

# The Differences Between Marx and Rousseau on Critique Capitalism

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## Review Article

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## ABSTRACT

Rousseau, as an important philosopher in the age of enlightenment, can find his romantic criticism of capitalism in many of his works. Although Marx was also criticizing capitalism, the difference is that in Rousseau's criticism, he ignored that capitalism is the process of human development and it's a social fact, Marx's critique, however, was based on a purpose dedicated to the transformation of society. The greatest difference between Rousseau's and Marx's critique of capitalism is that Rousseau's criticism of the romantic color reposed the method of equalitarianism to improving the society to close to the original state, but Marx's criticism of capitalism is not only a philosophical criticism but has returned to economics and had a deeper analysis of the nature of capitalism.

## INTRODUCTION

Rousseau, as an important philosopher in the age of enlightenment, can find his romantic criticism of capitalism in many of his works, in the Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men, he focused on the analysis of how the so-called modern civilization has changed the primitive human state and brought misfortune to human

beings, but he presupposed a premise, that is human in their primitive state is in their best state <sup>[1]</sup>. In other words, his critique is essentially a critique of the modernity, as the essence of the modern world; there are two pillars of the modernity, capital and modern metaphysics <sup>[2]</sup>. Although Marx was also criticizing modernity, the difference is that in Rousseau's criticism, he ignored that capitalism is the process of human development and it's a social fact, and Marx's critique has reached the height of principle <sup>[3]</sup>. This height of principle refers to whether really committed to the transformation of society. The reason for Rousseau's criticism did not reach this height is that his criticism with the romantic color reposed the method of equalitarianism to improving the society to close to the original state, which is impossible. However, Marx's criticism of modernity is not only a philosophical criticism but also has returned to economics and had a deeper analysis of the nature of capitalism. In the first part of this essay, I would like to introduce Rousseau's critique on modernity; the second part will be Marx's critique on modernity, at the end of this essay is a conclusion of differences between Marx and Rousseau on critique modernity.

### ROUSSEAU'S CRITIQUE ON MODERNITY

The starting point and basic thought of Rousseau's theory on critical on modernity are the antagonisms between "natural state and" social state "and between nature and civilization. In his opinion, nature makes people happy and kind, while society makes people degenerate and miserable <sup>[1]</sup>. In 1750, Rousseau has published an essay named Discourse on the Arts and Sciences, he considered that art and science corrupted human morality. This is Rousseau's first expression of his influential views on nature and society, and he continued this view in his later studies. Rousseau pointed out that the root of all knowledge is evil, the source of astronomy is superstition, the source of polemic is hatred, the source of geometry is greed, the source of physics is vanity, the source of art is luxury, and the source of jurisprudence is injustice. On the relationship between knowledge and morality, for Rousseau, having knowledge makes one hypocritical. Rousseau argued that since the possessions of knowledge, people have become polite and willing to be polite to others and that those who lack virtue also appear to possess virtue on the surface. This not only makes everyone afraid to show their true self because they follow the etiquette, but also makes it difficult for people to truly recognize the true face of others. True friendship, true respect, is lost in the uncertainty of the human heart, and suspicion, fear, coldness, wariness, hatred, betrayal, are always hidden behind the etiquette <sup>[4]</sup>.

In Rousseau's era, France's "modern" has experienced a Renaissance, classical and enlightenment, this period features as follows: the rise of the nation-state and the bud of capitalism, it goes with the ancient traditional agricultural civilization of the biggest difference is the emergence of modern industries, science and technology are evolving, Europe into civilized society on the basis of the science and technology. Then came the industrial revolution, which expanded reproduction and changed the whole face of human production. Industrial society has greatly changed the way people live. And human thought, social order, customs, and habits will change accordingly. There are two kinds of inequalities that Rousseau introduced to us, physiological inequality (perspective of nature) and mental or political inequality (perspective of social). The first kind of inequality is caused by nature, including various differences in age, health status, physical strength, and intelligence or mind, but the second kind of inequality is the unique product of human "civilization". With the development of modern civilization, Rousseau believed this kind of civilization will further constrain human nature and increasing this kind of inequality.

In his criticism of these inequalities, Rousseau turned to the foundation of the capitalist system, private ownership, after the emergence of private ownership, the society appeared inequality between obedience and domination, between slave and master. The former free man in the state of nature became the slave and master of the slave,

then human freedom in the state of nature disappeared, and social inequality increased. Rousseau believed that all men are created equal from the perspective of natural law, but the real society is full of various inequalities. And all kinds of inequality can finally be boiled down to the inequality of wealth. Therefore, Rousseau argues that to promote social equality, not to eliminate private ownership, but to limit people's property. So that no citizen is rich enough to buy another and no citizen so poor that he has to sell himself <sup>[5]</sup>. Inequality in society will disappear only when there is no great wealth or great poverty when everyone has a small amount of property and there is little difference between them. In fact, Rousseau imagined a solution that was close to egalitarianism, representing the ideals of the petty bourgeoisie in a capitalist society. But this kind of equalitarianism neither eliminates the private ownership, also did not surpass the private ownership, but always takes the private ownership as the premise.

### MARX'S CRITIQUE ON MODERNITY

Like Rousseau, Marx believed that private ownership brought inequality to human, he did not regard human in the natural state as the best state, but explained the emergence of capitalism from the perspective of historical materialism. In Marx's time, the main form of capitalist production is the machine industry, so the basic form of social production is industrial capitalism. Because of this, Marx understood and interpreted modern society mainly according to the situation of industrial capitalism, and the "modern disaster" he criticized was the inevitable consequence of the development of industrial capitalism. In other words, in Rousseau's era, capitalism began to appear, while in Marx's era, capitalism has been gradually perfected, and his criticism of the modernity of the modern society represented by capitalism is clearer. In Marx's case, it was the capitalist mode of production that created modern society. Therefore, for Marx, modern social criticism and capital criticism are the same, and his examination of modern society is realized in the way of a historical trial of capital relations. Based on the overall process of historical development, Marx on the one hand affirms the historical progressive significance of the development of the capitalist mode of production, affirms the progressive significance and historical value of modern society. On the other hand, with an eye to future social development, Marx launched a systematic historical criticism on the relationship between modern society and capital. It emphasizes that only by eliminating the capital relationship can we finally eliminate the social crisis, and systematically expounds the conditions and process of reforming the existing society.

The nature of capital lies in the maximization of its own multiplication, on the one hand, to maximize production, on the other hand, to maximize exchange and to promote the maximization of consumption. Under the condition of large industrial production, the maximum production means the maximum conquest, transformation and utilization of nature, and science and technology are the fundamental force to transform nature. Thus, the idea and discourse of modernism were formed. The need for maximum exchange facilitated the formation and development of the world market, in which all nations and peoples were involved in the mode of production of capital. Under the conditions of modern large-scale industry, we can see similar modern cities, standardized workshops, and production lines all over the world, which are exactly the material expression of modern discourse. However, capital because of its own inherent contradictions cannot overcome the inevitable crisis in the development. On the one hand, it is the contradiction between the trend of infinite expansion of production and the relative finitude of the market, that is, the economic crisis. On the other hand, it is the contradiction between the trend of unlimited expansion of production under industrial production conditions and the relative finitude of natural resources, that is, the ecological crisis. When the requirement of unlimited growth of capital is more and more restrained, it causes various social problems, social contradictions, and social crises in real life. This is the so-called crisis of modernity.

Based on historical materialism, Marx believed that the ownership system determined by the productive forces, as the sum of the relations of production, determines the social system. The private ownership of the means of production is the root cause of exploitation, inequality, and economic crisis in capitalist society. In the *Capital*, Marx took "commodity" as the logical starting point, analyzed the economic root of capitalist exploitation, and explained the concrete contradiction and its consequences caused by the basic contradiction between capitalist private ownership and the socialization of production [6]. Marx argued that with the development of capitalism, the deepening of the social division of labor, and the closer economic ties, making production more and more of a social nature. Each product is not the product of a single worker but is produced jointly by a group of workers. The products produced are for social consumption, and the materials needed for production are provided by society. The production units are closely linked, and the whole national economy is integrated into an organic whole. This nature of the productive forces requires objectively that society possesses the means of production and regulates the operation of the entire national economy according to the needs of society. However, under capitalist conditions, the means of production are privately owned by the capitalist, and the purpose of production is to pursue surplus value. Bourgeois private ownership obstructs the realization of this objective demand for productive forces of a social nature. The mode of production is in conflict with the mode of possession, and the mode of production rises up against the mode of possession. The contradiction between the sociality of production and private capitalist possession becomes the basic contradiction of capitalism. In order to solve this contradiction, it is necessary to replace capitalist private ownership with public ownership of the means of production (Marx, 1968). Engels explained that the development of big industry had now produced capital and productivity on an unprecedented scale, and the means were available to increase this productivity indefinitely in a short period of time. The productive forces are concentrated in the hands of a small number of Bourgeois, but the masses of the people are becoming more and more proles. The more the Bourgeois' wealth increases the more miserable and intolerable their situation will become. This powerful and easily growing productive force has grown so far beyond the control of private ownership and the bourgeois that it often causes the most violent shocks. Only then will the abolition of private ownership be not only possible but even necessary.

### DISCUSSION

Marx realized the great advantage of capitalism in liberating people's productive forces when he analyzed capitalism, and massive industrial production has greatly enriched people's material life [6]. But in this relation of production, the social classes are reduced to the conflicting and irreconcilable Bourgeoisie and Proletariat, the surplus value of the majority of society—proletarians is exploited by the capitalists all the time. Only by solving the private ownership of the means of production can this exploitation be eliminated to achieve freedom and equality. Furthermore, in Marx's theory, with the refinement of assembly-line work and division of labor, workers gradually lose control of their labor, resulting in alienation [7]. Marx believed that the alienated laborer was separated from his own production activities, labor objectives, and production process. It makes work a non-spontaneous activity, so workers can't identify with or understand the meaning of labor. Marx's theory of alienation is based on his observation of the capitalist industrial production process: the worker inevitably loses control of his work, and thus of his life and self. The worker has never been an autonomous, self-actualized human being. He can only exist in the way the bourgeoisie wants him to be [8,9]. In order to solve this problem, Marx also turned his hope to eliminate the private ownership of the means of production.

### CONCLUSION

In Rousseau's critique of modernity, he first constructed an ideal state of nature in which people are free, equal and healthy. And then when he criticizes modernity, he had the same ideal with Marx that it is private ownership that leads to social inequality. But there is a fundamental difference between Marx and Rousseau on the question of how private ownership arises. Rousseau believed that labor must lead to private ownership because only labor can give laborers the ownership of the products of their labor. At the same time, private ownership further promoted the development of labor. Marx believed that private property was the result of externalized labor. The emergence of private ownership has its historical inevitability. But how did labor create private ownership? Rousseau and Marx have very different answers. Rousseau saw that the cultivation of the land must lead to the distribution of the land that the new idea of private ownership must be conceived in terms of labor, and he talked about private ownership as an inevitable consequence of the development of metallurgy and agricultural technology. Marx believed that private ownership did not always exist. It is the product of the development of productive forces to a certain historical stage and the product of alienated labor. Private property itself is a manifestation of human alienation. The material and direct perceptual private property is the material and perceptual manifestation of the alienation of human life. The movement of private property is not only the emotional expression of the movement of production but also the reality of human beings.

Perhaps it is because of this difference in understanding of private ownership that Rousseau and Marx differ in criticizing capitalism or modernity, all in all, both Rousseau and Marx believed that private ownership was the root of human alienation, but Marx's thought was based on the investigation of specific social and historical experience, while Rousseau's thought was based on his own subjective guess. Therefore, Rousseau was sometimes contradictory about the origin of private ownership. He is powerless to eliminate the alienation root of private ownership. Marx dialectically understood the relationship between alienation and private ownership and clearly pointed out that private ownership is both the result of alienation and the cause of further human alienation. Only by completely abolishing private ownership can human alienation be eliminated.

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