
An Analytical Critique of Karl Marx's Political Philosophy

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Abstract:

This research paper critically examines Karl Marx's political philosophy, focusing on his views of religion and human-environment interrelationships. While Marx aimed to address social inequality and create an un-biased economic system, his ideas often neglected individual human well-being. Marx was particularly critical of religion, especially various religions, which he saw as supporting unfair social hierarchies. He argued that animals, such as cows and other animals, should be used for human benefit, and emphasized the importance of humans engaging with nature. This shows that Marx's focus was less on compassion for all beings and more on critiquing the social and economic problems of his time. Using archival data and historical-analytical-approach, this paper sheds light on Marx's political philosophy while explores his conflicting views of religion and human-environment interrelationships. It also addresses criticisms that Marx's philosophy is too focused on economic issues and fails to consider broader humanitarian concerns.

Keywords: political philosophy, human being, religion, social, nature.

Introduction

Karl Marx is a towering figure of the 19th century, renowned as a philosopher, political theorist, economist, and sociologist. His work on critiquing capitalism and advocating for communism has had profound impacts across various disciplines and geographic regions. Marx remains one of the most influential political theorists, especially regarding his critiques of capitalism and his vision of a classless society. However, Marx's ideas are often contentious, and they warrant careful examination due to their inherent contradictions and complexities. These inconsistencies range across a wide array of topics he discussed, but more pressing

have been his views towards religion and nature (Eagleton, 2011). On the issues such as humanity and human-environment interrelationships, Marx's explanations are also contentious.

Marx is popularly known for his broader explanations and sharp criticism to the advancement in industrial societies, particularly Capitalism. Marx defined capitalism as a system of organized production and distribution based on private ownership of the means of production, wage labor, and profit-making by the middleclass, the owner class. In this system, the owner exploits workers by paying them less than the value they produce, creating a conflict between the owner and the working class, or proletariat. Marx argued that the only way for workers to overthrow this system of exploitation was through revolution, led by the communist party, to establish a classless society (Marx & Engels, 1848). Marx believed in the power of the masses and stressed that change could only come through their active participation in political struggle. His ideas have profoundly influenced labor movements, unionists, and social democrats worldwide, sparking revolutions across Europe and beyond.

Marx's critiques were not limited to capitalism; they extended to various aspects of human life, including history, society, politics, culture, and religion. He viewed history as being shaped by the economic mode of production, with the ruling class controlling both the economy and the narrative of history (Escudos, 2021). Marx's dialectical view of society saw class struggle as the driving force, with the bourgeoisie constantly oppressing the proletariat (Ejeh, 2020). His views of the state were equally critical, seeing it as a tool of the capitalist class to suppress the weak and marginalized (Escudos, 2021). Nevertheless, his political and economic frameworks are criticized for their short sidedness, parochialism, and lacking human element.

This also applies to Marx's ideas of human-environment interrelationship. Marx believed that humanity's creative and productive potential could be harnessed to transform the natural world. Broadly, his practical proposals have been scrutinized for their alignment with sustainability, social cooperation, and democratic principles. Marx's views on nature were in line with theories of developmentalism and possibilism, which suggest that humans, despite nature's constraints, have the capacity to dominate and adapt the environment to their needs. According to Marx, humans should control and exploit nature to create a world of abundance (Ayichew, 2014; Jessop, 2024). However, critics, particularly ecologists, argue that Marx's focus on human domination of nature could lead to environmental harm (Jessop, 2024). On the other hand, some believe that Marx's ecological views have influenced contemporary movements aimed at sustainable development, arguing that his critiques of capitalism laid the groundwork for a new social and ecological order (Foster, 2015). These conflicting interpretations highlight the complexity of Marx's

views on nature and human interaction.

When it comes to culture and religion, Marx's views are both critical as well as controversial. He argued that religion emerged from human helplessness in the face of nature and social oppression. In his view, religion was a reflection of the real-world forces that controlled people's lives, masking the exploitation inherent in class society (Marx & Engels, 1975). Marx's deep suspicion toward religion, particularly in non-Western traditions, has been the subject of much criticism. For instance, Marx expressed critical opinions about Indian religious traditions and British colonial rule. Saran (2023) observed that Marx supported the expansion of Christianity in India, aligning it with British colonial interests, and criticized British authorities for inhibiting its spread. Marx's portrayal of Hinduism, particularly his unfounded criticism of sacred practices at the Jagannath Temple, has been denounced as baseless by several Indian scholars (Saran, 2023). His views on Hindu texts like the Bhagavad Gita and epics such as the Mahabharata also drew ire, as he dismissed them as tools for perpetuating feudal hierarchies (Saran, 2023). Marx's critique of religion, particularly his observations on Eastern traditions, raises questions about his understanding of non-Western cultures and religious institutions. Xinping (2011) contends that Marx's criticism of religion was rooted in his broader critique of society and politics, rather than religion itself (p. 13). Meanwhile, Foster (2000) argues that Marx's ecological worldview stemmed from his analysis of the relationship between society, humans, and nature, rather than a direct critique of religious doctrine. These varied perspectives reflect the complexity of Marx's thought and his often-controversial positions on nature, religion, and political institutions.

This paper aims to explore Marx's views on religious and cultural institutions, his perspectives on animals and nature, and the broader motivations behind his philosophical stance. By examining these concepts, this study argues that while Marx's ideas were revolutionary and transformative, they do not align seamlessly with democratic values. Through the analysis, this paper seeks to shed light on both the strengths and limitations of Marx's philosophy, particularly in its relevance to modern debates on ecology, religion, and social justice.

Methodology

The aim of this article was to examine Karl Marx's views towards religion and nature in view of understanding his position regarding humanity, social and ecological justice. To comprehend this, historical as well as analytical approach was adopted. Historical approach helped accessing past documents by Karl Marx, understanding historical epochs connected to Marx's views and knowing the contexts that influenced Marx to make his position on religion and human and environment interrelationships. The analytical approach was adopted in view of examining Marx's approach towards religion and nature in detail and drawing conclusion.

The archival sources for understanding and analysis were accessed through

online sources including scholar.google.com, www.researchgate.net and internetarchive.org. Keywords were entered to seek the relevant archival sources. Such keywords included Karl Marx' on religion, religion and Karl Marx, Karl Marx's on nature, Marx's view on Hindu religion, Marx on India, Karl Marx on ecology, Marx's views eastern tradition etc. Alongside, Marx's published books and articles as well as write-ups on Karl Marx's position on religion and nature were accessed through public libraries.

The archival and published documents listed for examination and analysis were scrutinized for their validity. Altogether 72 such sources were obtained while after scrutinizing only...X... were included for further examination and analysis. These documents were sent to experts for further validation. After studying, the experts from political science and political economy endorsed only...Y.... documents which were included for final analysis in this paper.

Conservative coding method was applied to generate themes for final analysis. The final documents were read carefully highlighting the keywords. This process was further complemented by line-by-line coding of the most useful section of the documents. The codes were grouped under separate themes in separate files and scrutinized and edited for finalization. At the end, the themes were analyzed descriptively as well as juxtaposing relevant literatures wherever was necessary.

Results and Discussion

The Origins of Marx's Theory

Karl Marx's ideas did not come from calm, detached philosophical thinking but were born out of intense pressure and frustration. Throughout his life, Marx faced many personal difficulties, including financial hardships and being forced into political exile, which deeply shaped his views. These challenges pushed him to criticize capitalism and focus on the struggles of the working class, known as the proletariat. In his early writings, Marx famously said, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (Marx, 1845). This powerful statement reveals Marx's urgent desire for real, impactful change in society.

Marx saw the current social and economic systems as unfair and oppressive. His personal struggles made him very aware of the injustices faced by workers, and he wanted to create a society that focused on meeting their needs. He encouraged the working class to unite and fight against those in power, believing that collective action was the key to bringing about meaningful change. Marx's dream of a fairer society was driven by the pressures he faced in his own life, and his ideas continue to inspire movements for social justice today.

Human Rights and Enjoyment of Life

Marx supported human rights, but his views on individual fulfillment are complex. While he recognized the importance of rights, he criticized how they are

expressed under capitalism. He believed that capitalism strips people of their true essence by alienating them from their work. In his Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, Marx argued that capitalism limits workers' creativity, preventing them from fully enjoying life (Marx, 1844). According to Marx, true fulfillment can only be achieved when the economic system supports individual well-being and creativity. He emphasized the need to change the societal structures that prevent people from realizing their full potential and experiencing true happiness.

Harshness Toward Other Beings

Marx's ideas also extend to how he views other living beings, where his focus on materialism may appear harsh. His emphasis was largely on human experiences, often considering non-human entities. Some critics argue that this shows a lack of empathy for the broader world of living things, reflecting Marx's strong focus on economic issues over ethical perspectives that include all forms of life (Fitzgerald, 2018). Because of this, Marx's views have faced criticism for overlooking the importance of respecting and caring for all living beings. Critics believe that by focusing mainly on human struggles, Marx's framework misses the interconnectedness of all life, which is crucial for a fuller understanding of the world.

The Absence of Compassion and Sympathy

Marx's materialist view is focused on class struggle and economic relationships but is often criticized for neglecting emotional and ethical aspects of life. Christian teachings, for instance, emphasize compassion, as shown in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which calls for loving and caring for one's neighbor (Luke 10:25-37, New International Version). Saint Thomas Aquinas also argued that true justice is linked to love and moral virtue, believing that a just society cannot be built solely on economic factors, but must consider ethical relationships between people (Aquinas, 1274). Critics suggest that Marx's vision of social justice may be incomplete, as it overlooks these emotional and ethical dimensions that are central to many religious traditions.

Hinduism also promotes tolerance and compassion through its teachings and practices, particularly the concept of "Ahimsa," which emphasizes non-violence and respect for all living beings. Mahatma Gandhi, a key figure in India's fight for independence, advocated for Ahimsa as a powerful tool for social and political change. Gandhi stated, "Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind" (Gandhi, 1948). This principle encourages empathy and understanding, fostering a peaceful society. The 'Bhagavad Gita' further teaches that individuals should act with a sense of duty and righteousness, promoting compassion and responsibility toward others, regardless of their background (Bhagavad Gita 2.47).

Buddhist philosophy offers similar insights, highlighting the importance of compassion, or 'karuna', in reducing suffering and promoting empathy among all beings (Rahula, 1974). Critics like David McMahan argue that Marx's focus on

material conditions ignores the moral and emotional factors essential for addressing the root causes of social inequality. By overlooking these aspects, Marx's framework may fall short of inspiring lasting social change, as it doesn't engage with the compassionate values emphasized in spiritual teachings. Contemporary thinkers like Martha Nussbaum also stress the importance of emotions in understanding morality. Nussbaum (2001) argues that compassion and empathy are vital for human well-being, and without them, Marx's ideas of justice risk becoming a cold calculation rather than a genuine expression of how deeply connected we are as humans. Critics argue that a comprehensive approach to justice should include emotional and ethical dimensions to truly value all members of society. This raises questions about whether a purely materialist view, as Marx proposed, can fully address the complexities of human life.

Deep-Rooted Frustration

At the heart of Marx's theories is a deep frustration with the economic systems of his time, especially capitalism. He criticized capitalism for the harm it caused to people and pointed out that the ideas of the ruling class shaped society, creating and maintaining inequalities. Marx believed that those in power used their influence to maintain control, which led to widespread suffering. This perspective contrasts with many religious traditions that focus on compassion and justice. For example, both Hinduism and Buddhism stress ethical actions to reduce suffering and help the vulnerable (Rahula, 1974). Christian teachings also emphasize the importance of love and caring for others in the fight against social injustices. The Bible encourages believers to "love thy neighbor" (Mark 12:31, New International Version), promoting a sense of community and compassion that Marx's theories often lack. Reinhold Niebuhr, a Christian theologian, pointed out that Marxism tends to focus too much on economic issues, neglecting the moral aspects of being human (Niebuhr, 1952). Without considering emotions and ethical relationships, Marx's ideas can seem too rigid, leaving out the richer understanding of justice that compassion brings. Martha Nussbaum (2001) argues that understanding justice requires recognizing the role of emotions in moral decisions. While Marx's critique of capitalism is essential, it is also necessary to include compassion and empathy in discussions of social change. A broader approach would address not only economic problems but also the emotional and ethical factors needed to build a just society.

In summary, while Marx's theories highlight critical issues within capitalism, they may not fully address the importance of compassion and ethical relationships. Religious teachings from Buddhism and Christianity emphasize the need for empathy and love in addressing social injustices. By acknowledging the emotional aspects of human experience, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of justice that incorporates both economic and ethical dimensions. This balanced approach could lead to more meaningful social change that truly values all individuals.

Conclusion

Marx's ideas come from his own struggles and frustrations with society, especially the harm caused by capitalism. He talks about big problems in the economy, especially how the working class is treated unfairly. However, his focus on money and material things sometimes overlooks important emotional and moral aspects that are key to understanding human life. Religions like Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism highlight the importance of kindness, compassion, and responsibility to others, saying that true justice requires caring for people and building strong communities. This suggests that while Marx's focus on class struggle is important, it may not fully address all the complexities of human relationships and social justice. Critics like Reinhold Niebuhr and Martha Nussbaum say that emotions and ethics must be part of justice discussions. Without these, Marx's ideas can seem too strict and may not inspire real change. A compassionate approach, taught by many spiritual traditions, is important for creating real connections among people and addressing the root causes of inequality. We also need to remember that all living things, including animals and the environment, are connected when we think about justice. By adding compassion and ethics to Marx's ideas, we can create a more complete view of justice that values everyone's well-being. This approach not only improves Marx's ideas but also helps build a stronger and more inclusive movement for social change. To make social justice meaningful, we need to consider both money and emotions. This balanced approach can create a society that cares for and supports everyone, fixing economic problems while encouraging empathy and care for others.

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