**E. P. Thompson & British Ethical Socialist Tradition: Historical Generation of the Moral Dimension of “British Marxism”**

Author: Zhang Liang 2023-01-14

summary

Marxism and the issue of justice have become a hot topic of debate in the domestic academic community. To fully understand the issue of justice in the British and American academic circles, we cannot be separated from the moral dimension of "British Marxism".

Therefore, we need to return to the historical context of the debate on "socialist humanism" in the early days of the British New Left Movement. Starting from the theoretical reflection on the tradition of "dogmatic Marxism", Edward Thompson developed the theory of " socialist humanism " which is closely related to the British 19th century ethical socialist tradition , and tried to prove that " socialist humanism " is the proper meaning of Marxism.

Although Charles Taylor is not opposed to " socialist humanism " in general , he opposes using a simple " yes " or " no " to judge the relationship between Stalinism and communism. Alasdair MacIntyre pushed the debate on "socialist humanism" to a new height, proposing to get out of the "moral wasteland" in the unity of "conceived human nature theory" and "real historical struggle".

Keywords

New Left; British Marxism; socialist humanism; morality

About the Author

Zhang Liang is a professor and doctoral supervisor at the Center for Marxist Social Theory Research and Department of Philosophy at Nanjing University.

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For "British Marxism" or contemporary British left-wing thought in a broader sense, the first five to six years after the rise of the New Left Movement in 1956 was the most important period of ideological explosion. The basic outline and important topics of the development of British left-wing thought and academic thought for more than half a century were created in these few short years. Almost all ideological and academic debates with a relatively broad British foundation can find their direct origins in this period. This means that only by returning to this period of great explosion more consciously can we form a deeper understanding of contemporary British issues with great reality.

During my time as a senior visiting scholar in the UK from 2009 to 2010 , I found from literature and academic exchanges that after the end of the New Left Movement in the early 1980s , the focus of the British left camp began to change. The moral and ethical topics that were rarely discussed in the past have significantly heated up. A previously difficult-to-see moral dimension of "British Marxism" has become clearly visible and has an impact on both sides of the Atlantic. In 2014 , I visited the UK again as a senior research scholar. After returning to China, I found that Marxism and the issue of justice had become a hot topic of debate in China, but the participants in the debate knew little about the original intellectual history background of this topic and did not realize the intertwined relationship between this topic and the moral dimension of " British Marxism " . At a seminar in 2019 , I was asked to express my attitude towards the relevant debate.

This prompted me to briefly outline my basic views on contemporary British and American Marxist political philosophy research for the first time, that is, understanding the issue of justice in the British and American academic circles cannot be separated from the moral dimension of " British Marxism", which directly originated from the debate on "socialist humanism" in the early days of the British New Left Movement. [1] My views attracted the attention of my peers, and also prompted me to return to the origin stage of the British New Left Movement again after many years, and systematically explore the historical generation of the moral dimension of " British Marxism " to provide a more complete intellectual history background for the relevant debate in China.

**1. Why did E. P. Thompson want to restore the British ethical socialist tradition of the 19th century?**

In the summer of 1957 , Edward Thompson and John Saville , two New Left historians who had just quit the Communist Party of Great Britain, co-founded the magazine The New Reasoner, whose supplement was titled " Socialist Humanism Quarterly " .

The main article in the first issue was Thompson's long masterpiece Socialist Humanism: A Letter to the Philistines. This article not only questioned and criticized the dogmatic Marxist tradition upheld by the Communist Party of Great Britain, but also developed a socialist humanist theory that was closely related to the ethical socialist tradition of Britain in the 19th century. It immediately triggered heated discussions within the New Left, and ultimately contributed to the historical formation of the moral dimension of " British Marxism " .

So, what is the ethical socialist tradition of Britain in the 19th century?

As the birthplace of the first industrial revolution, Britain in the 19th century naturally formed and developed its own socialist tradition from its social reality. [2] The relatively stubborn refusal to accept the beneficial influence of other socialist ideas is an important feature of this tradition. Therefore, when Marx fled to Britain due to the failure of the 1848 revolution, British socialists not only did not welcome him with open arms, but instead ignored or even treated the scientific socialism founded by him and Engels with hostility. In his later years, Engels sharply criticized the socialists of the Fabian Society, attacking " the reason why they are so crazy about Marx and all of us is because of the class struggle issue . " [3] At the same time, this tradition is closely linked to "feudal socialism" [4] that criticizes modern capitalism from the standpoint of traditional society . In the era of Marx and Engels, the main representatives of " feudal socialism " in Britain were Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin . They both condemned modern capitalism's destruction of morality, humanity and freedom based on moral or religious sentiments, and called for the advent of a more humane society. In 1883 , William Morris , a famous British designer and social activist, turned to socialism under the influence of Marxism. He then worked to combine Marxism with the critical theories of Carlyle and Ruskin, developing a capitalist moral and aesthetic criticism theory with a distinct Marxist color. The academic community usually refers to this tradition as the British ethical socialist tradition. [5]

The British ethical socialist tradition established by Morris is, to a large extent, a recent "invention," which was mainly accomplished by Thompson in his book William Morris: From Romanticism to Revolution, published in 1955. In 1955 , when the international communist movement had not yet undergone major changes , why did Thompson, a member of the British Communist Party, " invent " this British ethical socialist tradition that was quite different from the scientific socialist tradition?

First, there has always been a "bourgeois tendency" within the Communist Party of Great Britain that values ​​and cherishes the British romantic tradition.

In the early 1950s , this tendency began to revive after a long period of suppression by Stalinism. After the Nazis came to power in 1933 , the Communist Party of Great Britain insisted on leading the anti-fascist struggle internally and actively supported the left - wing alliance in the Spanish Civil War externally, which greatly enhanced its political appeal and moral influence. A large number of intellectuals from various fields joined the Communist Party of Great Britain. [6] A group of talented young writers such as Wystan Hugh Auden, Christopher Caldwell , and George Orwell also joined or approached the Communist Party of Great Britain during this period. They are usually called the "Auden generation." [7] Intellectual party members, especially the " Auden generation " , cherished the British anti-capitalist romantic literary tradition and the spontaneous struggle tradition of the grassroots people in the 19th century, and carried out preliminary theoretical exploration, which had a great influence, thus attracting a younger generation of intellectuals such as Thompson to join the Communist Party of Great Britain. After the late 1930s , Stalinism took the leading role in the British Communist Party, which immediately defined the former as a " bourgeois tendency " and carried out a long period of theoretical criticism and suppression. In the early 1950s , the smoke of the Cold War spread to the cultural field. In order to oppose the cultural colonization of American popular culture, the mainstream of the British Communist Party began to praise British culture, especially the part of the masses spontaneously opposing capitalism, so that the criticized and suppressed "bourgeois tendency" could be transformed and return. The task of reviving the British humanistic tradition and finding a local Marxist imagination thus gained political legitimacy and fell on "Comrade Thompson". [8]

Second, the British bourgeois academic community deliberately concealed Morris's later Marxist revolutionary beliefs, and the British Communist Party hoped to win Morris back from the bourgeoisie. As a pioneer of the Arts and Crafts Movement, Morris is known as the father of modern design and has a huge social influence. However, bourgeois scholars, including the author of his standard biography in 1899 , obviously did not like or even hate Morris's later Marxist revolutionary beliefs, so most of them selectively focused on Morris's art, design and literary thoughts, and consciously avoided his political thoughts, especially his Marxist socialist thoughts in his later years. Since reviving the British humanistic tradition and finding a local Marxist imagination have become urgent political tasks, it is necessary to win Morris back from the bourgeoisie and restore his proper appearance as a Marxist revolutionary. Thompson was commissioned to research and publish William Morris: From Romanticism to Revolution with the goal of proving that Morris was "a Marxist and a utopian at the same time" [10] , and "the first Marxist in the English-speaking world "[11], by deeply interpreting the "failure of bourgeois researchers to fully treat the political activities and political works that Morris devoted himself to in his mature years"[9], and proving that Morris was "a Marxist and a utopian at the same time"[10] , and that he grew up from the radical tradition of Britain . The Communist Party of Great Britain and Thompson's goal was obviously achieved: after the publication of William Morris : From Romanticism to Revolution, bourgeois critics immediately commented sensitively and sharply that the book " used almost 900 pages to prove that Morris was really a Marxist "[12] .

picture

Edward Thompson

Third, starting from the article "Existentialism is a Humanism" published by Jean - Paul Sartre in 1946 , humanistic philosophy gradually became popular in the European and American intellectual circles, objectively promoting the formation and spread of humanistic Marxist thought within the international communist camp . In the article "Existentialism is a Humanism", Sartre emphasized that his existentialist philosophy is a philosophy of realizing human freedom, a philosophy that connects everyone in society through human freedom and responsibility, and is therefore a humanism. [13] Sartre's views sparked heated debates. Martin Heidegger , Georg Lukács and others responded with different positions, which promoted the rapid spread of humanistic philosophy on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and became an international philosophical trend. It also had a direct impact on the contemporary Marxist camp. Marxists in France, the United States, Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and even the Soviet Union all participated in it to varying degrees, either directly explaining and arguing that humanism is the core content and highest goal of Marxism from a theoretical perspective, or reinterpreting Marx's early works such as the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 to prove that humanism is the inherent meaning of Marxism. After Stalin's death in 1953 , a de-Stalinization movement emerged within the international communist movement. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union also began to reflect on Stalinism and allowed and even supported the spread of humanistic ideas to a certain extent, thus giving the humanistic Marxist thought a certain legitimacy within the international communist movement and gaining a relatively wide spread and acceptance within European communist parties such as France and Britain in the mid-to-late 1950s . It is precisely because of this ideological atmosphere within the Party that Thompson, as a Communist Party member, consciously explored the humanitarian elements in Morris’s thought and “ invented ” the British ethical socialist tradition , attempting to fill the moral vacuum in Marx’s social criticism theory: “ The harm caused by developed capitalism and market economy has limited human relations to basic economic relations. Marx was committed to orthodox political economy and regarded revolutionary economic man as a solution to exploited economic man. But in Marx, especially in his early works, this was not clear enough… In Blake and Wordsworth, this criticism of industrial capitalism is very clear, and it also exists in Morris’s works. Therefore, it is completely complementary to the Marxist tradition, and not in conflict at all.” [14]

2. Edward Thompson: “Socialist Humanism” is the inherent meaning of Marxism

After the Hungarian incident in 1956 , Thompson decided that the Communist Party of Great Britain could no longer develop in the direction that intellectual party members like him had hoped, so he chose to withdraw from the Communist Party of Great Britain and turn to the non-institutionalized British New Left movement. The New Reasoner founded by Thompson and Saville, together with another New Left publication, Universities and Left Review, historically assumed a certain organizational and leadership function and became the main public spokespersons of the New Left movement. In the inaugural editorial of The New Reasoner, Thompson and others clearly stated that their goal was to uphold and develop Marxism in connection with British reality and the theoretical tradition of British Marxism: “ We have no intention of making a hasty break with the British Marxist and socialist tradition. On the contrary, we believe that this tradition, which originated with William Morris, Tom Mann and others, and was later expressed in magazines such as Left Review and Modern Quarterly, is what we need to discover and reaffirm. Our hope is to build some bridges between this tradition and those left-wing socialists who have grown up outside of this tradition.” [15] It was based on this proposition that Thompson published the famous article “Socialist Humanism: A Letter to the Philistines”, attempting to prove that “ socialist humanism ” is the inherent meaning of Marxism by reflecting on Stalinism.

In June 1956 , Khrushchev’s secret report entitled “On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences” was made public in the West, causing a strong reaction from the left-wing camp. Popular opinion therefore simply denied Stalinism and regarded it as a false and erroneous ideology. Thompson opposed this view, arguing that it not only underestimated the power, logic and consistency of Stalinism and failed to explain the huge impact of Stalinism on the ideas and actions of the Communists, but also fell into the theoretical fallacy of economic determinism and “ ignored the role of people’s thoughts and moral attitudes in the process of creating history ” [16] . In Thompson’s view, Stalinism is indeed an ideology, but it is an ideology rooted in the specific social and historical stage of Soviet Russia and has an inherent historical foundation and legitimacy. Thompson believes that Stalinism is the natural result of the localization of Marxism in Soviet Russia. In terms of localization, Stalinism can be said to be successful, but in terms of accurate understanding and interpretation of Marxism, Stalinism is a failure, because it runs counter to Marxism born in Western Europe in three important aspects, thus leading to anti-intellectualism, moral nihilism and denial of the historical subject role of the masses. These three important aspects have been well inherited and developed in the British ethical socialist tradition.

picture

Khrushchev​）

First of all, it is anti-intellectualism, that is, the loss of rational thinking ability and critical consciousness. The predecessor of "The New Rationalist" was "The Rationalist", a theoretical debate journal founded by Thompson and others within the British Communist Party. The name of "The Rationalist" originated from "The Rationalist", a journal of the same name founded by British romanticists in the early 19th century to promote Jacobin radicalism. 150 years later, when Thompson and others wrote " Rationalist " prominently on their ideological banner, they first wanted to highlight the importance of rational thinking, secondly to oppose the irrational thinking characteristics of Stalinism, that is, anti-intellectualism, and finally to emphasize the inherent connection between the British ethical socialist tradition and rational thinking. Thompson believes that the inevitable result of anti-intellectualism is the prevalence of dogmatism. Taking the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure as an example, Thompson pointed out that this was originally a metaphor of Marx. Its advantages are intuitive and vivid, but its disadvantages are simplicity and static, which makes it easy for people to ignore the process and complexity of social development. Stalinism accepted and reinforced Marx’s literal meaning, ignoring or even abandoning the dialectical interaction between the economic base and superstructure, social existence and social consciousness that Marx had always advocated, thereby simplifying the vivid historical materialism into a rigid and mechanical economic determinism. [17]

The second is moral nihilism. Thompson pointed out that because Stalinism misunderstood historical materialism, it could not accurately understand the real social process and the nature of human beings. The result was amorality (using ends to justify means) and immorality (disliking moral means), which led to an abstract understanding of human beings. "But the Roundheads, the Levellers and the Royalists, the Chartists, the Anti-Corn Law League... did not abandon their creeds because of economic incentives. They loved, hated, argued, thought, and made moral choices. Economic changes promoted changes in social relations, in real human relations; these were understood, perceived, and revealed in the sense of injustice, in anger, and in the desire for social change. All of this was resolved through struggle in human consciousness, including moral consciousness." [18] Thompson pointed out that although Marx and Engels rarely discussed moral issues in their mature works, they firmly opposed moral nihilism and believed that " human moral consciousness can have a profound impact on the form taken by social confrontation, and can ease or intensify conflicts; similarly, the degree to which theoretical concepts are close to reality will also affect the course of history . " All of this stems from the influence of humanitarian thought in European history on them, that is, " humanism not only runs through their works, but also provides an inexhaustible driving force for their epic theoretical creation . " [19] As early as when he wrote William Morris : From Romanticism to Revolution, Thompson was shocked by the degeneration of the dogmatic Marxist theoretical vocabulary, believing that " it takes as its basis those categories that deny the effective existence of moral consciousness (historically or now), compressing the imagination and passion that permeates William Morris's late works to the point of almost non-existence." [20] In Socialist Humanism: A Letter to the Philistines, Thompson pointed out clearly: " For Marxism, William Morris 's insight into the potential moral nature of human beings is not icing on the cake, but a timely help, supplementing Marx's discovery. " [21]

The third is to deny the subjectivity and creativity of human labor. Thompson believes that moral nihilism prevents Stalinism from seeing that "everyone is an intellectual and moral being" and that every ordinary worker who develops himself in material labor is an "intellectual and moral subject." [22] Therefore, although Stalinism also advocates that the masses are the creators of history, it is essentially elitist. " In Stalinist ideology, people are an addition to the ' tools of production . ' In fact, people are at the core of labor, and all production tools, politics, systems, etc. come from this, but this concept has disappeared from Stalinist ideology. " [23]

Thompson criticized Stalinism in order to establish "socialist humanism". Based on Marx and Engels' discussion of "real individuals" in The German Ideology, he emphasized that Marxism must truly adhere to the mass historical view and recognize that workers are the real subjects of history. Socialism can only become a reality through their historical actions. Therefore, while capitalism devalues ​​workers and only hopes to satisfy workers with commodities or physical needs, "socialist humanism" requires people to be liberated from the slavery of things, the slavery of profit-seeking, or the slavery of "economic necessity". As a creative person, the liberated person will not only create new ideas, but also create a huge flow of things." [24]

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Manuscript of The German Ideology

3. Charles Taylor: Criticism of Stalinism Does Not Solve the Fundamental Problem

After the publication of Socialist Humanism: A Letter to the Philistines, it sparked heated discussions in the New Left. "Orthodox" Marxists criticized "socialist humanism" for being heretical and falling into the quagmire of idealism. [25] Former communists who turned to the " left-wing social democratic " position demanded the establishment of clearer moral principles and denied the reality of " socialist humanism " . They believed that Thompson was just mixing Marxism with some diluted Christian seasoning, without realizing that this was a very strange dish. [26] Charles Taylor , a young New Left scholar from Canada, was studying for a doctorate in philosophy at Oxford University with Isaiah Berlin and Elizabeth Anscombe . Berlin was good at the history of political thought. His early work "Karl Marx : Life and Environment" ( 1939 ) pushed Western " Marxism " to a new height of standardized research and trained a large number of world-renowned Marx research experts . Anscombe was good at analytical philosophy and moral philosophy, and was writing her masterpiece Modern Moral Philosophy at the time. Based on this highly specialized academic training background, Taylor published an article titled Marxism and Humanism in the second issue of The New Rationalist, questioning and discussing the accuracy of Thompson's understanding of Marx and Engels' thoughts, although he did not oppose " socialist humanism " in general .

In Taylor's view, the relationship between Stalinism and communism is very complex and cannot be simply judged as "yes" or "no". In terms of human subjectivity, Taylor believes that Stalinism in theory seems to belong to "mechanical economic determinism" and denies human subjectivity; but in political practice, Stalinism seems to believe in absolute voluntarism and believes that "the possession of ideas, aspirations and intentions is the objective historical role that the owner can play" [27] . " In fact, Marx understands man as a complete unity of limitation and breaking through limitations, being determined and being able to create. Therefore, the two components of the Stalinist dialectic, extreme economic determinism and absolute voluntarism, are equally irrelevant to Marxism. " [28] Based on this theoretical perspective, Taylor agrees with Thompson's view that Stalinism has in fact turned subjectivity and creativity into the privileges of the political elite, and turned the flesh-and-blood, concrete working class into a mask for the former.

The core reason why Taylor opposed using a simple "yes" or "no" to judge the relationship between Stalinism and communism was that he believed that Marx's theories, positions, and views had changed in his works in different periods, making it possible for the interpretation tradition, including Stalinism, to be distorted and deviated, and for differences and conflicts to occur. Stalinism opposes humanism and refuses to understand communism as an ethical concept. The textual basis for this is that The German Ideology clearly states: "Communism is not for us a condition to be established, not an ideal to which reality should adapt itself. What we call communism is the real movement which abolishes the existing condition. The conditions of this movement are generated by existing premises." [29] The reason why Thompson and others held high the banner of humanism is because the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 declared to people: " Communism is the positive transcendence of private property, that is, the self-alienation of man, and therefore the real possession of man's essence by man and for man; therefore, it is man's return to himself, to society, that is, to human nature ... This communism, as a completed naturalism, is equal to humanism, and as a completed humanism, it is equal to naturalism. It is the real solution to the contradiction between man and nature, between man and man, and the real solution to the struggle between existence and essence, objectification and self-affirmation, freedom and necessity, and between individual and class. " [30] Based on this, Thompson insisted on reintroducing morality into Marxism and pointed out: " A certain kind of vulgar Marxist amoralism or moral relativism is incompatible with Marxism. The proposition that morality is 'class-bound' is not only a historical commentary but also an implicit and incomplete condemnation of all previous moral systems. It is also a plea for a higher and more conscious morality." [31]

picture

Charles Taylor

Although Taylor agreed with Thompson's position, as a philosopher, he immediately discovered other problems that were not Stalinist. First, the relationship between ends and means. After The German Ideology, Marx and Engels actually abandoned the dichotomy between ends and means through the theory of historical laws, but "socialist humanism" once again introduced the relationship between ends and means, and believed that "moral ends can only be achieved through moral means" [32] , which is bound to cause controversy. Second, the relationship between justice and rights. Communism must build a new society through violent revolution, which is the most basic social justice. However, does violent revolution infringe on the rights of those who are unwilling to accept communism? This question is a key issue for humanism. Third, the relationship between liberation and freedom. The proletariat pursues the liberation of all mankind and itself. "They openly declare that their goals can only be achieved by violently overthrowing all existing social systems. ... The proletariat has nothing to lose in this revolution but their chains. They will gain the whole world." [33] But do people have the freedom not to accept liberation? In this way, " socialist humanism " seems to have to add another sentence: " The proletariat cannot liberate itself without depriving some people of their status as human beings. " Fourth, the relationship between goals and processes. Taylor cited the example of collective farms in the process of Soviet industrialization to illustrate that the interests of some social groups will inevitably be violated before the realization of communism.

In short, Taylor believes that Stalinism is indeed full of problems, but simply criticizing Stalinism cannot really solve the problems. In Taylor's view, Marxist communism is "an unfinished humanism" and Stalinist ideology reflects both the inadequacy of Marxism and the distortion of this inadequacy. Therefore, the criticism of Stalinism cannot be a mere return to the original tradition, but must also reconstruct the Marxist theory of communism. [34]

4. Alasdair MacIntyre: We must get out of our own “moral wasteland”

Among the many participants, the one who really pushed the debate on "socialist humanism" to a new height was Alasdair MacIntyre . MacIntyre was born in Glasgow, Scotland. He briefly joined the Communist Party of Great Britain during his university years, but later left the party due to his dissatisfaction with Soviet politics. As an academic philosopher who received systematic training in British philosophy, MacIntyre devoted his life to " pursuing virtue " and tried to resolve the fundamental differences between various contemporary Western moral philosophies. In Marxism: An Interpretation, published in 1953 , MacIntyre tried to integrate Marxism with the British Christian tradition and proposed a Christianized view of Marxism. Its core idea is that Marxism is a humanistic worldview that originates from Christianity and transcends Christianity. It is an alternative to the history and morality of capitalism and can solve the ethical problems of contemporary capitalism. [35] In this way, MacIntyre and Thompson arrived at the door of " socialist humanism " by different paths . After the rise of the New Left Movement, MacIntyre became a member of the New Rationalist circle, but did not immediately intervene in the debate on " socialist humanism " . As the debate became more intense, MacIntyre published "Notes from a Moral Wasteland" in the last issue of the New Rationalist in 1958 and the first issue of 1959 , systematically expounding his views on Stalinism and his support for " socialist humanism " .

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Alasdair MacIntyre

The opening of Notes from a Moral Wasteland points out that Stalinism and its various types of moral critics have not realized that the fierce debates and disagreements among the parties are merely a manifestation of the different moral choices that exist in the real world, just as people are exploring in an unfamiliar moral wasteland. The key to the problem lies in overcoming their own limitations and finding a truly realistic moral solution: "To overcome and transcend their limitations, mistakes, and their 'false needs' on moral issues is to find a way out of our own wasteland." [36]

In the first part of the text, "Morality and Desire", MacIntyre summarizes the debate between Stalinism and various types of moral critics from a philosophical perspective, arguing that both sides are trapped in the "means-end model of morality" and are the two sides of the same coin. The reason why Stalinism does not talk about morality and "ought to be" is that it "equates what is morally correct with what is truly the result of historical development". For it, "history is a field where objective laws operate, in which the role of individuals is predetermined by their historical circumstances. Individuals can accept their roles and play them willingly or unwillingly, but they cannot rewrite the script. Individuals are nothing in history, just actors, and even their moral judgments on historical facts are part of the performance. The principle of 'ought to be' is overwhelmed by the 'is' in history." Stalinist moral critics, like God, stand outside of history and talk about morality and “what should be”. “All issues are judged according to their moral superiority. The principle of ‘what should be’ is completely outside the ‘what is’ of history. … For moral critics, the historical process, what actually happened, and what should happen are completely irrelevant issues.” [37] The Don Quixote-like struggle between the two sides shows that it is necessary to transcend the “ fruitless confrontation between moral individualism and immoral Stalinism ” and find a “ third moral position . ” [38]

In the second part, “History and Morality”, MacIntyre continued Thompson and others’ criticism of Stalinism, emphasizing that Stalinism is only a “secondary” Marxism and cannot represent Marxism itself. Therefore, the fact that Stalinism does not or cannot discuss issues does not mean that Marxism cannot provide its own answers. The traditional questions about human nature and morality, namely the relationship between “I am”, “I can be”, “I want to be” and “I should be”, need to be answered by contemporary Marxists in accordance with the understanding of human nature theory that is consistent with Marx. [39]

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Then, in the third part, "The Unity of Morality and Desire", MacIntyre gave his own principled answers to these questions. By reviewing the history of morality, MacIntyre pointed out that achieving the unity of morality and desire, what should be and what is, and the group and the individual is a moral dilemma that modern Western society must solve, and Marxism is the only possible key to solving this dilemma. Based on the concept of "real individual" in "The German Ideology", MacIntyre pointed out that the formation of human nature is historical, "human potential has progressed in every era, and this progress is unique to that social form and is constrained by the class structure of society. Under capitalism, the development of this possibility has a crisis", but "the growth of production makes it possible for people to regain their own essence, the real people to realize the richness of human beings". So, why can the development of production and class struggle realize the essence of human beings and solve the problem of the unity of morality and desire, what should be and what is, and the group and the individual? In MacIntyre's view, the working class has achieved a change in cognition through class struggle. "They first discovered that what they want most is what most other people want; in addition, sharing people's lives is not just a means to achieve what they want, but the specific way they share life is indeed what they want most. ... People rediscover the deep desire to share the common points of human nature and satisfy the disordered and individualistic desires that competitive society breeds in us, thus neither deviating from human nature nor from the self. In this discovery, moral principles regain their importance. Because their satisfaction can now be seen as helpful in correcting our short-term selfish behavior, thus helping to liberate desires. Moral rules and our basic needs are no longer diametrically opposed." [40]

Finally, in the fourth part, "Communist Morality is Not Futurism," MacIntyre returns to reality and calls on the New Left to abandon empty words and take positive action, because communism is by no means futurism, morality is rootless without history, and real individuals can only realize their own essence and achieve unity with others through real struggle. [41] In other words, MacIntyre believes that: " Any moral proposition, if it is to be universalized in the real world, must be rooted in a historically conceived theory of human nature, and it must be realized in the real historical struggle of the oppressed for freedom. " [42]

V. Brief Comments

After Notes from a Moral Wasteland, Thompson, MacIntyre, Taylor and others continued to publish articles and launched debates, pushing the debate on "socialist humanism" to a deeper level until 1960. [43] Although this debate only lasted for three or four years, it produced a profound effect on the history of thought. First, the orthodox status of Soviet Marxism in the British left-wing intellectual and academic circles was completely overturned. On the ruins of its collapse, the British native Marxist thought tradition began to take root and thrive. Second, with the continuous integration of British native Marxism, the moral vacuum in traditional Marxism was filled, and British left-wing scholars' thinking on moral and ethical issues began to make great progress. Third, the relatively closed state of the British left-wing intellectual and academic circles was broken, and various Marxist thoughts from the European continent began to land in Britain, thus improving the theoretical genes of the British left to a certain extent. Fourth, with the emergence of a situation of competition among multiple theoretical discourses, the British left began to pay attention to the interpretation of the works of Marx and Engels. On the one hand, this promoted the prosperity of Western "Marxism" in the UK, and on the other hand, it also improved the level of Marxism of the British left, reduced unnecessary disputes of opinion, and gradually increased the accumulation of academic consensus and ideological consensus. However, academic research is also a product of the times. These ideological history effects are like seeds. If they want to truly take root, sprout, and grow, they must wait for the arrival of a suitable era. History has proved that this suitable era can only be truly opened after the end of the New Left Movement.

Notes

[1] See Zhang Liang, “A Remnant of the Academic History of the Rise of Research on Marxist Political Philosophy in Britain and the United States”, Social Sciences in China, p . 3 , July 25 , 2019 .

[2] See Max Bill , A History of Socialism in England, translated by He Xinshun, Commercial Press, 1959 .

[3] Selected Works of Marx and Engels, Volume 10 , People’s Publishing House , 2009 , p. 644 .

[4] Selected Works of Marx and Engels, Volume 2 , People’s Publishing House , 2009 , p. 54 .

[5] Stanley Pierson, Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism: The Struggle for a New Consciousness, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973, p.88 .

[6] Henningdon, “The Communist Party of Great Britain’s Anti-Fascist Struggle”, in Gowland et al., Thirty Years of the Communist Party of Great Britain, translated by Fu Jiaqin et al., People’s Publishing House , 1953 , pp. 81-88 ; Noreen Branson, History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1941 , London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985, pp . 110-129, pp. 210-213 , pp . 220-239 .

[7] Samuel L. Hynes, The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930's, New York: Viking Press, 1977 .

[8] Tim Logan , The Moral Economists : R. H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi , and EP Thompson ’s Critique of Capitalism, translated by Cheng Guangyuan, Zhejiang University Press , 2020 , pp. 235-246 .

[9] EP Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988, p. 817 .

[10] Ibid. , p. 791 ．

[11] Henry Abelove (ed.), Visions of History, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983, p.21 .

[12] EP Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, p. 769.

[13] Jean-Paul Sartre , Existentialism is a Humanism, translated by Zhou Xuliang and Tang Yongkuan, Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 1988 .

[14] Henry Abelove(ed.), Visions of History, p. 22.

[15] John Saville and Edward Thompson, “Editorial”, The New Reasoner, No. 1, Summer 1957, p.1.

[16] Thompson, “Socialist Humanism : A Letter to the Philistines,” in Zhang Liang and Xiong Ying (eds.), Ethics, Culture and Socialism: A Reader of Early Thought of the British New Left, Jiangsu People’s Publishing House , 2013 , p. 6 .

[17] Ibid., pp. 10-15 .

[18] Ibid., p. 23 .

[19] Ibid., p. 25 .

[20] Henry Abelove(ed.), Visions of History, p. 21.

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[26] Harry Hanson, “An Open Letter to Edward Thompson , ” in Zhang Liang and Xiong Ying (eds.), Ethics, Culture and Socialism: A Reader of Early Thought of the British New Left, pp. 50-63 .

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[31] Charles Taylor, Marxism and Humanism, in Zhang Liang and Xiong Ying (eds.), Ethics, Culture and Socialism: A Reader of Early Thought of the British New Left, p. 69 .

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[33] Selected Works of Marx and Engels, Volume 2 , p. 66 .

[34] Charles Taylor, Marxism and Humanism, in Zhang Liang and Xiong Ying (eds.), Ethics, Culture and Socialism: A Reader of Early Thought of the British New Left, pp. 71-72 .

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[39] Ibid., p. 84 .

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