reflection of human’s consciousness.

In this section, what the author applied most is the comparison, through which the author gave a clearer picture of the theory of Marxism to readers. By comparing Marx with the materialists in Enlightenment Movement of 18th century, the author clarifies the misread the masses hold about what Marxism aims at in reality. By comparing Marx with philosophers like Locke and Hume, Eagleton emphasizes that in fact Marx never separated material from spiritual world.

3.2.2 Misunderstandings Marx’s Opinion of Human Nature

The book lists two main fallacies of Marxism towards human nature, overlooking human nature and dreaming of a kind of perfect human nature. The author has a detailed argument against these two fallacies respectively.

In terms of the first misreading, Eagleton firstly provides the background information and gradually moved towards the target, like peeling the onions. To start with, the author accentuates that the greatness of Marx never lies in those brand-new concepts he created, such as communism and social class. The determination of economic basis towards superclass and the development of production mode, are not invented by Marx as well. Then Eagleton clarifies that class struggle, a vital factor in the theory of Marxism, does not necessarily means that all the social history is made of class struggle, but class struggle plays a fundamental role in the whole social history. The unique feature of Marxism is the combination of class struggle and production mode, contributing to a brand-new view of history. In the view of Marx, the productivity forces will develop, but may not be necessarily booming all the time, sometimes may stagger as well. Only if the productivity forces of the former class boomed to a certain level, can it be possible for a new social class to take over the relay baton in the historical stage. Even though Marx held that material treasures might corrode our morality, he did not separate material with morality. Because in his view, it is a part in developing productivity forces to bring the human creativity into full play, which is the exact reflection of human value.

In terms of the second fallacy, some people may believe that “Marxism is a dream of utopia. It believes in the possibility of a perfect society, without hardship, suffering, violence or conflict. Under communism there will be no rivalry, selfishness, possessiveness, competition or inequality.” And obviously, “this astonishingly naive vision springs from a credulous faith in human nature. Human viciousness is simply set aside (Eagleton, 2011: 78)”. In a word, is it likely that a communism society could be realized in the future?

The nucleus of this topic lies in the understanding of Marx's view about future. To start with, Eagleton demonstrates that actually "he does not show much interest in the future at all, and it is a notorious fact about his work that he has very little to say in detail about what a socialist or communist society would look like"(Eagleton, 2011: 79). Just as the Jews were traditionally forbidden to foretell the future, which can be seen in the Bible where the great saints never tries to foresee the future but criticize folks' degradation, greed for fortunes or lust for power, and give warnings, hence Marx in his theory is mostly silent on what might lie ahead. Marx realized that it is the real practice instead of the dreamy blueprint to accomplish the political mission. "The point of Marx is not to dream an ideal future, but to resolve the contradictions in the present which prevent a better future from coming about. When this has been achieved, there will be no more need for people like himself" and "The future, then, is not just to be tacked on to the present, any more than adolescence is just tacked on to childhood"(Eagleton, 2011: 86). That demonstrates the importance to make a step in changing the world for a certain purpose instead of waiting negatively, if not trying to predict the future. And that is the reason why Marx regarded socialism as a decisive break with the present.

"A Utopian thinker might exhort us to rise above these conflicts in the name of love and fellowship, Marx himself takes a very different line. He does indeed believe in love and fellowship, but he does not think they will be achieved by some phony harmony"(Eagleton, 2011: 92).

In a word, Marx is skeptical of high-minded moralism and wary of idealism, which provides a further proof that the criticism held by the masses in the beginning is the pseudo-proposition. What's more, the assertions that Marxism dreams foolishly of a future in which everyone will be comradesly and cooperatively all lack the solid support from Marx's works.

However, on the other hand, Marx did notice some virtues in humanity, which makes it possible to realize Marxism with the concerted effort from global cooperation, the just way to achieve Marxism in his opinion.

3.3. In Economic Dimension

Many people hold the belief that "Marxism reduces everything to economics. It is a form of economic determinism"(Eagleton, 2011: 121), which is in fact objected by Marx himself. That is to say, "the true complexity of human affairs is passed over for a monochrome vision of history. In his obsession with economics, Marx was simply an inverted image of the capitalist system he opposed. His thought is at odds with the pluralist outlook of modern societies, conscious as they are that the varied range of historical

experience cannot be crammed into a single rigid framework"(Eagleton, 2011: 121).

There is no doubt that almost all phenomena in history have some associations with economy, which Marx certainly agrees with. Without material production, there could never be civilization. However, it is never Marx's intention to ignore other elements in determining the process of history, but the absolute resolution in realizing the fundamental role of economy in human history. There exist amazing underlying laws beneath human history all the time, such as exploitation, riots, etc., based on which Marx regards history as a not-that-colorful pattern unknown to the masses, which is also the essence of Marxism in economy-determination theory.

In addition to Marxist economics, there is another famous economics doctrine, principles of western economics, which has received excellent reviews. Thus, it is really meaningful to compare these two economics doctrines. The essence of western economic theory is the ten principles of economy, among which inset the three dimensions: individuals in decision-making, mutual dealing of each other and the proper operation of the whole economy (Mankiw, 2010: 2). In the first dimension, it demonstrates all kinds of costs, possible reasons and incentives that may prompt people to make different decisions. The core in this section, for my money, is the subjective initiative of individuals, the rational men. However, the emphasis of subjective initiative among individuals by Marx is never insufficient enough but always misread as discussed above. Although Marx's theory about individuals pales immediately compared with the ones like Benthamism imbued with the maximum utilities among individuals, it shed great light on the creative initiative of people, which is of vital importance to the booming of the whole economy. "Marxism's role is also digging out the utmost potential from individuals"(Guo Taihui, 2009: 16), which, in my opinion, certainly involves the business talents. In terms of the second section, mutual dealing, actually, there are two sub-dimensions -- free market and government regulation, which are in the parallel. However, it is so likely for us to concentrate inclusively on the "invisible hand" put forward by Adams when talking about economics essentials in western world. That is to say, the government regulations and controls emphasized by Marxism are not compatible with the roots of western economics essentials in reality. What's more, when the results are reviewed, free market has transformed the Great Britain into a powerful industrialized nation, so do regulations and controls to the Soviet Union. Moreover, with the introduction of welfare system in western world, people gradually begin to realize the limit of free-lance system, and voice for macro-regulations for economy nowadays is getting louder than ever. Thus, the statement that Marxism economics should be placed to the museum lacks solid evidence. In

terms of the third dimension, the whole operation of economy, the ten principles put emphasize on the fiscal and monetary policies of the government and the proper distribution of labor power, including the dealing with inflation, unemployment rate and proper balancing the distribution of labor power. In Marxism economics, there are even more words than the ten principles in terms of labor power. However, in terms of solid policies, the two theories are in the different angles: economics essentials laid its foundation on the solid contemporary economical figures, whereas Marxism shed more light on the deduction of economical regular patterns in history, but it is no judging which one is superior to the other, because they are totally bred on different values.

IV. Marxism: A System Vibrant With Energy Guarding Human Value

“All the most interesting radical movements of the past four decades have sprung up from outside Marxism, such as Feminism, environmentalism, gay and ethnic politics, animal rights, anti-globalization, the peace movement: these have now taken over from an antiquated commitment to class struggle, and represent new forms of political activism which have left Marxism well behind”(Eagleton, 2011: 225).

To start with, Eagleton states the fact that Capitalism is no way to die out in a short period, and meantime, the trend of anti-capitalism shows no signs in ebbing away. And that is why, Marxism, as one of the famous anti-capitalism theories is no way to go into the museum in no time. Marx neglected the gender differences, in other words gender-blind, in almost all his works, giving a strong support to Feminism Movement. Besides Feminism, Marxism provided the indispensable starting point for most of the great first-generation theorists of the anticolonial wars. “In the 1920s and 1930s, practically the only men and women to be found preaching racial equality were communists. Most African nationalism after World War II, from Nkrumah and Fanon onwards, relied on some version of Marxism or socialism. Most Communist Parties in Asia incorporated nationalism into their agendas”(Wang Jie, 2008: 82). What needs to be stressed is that Marx’s personal standing on the issue of colonization is a little ambiguous, which may incur some criticism. However, Marx never attempted to compromise with Capitalism and to witness the brutality of colonization, but acknowledged that through colonization modernized factors could spread to uncivilized regions in need of material foundation for the realization of socialism.

Another factor of Marxism Eagleton fails to mention in this book is about the applicability of Marxism in the long term. Marxism is a theory never static but vibrant with energy. “Society has evolved to a certain period in which traditional Marxism has also evolved correspondingly, making it a golden rule”(Yi Xingxia, 2001: 61). There is never a forever-correct

physics law not only because of the development of technology but the stability of almost all the physical laws themselves. However, it is never the case with the theory of Marxism, which, as Ernest Mandel remarked, is always open, always critical, and always self-critical. Throughout the history since the birth of Marxism, it has sprung into various manifestations in different places and different time from their original matrix, classical Marxism, which denotes the collection of social, economic and political theories expounded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. However, classical Marxism was to blame for its academic institutionalization which is too shallow and detached from political action. For instance, Zimbabwean Trotskyist Alex Callinicos, a professional academic, stated that “its practitioners remind one of Narcissus, who in the Greek legend fell in love with his own reflection... Sometimes it is necessary to devote time to clarifying and developing the concepts that we use, but indeed for Western Marxists this has become an end in itself. The result is a body of writings incomprehensible to all but a tiny minority of highly qualified scholars”(Alex, 2010: 68). Actually, Marxism has various forms afterwards, such as Marxism-Leninism, Post-Stalin Moscow-aligned communism, Euro-communism, anti-revisionism, Maoism etc. All the revisions are made for certain historical features, which fully reflects the vibrant energy fitting the historical trends.

Nowadays, a new branch of Marxism, known as Ecological Marxism, is growing prevalent in the arena of academics around the globe, catering to the actual awkward situation of natural resources. However, it is never a brand-new concept totally divorced from classical Marxism created by Marx. In the works such as *Capital*, Marx states that the natural ecological environment is the natural basis of human material production activity from the angle of economics. The first point Marx made regarding nature is that nature is the natural basis and precondition for the labor of human being. Just as pointed in his work that “on the one hand, nature provides living materials for labor in such a scene, namely, there is no labor without labor objects; on the other hand, nature provides means of subsistence in a narrower sense, namely to meet workers’ body demand for existence”. This is because “workers realize their labor, and spread their productivity, and produce output and produce themselves” in nature. Engels also pointed out “nature provides material for physical labor, while labor turns material into wealth”. It is obvious that both Marx and Engels affirmed that nature is primarily the premise and precondition of the survival and material production activity for human being. What’s more, Marx also held that division of society and cooperation in the social production and economic development, even the life style of human existence, rely on nature, and different nature bases shape different economic structures. “If not the foresight imbued with Marxism towards ecological

issues, how can it survive the changeable world nowadays (Zhao When, 2011: 55)?”

And thus, based on the ecological indicators of the classical theories of Marxism, the modern Ecological Marxism emerged as the time requires. When human beings encountered with survival crisis, like environmental and ecological issues, it is really beneficial to combine ecology with Marxism, imbued with the actual practical meaning. Ecological Marxism, as a branch of Marxism in the United States, is put forward by social ecologist and racial plutonomist James O'Connor in his recent work *Natural Reason -- Ecology Marxism Research*. In the view of Ecological Marxists, Capitalists regard nature as a water faucet and sewage pool at the same time. Which is never compatible with the sustainable development idea nowadays? Thus, just as O'Connor pointed out, the rhythm and the cycle of nature itself are fundamentally different from the rhythm of the capital operation and cycle. And they realized the anti-ecological essence of Capitalism, which enable them to bestow Ecological Marxism with a new ecological principle, and make it fit well with the current world. And just as discussed above, Marxism will still be vibrant with energy with its proponents' renewal constantly and remains a charming doctrine for the scholars around the globe.

V. CONCLUSION

In a word, Marxism, seemingly a piece of cliché in some way, will never perish because of its strong vitality. And Eagleton has pointed out the truth about Marx and Marxism in the book *Why Marx Was Right* for Marxism researchers.

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