

The Marxist Epistemology and the Outlook on Truth from the Perspective of “Practical Thinking Mode”

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Abstract: Epistemology and the truth outlook constitute an important part of Marxist philosophy. The understanding of this issue concerns how to grasp Marxist philosophy as a whole and how to further promote the chinization of Marxist philosophy. The theoretical system of textbooks considers epistemology, the outlook of truth, and the issue of unity in a materialist way of thinking, which fails to truly present the spiritual essence of Marxist philosophy and its transcendence for the traditional philosophy. It cannot provide spiritual impetus for the great social practice of contemporary China. To create a Marxist philosophical theory system with Chinese characteristics, manner and style, we must go beyond the interpretation principles of traditional textbooks, follow the “practical thinking method” advocated by Marx’s new materialism, and consider the issues of “cognition” and “truth”. Therefore, on the basis of “understanding issues from practice”, the internal unity of Marxist philosophy’s “practical epistemology and practical truth outlook” can be realized.

Keywords: Epistemology; Truth Outlook; Materialistic Thinking Mode; Practical Thinking Mode

1. Introduction

Epistemology and the truth outlook have always been the important research contents and components of Marxist philosophy. Understanding and interpreting this issue not only relates to the overall understanding of Marxist philosophy, but also relates to how to promote the chinization of Marxist philosophy under contemporary historical conditions. To realize the innovation of epistemology and the truth outlook, we must first surpass the interpretation principle of “materialism” in traditional textbooks and follow the “practical way of thinking” advocated by Marx’s new materialism, so as to create the Marxist philosophy with Chinese characteristics, manner and style. The epistemology and truth outlook of the new theoretical system truly realizes the internal unity of the two.

Marxist Philosophy’s traditional textbooks believe that the transformation of Marxist philosophy in epistemology is the introduction of a practical perspective into epistemology, the application of dialectic into reflection theory, and the creation of a dynamic revolutionary theory of reflexion. based on this kind of epistemological transformation, a materialist dialectical view of truth has been constructed; on the basis of dialectical materialism, the unity of epistemology and the truth outlook has been realized. We believe that this kind of interpretation in the Marxist philosophy traditional textbook does not accurately convey the essence of Marx’s new materialistic transformation, and thus fails to reasonably reveal the true connotation of Marx’s new materialistic “unity of

epistemology and truth outlook”. Because, fundamentally speaking, the transformation and transcendence of Marx’s new materialism to all the old philosophies are achieved at the level of philosophical thinking mode. Correspondingly, in order to achieve the theoretical system innovation of the “Chinization of Marxist Philosophical”, we must use the “practical way of thinking” to reflect on the issues of “cognition” and “truth” as advocated by Marx’s new materialism, thus on the basis of “understanding issues in practice”, we must achieve the internal unity of Marxist philosophy’s “practical epistemology and the practical truth outlook.”

2. Understanding of “Practical Epistemology”

On the issue of epistemology, the most important innovation value of Marx’s new materialism is to understand “practice” from the height of the thinking mode and establish a practical materialist standpoint that “understands relevant philosophical issues from practice” (including epistemology related issues), which has laid the foundation for the practical epistemology. The so-called “practical epistemology” does not refer to an epistemology emphasizing practices leading position and decisive action in understanding. It refers to the theory regarding the understanding of the essence, laws and methods of human understanding based on the understanding of epistemological issues related to the “practical way of thinking” advocated by Marx’s new materialism. The epistemology of practice is not a change or revision of the spe-

cific theory or view of traditional philosophical epistemology, but a radical change and fundamental transformation of its philosophical thinking mode. The objects it criticizes and transcends include both the old materialist epistemology that understands the problem from the object or the intuitive form, and the idealistic epistemology that unilaterally develops the “motility” of the person, which merely understands the problem in terms of the subject or the subjective form. The epistemology of practice requires understanding, interpreting, and evaluating the relevant issues of understanding from the “inherent nature and laws of practice” to construct the theoretical and systematic understanding theory of Marx’s new materialism. This is specifically manifested in:

First of all, “comprehending and understanding problems from practice” is the Marx’s new materialist epistemology transcending over the old philosophical epistemology limitation, and the fundamental to realize historical innovation. In the history of philosophy, modern old materialist epistemology understands problems in terms of objects or intuitive forms, persists in the cognitive line “from things to feelings and thoughts”, and regards the nature of cognition as “reflection”, arguing that cognition is a subject’s passively accepting the objects stimulus and photographic reflection process; modern idealist epistemology comprehends and understands the problem from the subject or the subjective form, persists in the understanding line from “thinking and feeling to the object”, and regards the object of understanding (object) as the existence of spirituality (that is, as the existence of concept) regards the subject as a spiritual thinking subject, and holds that the essence of understanding is self-awareness and self-reflection of thinking; agnosticism absolutely isolates “phenomenon” from “thing-in-itself”. It is believed that peoples cognitive ability is limited to knowing the phenomenal world and the impossible to reach the noumenal world. They can only recognize the existence of finiteness and cannot achieve the existence of infinity. It can be said that understanding the problem without understanding it from practice is the common defect of the above western modern philosophical epistemology. On the contrary, Marx’s new materialist epistemology thinks about the problem with the “practical thinking mode” and recognizes the problem. It has created Marxist “practical epistemology” that “understands problems from practice”, and has realized the fundamental transcendence over the old philosophical epistemology.

Secondly, Marx’s new materialist epistemology, based on the “practical thinking mode”, has achieved radical change for the specific content of epistemological theory. There are many issues related to epistemology. The most important ones are how to understand and grasp the subject and object of understanding, how to understand and grasp the nature of understanding, and the laws of devel-

opment, how to understand and grasp the nature, attributes, absoluteness, and relativity of truth and the objective criteria of truth, how to understand and grasp the essence of value, the standard of value evaluation, and the correlation between truth and value, etc. The old philosophy considered and solved these epistemologically related major problems, either from the object or the intuitive form, resorted to empiricism, and fell into a one-sided metaphysical dogmatism; or appealed to the rationalism from either the subject or the subjective form, fell into another kind of one-sided epistemologically metaphysical dogmatism, leading to skepticism or mysticism. On the contrary, the reason why Marx’s new materialism can surpass the limitations of the old philosophical epistemology and realize the historic reform of the old philosophical epistemology, the key is to base on the philosophical thinking of the “practical thinking approach” and understand related issues from practice. In order to rationally understand and solve the subject and object of cognition, the nature and laws of cognition, the truth of cognition and its objective standards, and the unification of truth, goodness, beauty and other series of cognition related major problems, making the human philosophy’s thinking for cognitive problem go beyond the philosophical thinking of the previous old philosophy, and promote the Marxist “practical epistemology” to a new stage.

3. Understanding of “Practical Truth Outlook”

The so-called “practical truth outlook” refers to the view of truth in which Marx’s new materialism takes the “practical way of thinking” as its fundamental feature, that is, to understand the truth outlook of the truth problem from “practice”. Based on the nature and laws of practice, it understands the problem of truth through the inherent unity of practical conforming with the regularity and purposefulness, and the internal unity of truth, goodness, and beauty. It believes that truth is obtained in the course of the objectification of subject and the subjectification of object in practice, a correct understanding of the nature and laws about the object. The “practical view of truth” has the rich connotation of “understanding the truth from the practice”:

Firstly, to understand the generation foundation, formation mechanism and development mechanism of truth and other issues from the perspective of practice.

From the foundation of generation, the problem of truth is not merely a question of subject cognition, nor is it a matter of merely objective laws, but is a question of the unity of subject cognition and the nature, laws of the object. The premise of the truth problem is the differentiation and opposition of the subject and the object caused by practice. The subject regulates itself by conforming with the regularity and purposefulness of self-practice and the unified measure of truth, goodness and beauty,

which leads to the understanding of the objective world and the reconstruction of the real world, and reconstruction of inner requirements for the human world. Therefore, the truth problem is not only a question of the truth outlook, but also a question of values and aesthetics. It is a question of the unity of truth, goodness, and beauty that has historically emerged with the dynamic development of practice.

Judging from the mechanism of formation, truth is formed in the process of dual objectification in which the subject and the object are mediated by practice. In practice, on the one hand, the subject must transform the nature and laws and other elements of the object into its own qualities and capabilities, and achieve the subjectification of the object, that is, to reform itself according to the nature and laws of the object; on the other hand, the practice is different from animals' merely adapting to the natural "conforming with regularity" activities, always following the "purposefulness" scale of human beings. Therefore, it is a process of "perfusing" subjective factors such as goals, ideals, desires etc. into object, to achieve the objectification of the subject. It is in this historical dynamic process that the "truth" for the unity of truth, goodness, and beauty is formed for people.

From the perspective of development mechanism, human practice is a historical evolutionary process, which determines the truth as a "unity of truth, goodness and beauty". It must also be the process of continuous generation and development that accompanies the historical development of practice. Therefore, fundamentally speaking, understanding and practicing the laws of dialectical movement is not only the law of cognitive development, the law of the truth development, but also the law of practical development.

Secondly, we must understand the objectivity, absoluteness, and relativity of truth in practice.

The "objectivity" of truth is not only the objectivity that is regulated by practice and created in practice, but also the objectivity conforming with regularity, value, and aesthetics that are regulated by practice. The process of the formation and development of truth is the process of unification for conforming with regularity, value, and aesthetics achieved by the subject in the transformation of the real world. Truth is the regular understanding for the unity of subject and object achieved in this process. Thus, the objectivity of truth understood from practice means that such objectivity is a kind of negative unity of subject and object, subjectively and objectively mediated by practice, that is, it is a kind of "subjective" (conforming with regularity, value and aesthetic nature) objectivity. The subjective and objective consistency and conformity that the truth symbolizes are both generated and developed in practice and regulated and restricted by practice. Practice is the basis, source, and motive power for generating and developing the objectiveness of truth. The

objectivity of truth that is not understood by practice can only be grasped on the object side—the inherently pure objectivity of the external object, or a kind of pure subjectivity for the intrinsic thoughts and ideas that can be grasped on the subjective side.

What is revealed by the "absoluteness" and "relativity" of truth is essentially the process of the development of truth. The procedural nature of practice determines the procedural nature of truth as an understanding, and truth can only achieve its own development in a procedural way determined by practice. The development of truth is a historical process that constantly transcends its own limitations and gradually approaches itself to absoluteness. The procedural nature of this truth development is rooted in the procedural nature for the historical development of practice. It is in this sense that Mao Zedong summed up the law of development of truth as "repeating itself in endless cycles" for "practice, understanding, re-practice, and rethinking". Lenin also emphasized that "the agreement between ideas and objects is a process." The understanding of truth as the existence of the "procedural nature" prescribed by practice means that mankind always maintains a critical and reflective attitude toward the status quo of truth, thus ending human illusions about any eternal truth.

Thirdly, to understand the truth inspection standard problem from practice. On the question of the test standards and test methods of the truth, Marx once pointed out that "this is not a theoretical problem but a practical problem". "People should prove the truth of their own thinking in practice, that is, the reality and strength of their own thinking, this one-sidedness of his own thinking." Since truth as a unity of understanding and practice, it can only be a concrete, historical unity regulated by practice, the development of "relativity to absoluteness" achieved by truth in the struggle with fallacy is a process constantly verified and promoted by practice; truth as a kind of practical conceptual grasp and transformation of the "essence and law of objective things" by people embodies the pursuit and orientation etc. For conforming with the regularity, value, and aesthetics of the subject's practice. Therefore, the inspection problem for the truthfulness of cognition is not a problem that can be solved by theoretical debate, but a practical problem, that is, the subject guides its practical activities with the "cognition about the nature and law of things" that it has previously recognized, and taking whether or not it meets the expected practical goals in the practical results as the standard, it is to verify whether or not the "subjective cognition" is consistent with, and unified with the actual existence of "the essence and law of objective things". Therefore, to test the truth of cognition has a double implications: Firstly, to test whether subjective cognition is consistent with objective reality and whether or not they are unified, that is, to test whether subjective cognition truly reflects

the essence and law of objective things—the objectivity of this cognition. Secondly, to test whether or not the cognition of objectivity (i.e. truthfulness) reflects the subject's conformity with regularity, value and aesthetics—the subjectivity of this understanding (i.e. the pursuit and orientation of the subject's practice). Therefore, we should understand the problem of the truth inspection standard from practice as taught by Marx's new materialism.

4. The Unification of “Practical Epistemology and Practical Outlook on Truth”

The fundamental requirement for the innovation of the theoretical system of “Chinization of Marxist philosophy” is to consider all relevant philosophical issues in the “practical way of thinking”. This theoretical appeal is expressed in the issue of epistemology. It is to understand the epistemological related issues in a practical way of thinking and to construct the epistemology of practice. To express on the issue of the truth outlook, it is to use the practical mode of thinking to understand the issues related to the truth outlook and construct a practical view of truth. In this kind of “comprehension of problems from practice”, the inner unity of “practical epistemology and practical truth outlook” is to be realized.

The traditional Marxist philosophy textbook's theoretical system considers the problem of “unification of epistemology and the truth outlook” in the spirit of materialistic philosophical thinking. It can only explain the unity of the “epistemology and the truth outlook” in the meaning of old materialism. The theoretical nature and spiritual essence of Marx's new materialistic “unification of Epistemology and the Outlook on Truth”. The innovation of the theoretical system of “Chinization of Marxist Philosophy” calls for the “practical way of thinking” to think about the “unity of epistemology and the truth outlook”, to implement the practical outlook of truth in the practical epistemology, and to implement the practical epistemology in the practical truth outlook, in order to achieve the mutual interpretation and internal linking of the two, so as to achieve the fundamental transcendence over the old philosophical epistemology and truth outlook. In the new theoretical system of “Chinization of Marxist philosophy”, the unity of “practical epistemology and the practical truth outlook” can be understood from the following two interrelated aspects:

Firstly, in the “practical epistemology” of Marx's new materialism, it is necessary to implement the practical outlook of truth. In the new theoretical system of “Chinization of Marxist philosophy”, the “practical epistemology” is the epistemology defined by the practical outlook of truth. In the “practical epistemology”, the basic provisions and basic spirit of the practical outlook of truth must be embodied.

The epistemology of Marxist philosophy traditional textbook's theoretical system is based on the philosophical thinking of materialism, the pursuit of a so-called absolute objectivity that completely excludes the subjectivity of man, and the nature of cognition is understood as a purely objective “reflection” of the subject towards the object. In contrast, the epistemology of practice requires that the philosophical thinking of the “practical outlook of truth” be used as the internal principle for the epistemological problem of its thinking, and fundamentally surpasses the old philosophical epistemology. The practical concept of truth holds that “truth” is a “totality” category that symbolizes the unity of truth, goodness, and beauty in practice. It has the triple implication of “epistemology,” “values,” and “aesthetics.” Truth is the unity of conforming with regularity, value, and aesthetics as regulated by practice, therefore, human cognition requires not only applying the law scale of practice to objects, in order to achieve “seeking truth” (conformity with regularity); it requires practical value scale applied to the object to achieve “goodness” (conforming with value); at the same time, it also requires applying the scale of practical beauty to the object in order to achieve the “conformity with beauty” (conformity with aesthetics). Therefore, in the “practical epistemology”, cognition is not just a dimension of “truth”, but inherently includes three dimensions of “truth, goodness, and beauty”.

The “objectivity of ideas” is the problem of “truth”. In the traditional textbook of Marxist philosophy, it is understood as the problem of conformity between subjective cognition and objective law, when viewed in the practical truth outlook, the objectivity of truth is the objectivity restricted by the practice regulation, generated and developed in practice. Practice is the basis, source, and driving force for the generation and development of truth objectivity. From this point of view, regarding the objectivity of cognition, it cannot be understood as the Marxist philosophy's traditional textbook, which is only from the objective and the reflection of the objective world, but should be understood as a kind of conceptual grasp and transformation for the practice of external things.

The outlook of truth in traditional Marxist philosophy textbooks sets the relativity of truth in opposition to the absoluteness of truth in order to transcend the relative truth and grasp the ultimate truth as the task of human cognition. In this way, the “cognitive process” is regarded as a process of constantly approaching absolute truth from relative truth. On the contrary, the practical outlook of truth is based on the historical development of human practice. It is believed that there is no absolute truth waiting for people to reveal and grasp. Truth is a dual objectification presenting process of subject and object realized with the historic development of practice. From this perspective, cognition activities cannot be un-

derstood as a purely objective process that reflects the objective world, like the traditional textbook of Marxist philosophy, but it should be understood as a process of continuous creation and development for “human being itself, the human world, and the relationship between man and the real world”.

Secondly, in the “practical truth outlook” of Marx’s new materialism, it is necessary to implement the epistemology of practice. In the new theoretical system of “Chinization of Marxist Philosophy”, the “practical outlook of truth” is the outlook of truth regulated by the epistemology of practice. In the “practical outlook of truth”, the basic provisions and basic spirit for the epistemology of practice must be embodied.

The epistemology of practice believes that cognitive activity is the internal link prescribed by the practical “seeking truth” (conformity with regularity), and accordingly, the problem of “truth” as a result of cognition is not a purely “epistemological” issue. It is still a question of “values” and “aesthetics”. Therefore, people’s pursuit of truth and treatment of truth are not only inseparable from the truth-seeking problem, but also inseparable from the value (conformity with goodness) and aesthetic issues (conformity with beauty).

The epistemology of practice holds that cognition deepens the development with the historical development of human practice. Accordingly, the truth should also be enriched and developed continuously with the historical development of human practice. The unity of opposites for the practical activities’ internal “conformity with regularity, purposefulness, and aesthetics” and the unity of opposites for the “scale of things and scale of people”, the unity of opposites for the “finiteness and infinity” determine the “truth” development is a historical process for the dual objectification revelation of subject and object.

The epistemology of practice believes that cognition from practice can also be returned to practice. Misrecog-

niton (fallacy) plays a negative role in human practice. Correct cognition (truth) plays a positive role in human practice. Therefore, people need to test the truthfulness of their own understanding. And to test the truthfulness of cognition, we must not only test whether or not the subjective cognition and objective reality are “consistent with each other, and whether or not they are unified”. We must also test whether or not the cognition with objectivity (i.e. truthfulness) reflects the conformity with regularity, purposefulness and aesthetics of the subject, the kind of cognitive subjectivity (i.e. the pursuit and orientation of the subject practice). In this way, the practical outlook of truth regards the truthfulness of testing the cognition as a self-examination, self-criticism and self-transcendence over the cognition and practice by the subject. It requires people to view the reality of the human world in practice in a critical and transcendental manner, and continue to construct the ideal conditions of the human world through practice.

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