

The Regularity of Historic Development and Human Agency: *Separate in Nature, United in the Combined Action of Human Beings and the Interaction Between the Two*

Ruike Cao¹

¹ Zhou Enlai School of Government, Nankai University, Tianjin, China

Correspondence: Ruike Cao, Zhou Enlai School of Government, Nankai University, Tianjin, China.

Received: April 25, 2022

Accepted: May 22, 2022

Online Published: May 26, 2022

doi:10.20849/ajsss.v7i5.1156

URL: <https://doi.org/10.20849/ajsss.v7i5.1156>

Abstract

The relationship between the regularity of historic development and human agency varies with the formation and development of regularity: regularity emerges from the exercise of agency and then both constrains and guides the latter; the exercise of the agency determines the formation of regularity, and after its formation is constrained but actively uses it and strives for the initiative. The two are separated by their fundamental nature but are united twice by the combined action of human beings and the interaction of 'constraint' and 'use and strive for initiative'.

Keywords: regularity of historical development, human agency, combined action, unity, separation

1. The Regularity of Historical Development Is Formed, Realized, and Given Its Corresponding Expression Through the Dynamic Practice of Man

The regularity of historical development is based on the reality of history and cannot be separated from human agency. In terms of formation mechanisms, modes of action, and forms of expression, the regularity of historical development is formed and realized in the activities of human beings, contains the actual contribution of each dynamic individual, and acquires different forms of expression according to the changing socio-historical conditions.

1.1 From the Point of View of the Mechanism of Formation: The Regularity of Historical Development Is Formed in the Dynamic Process of Human Practice

Various factors in nature form natural laws in the blind interaction; However, social history and its development law are not so "blind" - social history is a human activity pursuing its purpose, so the development law of social history is also a general trend formed in human activities. It is further deduced that the objective necessity of historical development, embodied by each specific law, i.e., the regularity of historical development, is also formed in this process.

1.2 In Terms of Mode of Action: The Regularity of Historical Development Is Realized in the Combined Force of Human Activity, Containing the Actual Contribution of Each Will

Based on real history, the law of historical development first presents the general trend reflected in human activities; but for this general trend to become a concrete reality, for the regularity of historical development - a purely objective necessity at the logical level - to work in practical life, the dynamic, practical activity of man is needed as a vehicle. This is as Chen Duxiu pointed out in his essay *The Death of Lenin*: "While the individual will certainly not create what is objectively impossible, there is room for the individual will to maneuver within the limits of what is objectively possible; and there must be much individual effort and creative idea before this objective possibility can be properly realized." (Note 1) This phrase reminds us that only the correct exercise of the human agency will allow the laws of history to be realized and the regularity of historical development to be put into practical effect.

For example, the two primary laws governing the movement of the fundamental contradictions in society - the law that relations of production must be suited to the state of the productive forces and the law that the superstructure must be suited to the state of the economic base - do not mean that every relation of production in human society is ideally suited to the productive forces and every superstructure is perfectly suited to the economic base; instead, they mean that The relations of production always change with the changes in the

productive forces and the superstructure changes with the changes in the economic base, but in reality, every relation of production that is suitable for the development of the productive forces and every superstructure that is suitable for the development of the economic base is built up through the dynamic practice of people.

Practice as the vehicle for the realization of laws is not the dynamic practice of a single person but the sum of countless practices, the combined force of human activity. For it is only through the combined force of human beings that the laws, as potential general trends, can become a reality that effectively covers the masses; the objective necessity that the various laws together embody can also become the regularity of the development of society as a whole. It is for this reason that every human activity participates and plays its part in the inevitable course of history in an authentic way; every will contributes to the realization of the regularity of historical development through its practical contribution to the combined forces of humanity.

1.3 From the Point of View of Expression: The Regularity of Historical Development Acquires Different Forms of Expression According to the Changing Socio-historical Conditions

The laws of social history are formed and work in human activity, but take different forms under different historical conditions. For example, the general law of social development (in the overall history of humanity, the succession of social forms manifests itself in a sequence of five social forms: primitive, slave, feudal, capitalist, and socialist societies) manifests itself in different forms as the Germanic peoples move directly from primitive society to feudal society.

The objective regularity of historical development, which is the common expression of the specific laws, also takes on different forms when the laws take on different forms; this is ultimately due to changes in socio-historical conditions. It can therefore be said that the actual manifestation of the regularity of historical development changes according to the socio-historical conditions.

2. The Regularity of Historical Development Does Not Depend on the Individual Will but Restricts and Dominates the Exertion of Human Agency

It is through the human agency that the regularity of historical development can be formed, realized, and given rich expression; subsequently, the regularity of historical development acts as a constraint and a dominant force on human agency. This role arises, on the one hand, from the fact that the regularity of historical development is formed by the combined action of human activity and therefore has an objective necessity; on the other hand, from the fact that the essential power of human beings has not yet been freely, consciously and comprehensively exercised, which is rooted in the spontaneity and alienation of practical human activity. This is illustrated separately below.

2.1 Spontaneity and Alienation Create the Conditions for Deviations and Constraints After Regularity Has Been Formed

The spontaneous, alienated nature of practical human activity prevents people from consciously and freely disposing of the essential forces that create history, thus creating the conditions for the deviation and constraint of regularity on dynamism.

Spontaneity is reflected in the synergy of human activity - the outcome of history is the result of the "synergy" formed by the interaction of various social factors and forces, and the inconsistency between the results of this "synergy" and the individual will is essentially due to the lack of a "common will", which leaves the overall practical activity in an unconscious, spontaneous state. The result of this is that people always perceive that the exercise of their initiative does not influence, or even diverges from, the formation of historical regularities and may feel constrained by this sense of "divergence" and by the nature of the regularities themselves.

Alienation is embodied in the alienation of human labor - the capitalist deprives the worker of his benefits, alienating the fruits of labor from labor, alienating labor itself from the worker, alienating the worker from his class nature, and finally alienating man from man; in short, "From the object of labor to labor itself becomes an external, antagonistic thing for the man." (Note 2) The worker, who suffers from alienated labor, is unable to reconcile the contradiction between his own labor time and free time, unable to freely and autonomously dispose of his essential forces to create history.

In summary, the spontaneity of human practice makes the regularity of historical development independent of the will of the individual at the stage of its creation, thus giving a sense of deviation and constraint after its formation; the alienating nature of human practice prevents people from enjoying enough free time to voluntarily and fully dispose of their essential power to make history, and from taking the initiative in the formation of regularity.

2.2 The Combined Action of Human Beings and the Nature of Regularity Make the Regularity of Historical Development Independent of Individual Will

In the formative period of the regularity of historical development, it is not the power of the individual that determines its formation, realization, and manifestation, but the synergy of human forces. The theory of historical synergy fully recognizes the actual contribution of each will to the "synergy", but it also indicates that the outcome of history is beyond the will of the individual. Thus, the regularity of historical development in its formative years is already beyond the will of the individual.

After its formation, the regularity of historical development, like the regularity of nature, represents the most fundamental nature of the law - objective necessity, which does not depend on human will. For example, once the law of historical development that "matter determines consciousness" and its objective necessity have been established, the dynamic activity of human beings always reflects this law and is always subject to it. A typical example is that material interests become the fundamental motivation for human beings and that human agency is always driven and conditioned by this law.

3. Human Agency Can Correctly Grasp the Regularity of Historical Development and Use It to Explain History and Guide Behavior

The regularity of historical development is an objective necessity that, like the regularity of nature, cannot be skipped or canceled once it has been established. But human agency makes man when subjected to regularity, a very different state from that of a creature blindly governed by nature -

3.1 Man Can Grasp the Regularity of Historical Development and Use It to Explain the History

According to materialist Gnosticism, the human mind is capable of correctly reflecting the real world. One can also correctly grasp the objective nature of the law of historical development in the passionate pursuit of truth. Grasping this regularity enables people to explain the regularities of historical processes more scientifically and rationally while at the same time being inquisitive about the unexplainable phenomena.

3.2 Man Can Think and Act Scientifically Guided by the Regularity of Historical Development

The proper and rational understanding of the regularity of historical development gained by humanity in practice can also be used to guide human behavior and direct man to bring his essential powers into play more rationally; thus making human intellectual and practical activities more scientific and the state of human existence and development more regulated.

This process, in the Marxist materialist view of history, is also the process by which "necessity is transformed into freedom" - "it is in the practical activity of transforming the objective world that man as a subject recognizes the historical necessity and plans his actions following this recognition, and thus necessity is transformed into freedom." (Note 3) "Freedom" is reflected in the fact that guided by the regularity of historical development, man can give fuller play to his subjective character and thus create his history more consciously with activities that are increasingly in line with objective regularity.

4. Human Agency Can Lead to the Coalescence of a Common Will and the Transformation of Production Relations, Fundamentally Influencing the Formation of Regularity and Thus Changing the Overly Passive State of Affairs

The regularity of historical development is essentially the regularity of people's social activities. Apart from correctly understanding the regularity and using it to guide practice, people can still alleviate its domination of human activity by "going back to the roots" and "prescribing the right remedy".

"Going back to the roots", that is, finding the fundamental reason why the regularities of historical development constrain people's dynamic activity - which, as mentioned above, lies in the spontaneity and alienation of practical human activity. Thus, the human agency can fundamentally influence the formation of regularity by working in two ways, thus changing its position of being too dominated by it and achieving coherence between the aims and results of its activities.

4.1 Dismantling Spontaneity - Coalescing the Common Will, Turning "Spontaneous" Into "Conscious"

To change the spontaneous state of human activity as a whole, which is caused by the conflict and obstruction of the various wills of the "combined forces", it is necessary to start with the "exporters" of the "combined forces" --The people who contribute to the history of the world need to develop a genuine common will (a common will that is not whitewashed, not imposed by rulers, and not influenced by the ideas of others) and make it the regulator of the practical activity of humanity as a whole. The ideal state of affairs is one in which the will of each is directed towards a similar goal and in which the practical activities of each are a means, not a hindrance,

to the achievement of the aims of others. In this way, the spontaneity and unconsciousness of historical outcomes would be weakened, their coherence with the aims of individual activity would be enhanced; and the laws of history and their objective inevitability, which emerge from the combined action of human activity, would be more in keeping with the needs of human development.

4.2 Dissolving Alienation - Developing the Productive Forces and Transforming the Relations of Production, Turning the "Repressed" Into the "Free"

For people who suffer from "alienated labor", the development and transformation of the productive forces and relations of production in their societies are what gives them complete freedom to dispose of their essential forces. Firstly, the development of the productive forces of society can provide the material basis for the elimination of the dichotomy between working time and free time. Secondly, the transformation of the relations of production is the fundamental way to transform the relationship between the "capitalist" and the "worker" on a material basis, thus changing the alienated relationship between labor and its products and the worker. Through these two efforts, workers are expected to increase their ratio of free time to labor time and to develop their essential powers more freely and fully.

To sum up, in the face of the regularity of historical development, the unique dynamism of human beings supports us in forming a correct grasp of the regularity of historical development and using it to guide our practice, but also by dissolving the spontaneity and alienation of practical human activities, we can consciously and freely bring into play the essential power of human beings, thus changing the passive state of being too much subject to the regularity of historical development.

5. A Summary: From the Point of View of the Separation and Unity of the Two

To summarise this paper in terms of the separation and unity of the regularity of historic development and human agency.

5.1 From a Discrete Perspective

The regularities of historical development do not depend on the subjective will of individuals when they are formed; nor can they be skipped over or canceled by the practice of human agency when they are formed.

5.2 From a Unified Perspective

Firstly, the formation and realization of the regularity of historical development cannot be separated from the dynamic activity of man; the two are united for the first time through the combined action of human activity.

Secondly, after the regularity of historical development has been formed, it has a driving or restraining influence on human agency, and people are not helpless to do anything about it - on the one hand, they can correctly grasp the regularity of historical development and use it to explain the history and guide their behavior, and on the other hand, they can unite their joint will, change the relations of production and fundamentally influence the formation of regularity, thus changing their passive state of being too much governed by it. This is the second unification of the two in the interaction between "restraint" and "use and initiative".

In summary, the relationship between the regularity of historic development and human agency varies with the formation and development of regularity: regularity arises in the play of agency, which then both constrains and guides the latter; agency determines the formation of regularity, and after its formation is constrained, but actively uses it and strives for the initiative. The two are separated by their fundamentally different nature and are united twice in the interaction between the combined action of human beings, 'constraining' and 'using and striving for initiative'.

References

- Du, J.-G. (2001). The dynamic and passive nature of the historical subject. *Journal of Peking University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, (3), 36-43.
- Gong, L.-J., & Feng, T.-Y. (2020). The relationship between subjectivity and subjectivity - the Dialectics of Nature as an example. *Studies in Natural Dialectics*, 36(11), 118-123.
- Gong, P.-H., & Yu, W. (2017). The logical dilemma of historical law research and the revelation of Popper's two assertions. *Changbai Journal*, (6), 31-35.
- Guo, G.-P., & Ye, Z.-X. (2013). A practical interpretation of the relationship between the laws of history and the dynamic activities of human beings. *Henan Social Science*, 21(2), 47-50.
- Li, K. (2019). On the four dimensions of Marx's view of practice. *Journal of Tianjin Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, (4), 30-35.

- Lu, Y. (2019). The ideological exploration of Marxism in China in the late May Fourth period: Chen Duxiu's understanding of the objective laws of history and human subjective initiative. *Nankai Journal (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, (3), 11-18.
- Marxist Philosophy. (2009). *Marxist philosophy*. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1.
- Xu, H.-B., & Wang, N.-C. (2008). Resolving the dilemma of the relationship between historical laws and human agency by relying on complexity science--A reply to Dr. Bai Lipeng. *Academic Monthly*, 40(11), 20-28.
- Zhou, Y.-T. (2018). *On the Imbalance between Labor and Management Interests in China's Non-public Enterprises and its Correction*. Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 1.

Notes

- Note 1. Chen Duxiu, edited by Li Dazhao, *The Essence of New Youth* 4, China Pictorial Press, 2013.01, p. 152.
- Note 2. Guo Guangping, Ye Zexiong. A practical interpretation of the relationship between the laws of history and the dynamic activities of human beings[J]. *Henan Social Science*, 2013, 21(02):47-50.
- Note 3. Liu Shengji, ed., *A Concise Course in Marxist Philosophy*, Kaiming Publishing House, 1991.09, p. 339.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).