

La teoría marxista en la geografía ambiental: La naturaleza, la sociedad y la dialéctica materialista

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August 20, 2017

Resumen

Esta sesión aborda con la dialéctica materialista y su papel en la comprensión de las relaciones naturaleza-sociedad. Esto incluye varios conflictos sobre la forma de la dialéctica naturaleza-sociedad y el papel de las preocupaciones ecológicas en el marxismo.

Textos

- Richards (1983) (clave: Cannon1983), «Dialectics, nature and physical geography»
- Harvey (1993) (clave: Harvey1993), «The nature of environment: Dialectics of social and environmental change»
- Foster (2016) (clave: Foster2016), «Marxism in the Anthropocene: Dialectical rifts on the left»

Notas de discusión

Dialéctica, naturaleza y geografía física

- Geography has adopted the mental division of labor and remains profoundly divided between “human” and “physical” domains, despite its pretensions to an integrated focus on society and nature.
- As an inherently integrative and dynamic philosophy, dialectical materialism can be used to overcome the compartmentalization of knowledge and the traditional categories of scientific inquiry
- This dynamic approach reconceptualizes society and nature from fixed and independent categories into dynamic and unitary processes
 - Essentialist perspective and its limitations also apparent in the dual conceptions of space as either mechanistically fixed in physical geography or entirely socially constructed in human geography, rather than the material product of historical processes
 - Thus, approaches to society, nature and space need to recognize their interconnectedness, contradictions and unities as well as their differentiations and relative autonomies
- The example of flooding in California illustrates several useful insights obtained through a dialectical approach, particularly with respect to issues of risk and vulnerability
 - Risk and vulnerability are a social concept that reflect a material reality generated by contradictory interactions between social and natural factors.

- * These underlying contradictions do not exist in isolation, but are products of historical processes
- Most risk analyses and proposed attempts at mitigation attempt to address the superficial issues rather than their underlying contradictions, and are therefore rarely effective.
- The interests of the state are primarily in reconciling these contradictory interests within the capitalist class to maintain the conditions for capital accumulation, rather than serving as an impartial social mediator (Roosevelt’s approval of efforts to limit land speculation was based on concern about the risk of retaliation against the capitalist class)
 - * Even when the state acts to protect social needs, its efforts are frequently stymied or undermined by the structural constraints of the capital system (large landholdings benefited from public irrigation despite the legislation; cities discouraged from enforcing no-development zones by need to expand tax revenues)
- As Richards notes, the capital system rests on the appropriation by private capital of wealth that is socially produced.
 - * The state is frequently an important part of this process, both as the guarantor of private property and as a vehicle for the transfer of public wealth to private capital
 - * This contradiction also appears in converse form, i.e., the attempt to socialize the costs of capital’s private gains. The state also frequently plays an important role here.
 - * This contradiction is frequently referred to more generally as the «Lauderdale Paradox», i.e., the «expansion of private riches at the expense of public wealth» (Clark and Foster, 2010, clave: Clark2010b)
- A fundamental contradiction exists between the interests of individual capitalists (particular developers) and those of the capitalist class, (developers’ opposition to proactive measures to mitigate the risk of flooding or water scarcity, despite the financial costs imposed by geological hazards)
 - * Rather than resolve its contradictions, capital usually seeks to displace them elsewhere (diversion of flooding and risk to marginalized and impoverished areas; the aforementioned attempts to socialize the costs of disasters)
- A dialectical approach to space based on its historical development reveals a series of contradictions and a rift between society and place that geography needs to address
 - Failures of rent-based land-use models
 - Disparities between territorial and physical boundaries, and between formal and social ones
- Struggles over resources and other «environmental» issues often reveal fractionations within the capitalist class
- Although dialectical analysis can be found in the natural sciences, they are rarely linked sufficiently with historical and socio-economic analysis to provide adequate explanations of existing issues

La naturaleza del medio ambiente

- Harvey begins with an interesting observation on the vast diversity of meanings attached to the term «environment», and then describes the conventional conceptualization of «environmental issues» as circumscribed to those regarding the relationship between society and:
 - The condition or «health» of the bio- or ecosystem that supports human activity
 - Specific aspects of the ecosystem (e.g., air, water, soil, landscape)

- Quantities and qualities of «natural resources» upon which human activities depend, including both «renewable» and «non-renewable» resources
- Harvey also describes an interesting distinction between an external and managerial «environmental» position and an «ecological» one that sees humans as embedded in nature, and then uses the second position to argue that the conventional division between the built environments of cities and the human-modified environments of rural and remote regions is largely arbitrary apart from an ideological distinction between town and country that underlies a pervasive anti-urban bias in ecology.
- The relationship between environmental and socialist political movements has frequently been antagonistic, although not necessarily between all types of Marxists and all currents of the environmental movement.
 - Marxist have primarily been critical of the pro-capitalist apologetics of ecological modernization theory, the neo-Malthusianism of deep ecology and other factions of the environmental movement, and the tendency to treat technological and cultural factors as the root of environmental problems rather than the social relations underlying their development and application. Marxists have been far more sympathetic to struggles for environmental justice among the poor and working class, and ecology itself has a history of Marxist influence (Faber, 2008; Foster, 2009).
 - * Given its reactionary role as a brutal apologetic of capital, Marxist thought has traditionally been highly critical of Malthusianism from the onset, as illustrated in Marx’s trenchant criticisms of Malthus himself (incluyendo referirse a él en un punto como un babuino en Marx, 1993). Rather than denying their existence or importance, however, criticism of the neo-Malthusianism currents ecology by Marxists generally focus on the ways in which appeals to over-population and over-consumption obscure the underlying causes of contradictory environmental change in capitalist society and thereby undermine efforts to resolve them by diffusing or diverting energy from efforts to overthrow capital into superficial and individualistic measures (e.g., Commoner et al., 1971, clave: Commoner1971; y Williams, 2010).
 - Environmentalists, on the other hand, and deep ecologists in particular, have primarily been critical of what they regard as a Prometheanism (reflected in the Soviet Union’s catastrophic ecological record) exemplified in the embeded in Marx’s ideas that either rejects the idea of ecological constraints on production or sees non-human nature as nothing but a resource to be exploited, and the Marxist emphasis on class struggle in contradistinction to the environmental issue as one that transcend class interests.
 - * With respect to the first of these two charges, most Marxists reject the productivist orientation of Soviet politics as a distortion or negation of the socialist project rather than an accurate reflection of its aims (de hecho, muchos marxistas consideran la contra-revolución estalinista la muerte del socialismo y el resurgimiento del capitalismo en la Unión Soviética Arnove et al., 2003). Although various scholars have used various excerpts of Marx and Engels’ work to argue that Marxism itself is laden with an anti-ecological bias, more careful and systematic review of Marx and Engels’ texts have not only refuted the existence of such a bias, but have illuminated a sophisticated ecological component of their work that anticipates many advances in contemporary ecology and that dialectically relates the transformation of non-human nature in ways inimical to humanity’s interests to the exploitation and degradation of labor-power by capital (Burkett, 1999; Foster, 2000, claves: Burkett1999, Foster2000a).
 - * With respect to the second charge, Marxists make no apologies for continuing to emphasize class struggle as the lever of historical change, and counter (1) that such struggle is necessary to bring about the social conditions in which humanity can transform nature to the benefit of all and avoid can be resolved rather than shifted around in time and space (Clark and York, 2008, clave: Clark2010b), and (2) that the capacity and tendency of capital to shift the burdens of its ecological contradictions onto the working and exploited classes make most the environmental issues very much class issues as well (Foster, 1998, clave: Foster1998b).

- The primary focus of this article is therefore on the development of a basis for socialist engagement with environmentalism and vice-versa. Harvey approaches this issue by considering how values are assigned to (non-human) nature.

Monetary valuation of nature

- Reflecting its primacy under capitalism, Harvey begins by examining the arguments in favor of monetary valuation of nature:
 - Money is the primary means by which we currently assign value to aspects of our environment.
 - Money is the only measure of value presently available with any reasonable claim to universality.
 - Money in contemporary society is the basic language of social power as well, and therefore articulation of nature's value in monetary terms is more likely to appeal to the powerful.
- However, Harvey then identifies a number of objections to the monetary valuation of nature:
 - The social processes that allow money to act as the representation of value are unstable, and the value that money represents therefore varies dramatically in space and time, posing significant problems to using it as a standard measure of nature's value.
 - Attempts to assign monetary values to assets apart from the market prices they achieve in exchange tend to be arbitrary, while these market prices themselves frequently change dramatically, precluding the objective of using monetary values to ensure that inter-generational transfers of natural (and produced) wealth are achieved.
 - Money prices attach to things that can be assigned property rights and exchanged, such that monetary valuations of nature require that aspects of nature be treated as though they can be separated from their environment, and that entire ecosystems are valued strictly as by the sum of the values of their respective parts. This approach to valuation breaks down entirely when ecosystems are regarded as complex and interdependent systems.
 - Money valuations assume particular temporal as well as spatial structures, the former defined by discounting. The assumption of exchangeability also fails when applied to aspects of nature, such as planetary energy fluxes, that cannot be reproduced, substituted, and therefore exchanged.
 - Appeals to monetary values require that the biosphere be treated as an externality that can only be internalized by a price structure or regulatory regime that is arbitrarily selected and imposed.
 - These aspects appear to suggest an inherently anti-ecological logic to monetary valuations of nature.
 - Money as a unidimensional standard of value (socially necessary labor-time) largely fails to represent the complexity and multi-dimensionality of human desires and needs, and is therefore a poor standard of value of any sort.
 - * This reflects a central moral failing of capitalism, as money becomes its core standard of value, yet is itself either considered entirely indifferent to the value it supposedly embodies or projects the image of filth, excrement, and prostitution.
- The problems of monetary valuation then pose the dilemma of either abandoning the universalization of nature's value or distorting it into monetary terms that largely fail to convey it
 - As long as society is dominated by commodity exchanges mediated by money, some degree of monetary valuation will be necessary
 - Such valuation is not inherently «evil»

- This problems of monetary valuation point to difficulties associated with the Smithian model of economics based on individualism, market behaviors and property rights, and the Cartesian and Newtonian conceptions of the biosphere, both of are related to the basis of economic thinking and practices under capitalism.

Inherent values in nature

- Romanticism, environmentalism, and ecologism all contain strong ethical elements that imply that nature possesses intrinsic value.
 - This offers a comforting sense of ontological security and permanence in response to our alienated existence.
- However, this position faces the significant challenge of explaining how we can know nature’s intrinsic value.
- Science regarded as an impartial pursuit of knowledge would be a logical choice for discovering nature’s intrinsic value, but science does not actually offer impartial knowledge. Rather, the metaphors of scientific explanations tend to reflect the political and social circumstances in which they are constructed.
- The assertion of intrinsic value in nature reflects our more general dissatisfaction with and desire for an alternative to money as a measure of value.
- Values purported to be inherent in nature are always properties of the metaphors used to describe them rather than actually inherent in nature.

Moral community as the guide to nature’s value

- Deep ecology has advocated a form of bio-regionalism that promotes moral community and experience of place as the guide to natures value and self-realization
- However, moral communities can just as readily be built on nationalistic and exclusionary bases as on democratic and anarchistic ones.
- This requires that we identify the circumstances that transform sense of place into nationalistic and exclusionary forms.
- Thus, the values of nature drawn from a moral community reflect the politics of the community as much as the value of nature.

Political positions and environmental values

- The diversity and generality of environmental arguments open them to use for a wide variety of political purposes:
 - Authoritarianism — environmental problems require intervention by an authority (i.e., the state) to restrict the action of individuals and to curb human liberties to preserve the common good
 - Corporate and state managerialism — rationalize resource use to sustain society, which implies sustaining corporate power as much as the biosphere
 - Pluralistic liberalism — democratic rights and freedoms necessary are needed to build a consensus on environmental issues, but such consensus would at best be a temporary moment in a deeply contested politics regarding nature’s values and ecological change

- Conservatism — existing landscapes, usages, and social arrangements should be preserved because they are the products of successful human adaptation to and of the natural environment; preservation of political power and values of those presently in power equally important as of environmental conditions
 - Moral community — coupling of communitarian politics and environmental issues, the later potentially becoming an important ideological tool to form community solidarities (e.g., nationalism)
 - Ecosocialism — posits a second route to socialism via the contradiction between the social organization and ecological conditions of production under capitalism that necessitate socialism to permit just and enduring solutions to the environmental crisis
 - Ecofeminism — devaluation and degradation of nature linked to that of women, and solutions to ecological problems therefore require acceptance of certain kinds of feminist principles
 - Decentralized communitarianism — decentralization and community empowerment, coupled with a degree of bio-regionalism is necessary to overcome alienated relations to nature and society
 - Environmental rhetoric also invoked to advance particular interests (research funding, technocracy, control over the resources of others)
- Implication is that all ecological projects and arguments are simultaneously political-economic projects and arguments, and vice versa. Thus, addressing environmental issues requires careful examination of the way ecology and politics interrelate.

Historical-Geographical Materialism and the Political-Economy of Socio-Ecological Projects

- Ecology tends to neglect the record of the historical geography of social and environmental change available.
- Societies historically attempt to create environmental conditions conducive to their survival, and the resulting environments tend to reflect their social relations.
- Thus, ecosystems transformed by humans tend to instantiate and reflect the social systems that generate them.
- A stronger focus is needed on constructing environments beneficial to humans than on adapt humans to nature.
- The dualistic concept of society and nature and the exclusive focus on the impact of the former on the latter needs to be transcended. Rather the environment is both the basis and (in part at least) a product of human activity.
- The «production of nature» thesis is useful in countering idealistic and romantic conceptions of a pristine nature, but problematic in several respects.
 - Conflates production with transformation — production defined as the transformation of nature to produce use-values, can increase degree of transformation but cannot produce matter or life from nothing
 - Nature engages in its own production, and humanity depends on the ability of nature to continue doing so. Even genetic engineering relies primarily on re-combining traits from different organisms to produce new ones; it does not produce whole new «natures» from the ground up.
 - Tends to descend into Promethean denials of humanity's dependence on nature's relative autonomy and neglects the fact that humanity depends on the aforementioned ability of nature to produce/reproduce itself autonomously; humanity cannot imperil nature as a whole, but it can impair its ability to produce the use-values that humanity requires

- Romantic characterizations of indigenous communities as living in harmony with nature are problematic, as such communities are not inherently less alienated from nature than the rest of society, nor are their relationships to nature necessarily harmonious. On the other hand, neither are they necessarily equally or more antagonistic than other relationships to nature.
- The historical-geographical account of environmental change is not meant to deny the novelty of the current scale of the problems, but to rebut the claim that humanity previously lived in harmony with nature until technology and modernity undermined this relationship.
- The historical-geographical account indicates that concepts such as nature and environment are laden with human history because, again, all ecological projects and arguments are simultaneously social projects and arguments, and vice versa.

The remainder of the article is sufficiently organized that recapitulation here in detail is not necessary. The main points are:

- Description of Cartesian perspective
 - The Cartesian perspective, although useful, is unduly restricted and its dualism is not empirically justified.
- The ten principles of dialectics
 - Principle seven, arguably the most important principle of the dialectic to grasp, implies that attempts to preserve nature unchanged should be supplanted by efforts to encourage change in directions conducive to human well-being, but with caution and prudence based on the recognition that our knowledge and understanding of nature and its operations is and will continue to be incomplete.
- Significant commonalities exist between Marxist dialectics (ontological and epistemological) and work in ecology.
- A dialectic approach to Marx’s analysis of the labor-process eliminates much of the basis for the claim that this analysis precludes an ecology rooted in Marxism
- Appreciation of the dialectical tension between the need for a new, unitary language of nature and the inability to express the multiple dimensions and meanings of nature in a single language.
- The problems arising from the invocation of biological bases for social factors do not justify retreat from the integration of social and natural sciences, but do mandate caution.
- Five areas of engagement proposed in ecosocialist politics
 - The paradox of alienation discussed in the first area is particularly insightful, and points to the need to overcome humanity’s alienation from nature and itself by moving society forward towards emancipation and self-realization rather than attempting to retreat and regress into a romantically conceived, unmediated past relationship to nature.
 - Issue of direct vs. indirect threat to capital accumulation: Environmental change will (probably) not pose a direct threat to capital accumulation in the foreseeable future, but degradation of the “*quality* of natural wealth as a condition of human development” (Burkett, 2009, p. 172) poses the indirect threat of social conflict and, if channeled effectively into anti-capitalist struggle, opposition to capital.

Rupturas dialécticas en la izquierda

- Several natural scientists have advanced the argument that we have now moved the Earth into a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene, but this argument is controversial for several reasons.
 - Empirical question of whether humanity is acting as a geological force: difficult to find someone who denies it, but questions still remain about the significance of human impacts in geological time (Zalasiewicz et al., 2011, clave: Zalasiewicz2011)
 - Naturalizes human transformations of the Biosphere in a manner inimical to action (Malm and Hornborg, 2014, clave: Malm2014)
 - Assigns responsibility for global change to an abstract «humanity» rather than the social processes and agents responsible (Altvater, 2016, clave: Moore2016)
- Marxist thought regarding socialist response to ecological change, although moving towards a higher synthesis, still divided due to Cold War politics and the rise of radical social constructionism and post-modernism
- With the demonstration of Marx's powerful ecological critique, debate has shifted from whether Marxists should engage with ecology to the dialectics of nature and society.

Progression of Marxist ecological thought

- Socialism and radical environmentalism initially linked in 1950s–1970s
- Ecosocialism in 1970s–1990s: rejection of dialectics of nature and distancing from natural sciences by «Western Marxism», lead to two divergent trends:
 - Acceptance of the position, popularized by Schmidt (2013), that Marx's original formulations were anti-ecological (Burkett, 1997, clave: Burkett1997, proporciona una refutación completa al argumento de Schmidt), and attempts to link with mainstream Green neo-Malthusian concepts (first-stage ecosocialism)
 - «Domination of nature» thesis replaced by «production of nature» thesis that merges social constructionism and monism with political-economic concepts and subsumes nature within society; increasing overlap with post-modernist position, especially Latour's (1996) ideas of «hybridity» of society and nature
- Ecological Marxism, monism and dialectics in 1990s–2016
 - Second-stage ecosocialism: rediscovery and reconstruction of Marx and Engels' ecology, especially metabolic rift and ecological value analysis (Burkett, 1999; Foster, 2000, claves: Burkett1999, Foster2000a)
 - Third-stage ecosocialism: development and praxis of Marx and Engels' ecology, especially in investigation of ecological rift in the Earth system
 - Parallel current of hyper-social-constructionist monism in Marxist, post-Marxist and post-modernist schools that emphasizes unity in ecological relations as capitalist society subsumes nature; contends that all other approaches to nature-society dialectic (including Marx's) reflect Cartesian dualism
 - Radical social constructionist theories of hybridity that see reality as consisting of machines, artifacts, cyborgs, monsters, etc.; similarly accuse Marx of nature-society dualism; Latour has adopted ecological modernism and posits the need for a political ecology that internalizes and bundles nature

Conflicts between ecological Marxism and ecological monism

- Post-modernists and Marxist adherents to monism accuse ecosocialists and others concerned about the direction of anthropogenic transformations of the Biosphere of a crude catastrophism because they posit nature or the Earth system is something that can be degraded (i.e., its ability to generate use-values necessary to human survival and social reproduction can be compromised).
 - Propound monism as consistent with Marx’s approach or a solution to his faulty dualism
 - Theoretical differences rooted in the rejection of the dialectics of nature by the philosophical tradition of “Western Marxism,” which divided it from natural science and the Marxist concept of the alienation of nature. This leads to an approach to dialectics that is:
 - * Idealist (vs. materialist)
 - * Closed (vs. open): restricted to subject-object identity (vs. unity), exclusive focus on internal relations and denial of external ones
 - * Excludes natural processes
 - Monistic approach subsumes nature within society, and therefore lacks understanding of complex mediations between society and the rest of nature within a dialectical totality, thereby precluding the possibility of a society of sustainable human development based on Marxist concept of socialism
 - * Rejects materialist dialectic and any materialist conception of nature
 - * Posits that ecological problems are effectively eliminated through the subordination of nature to society
 - * Posits nature as becoming progressively anthropogenic in a unifying way, eliminating rifts and alienation because natural process become internal to the social dialectic; rejects any conception of contradictions between capitalism and nature as dualism
 - * Difficult to see how this position could possibly fit with Marx’s observation that humans are a part of nature, albeit a distinct one
 - Therefore tend to promote idealist notions of holism, monism and harmony arising from capitalism and nature or those of hybridity where nature and society are intermeshed or bundled in ever new ways
 - * As Mészáros explains, the history of bourgeois thought formalistically counterposes dualism against idealized notions of unity, universality and harmony as a fundamental antimony between which it regularly alternates, each contributing to the perpetuation of alienating ideology
- Ecological critique of second-stage ecosocialism rooted in materialist dialectic, in contrast, connected to existing movements that oppose capitalism’s ecological and social contradictions
 - Dialectics of nature led to critique of capital’s inherently unsustainable relation to human and non-human nature
 - * Marx himself posited ecological contradictions as part of the impulse to socialism
 - Conceptualizes history in its totality as a process of dialectical mediation and change in the metabolism of nature and society
 - * Dialectics central to understanding of mediation of nature and society through production
 - Historical materialism denies the possibility of a resting point or final closure in the materialist dialectic of society and nature
 - * As materialist and dialectical, Marx’s approach is critical of both monism and dualism, and transcends them through the concept of dialectical unity
 - * Sartre’s inability to settle on monism or dualism without abandoning a dialectic approach is illustrates the manner in which dialectical materialism sublates monism and dualism

Currents in radical social-monism

- Social monism as world-ecology: Claim that capitalism is a unifying world-ecology in which nature is subsumed by capital and only exists as a supply of resources for the economy
 - Thus, ecological crises exist only as economic crises, to which capital adapts, prompting its transformation; amounts to social reductionism
 - In its efforts to escape dualisms (and Soviet dialectical materialism), Western Marxism frequently projects an abstract, hypostatized reality where the largely material world is almost entirely absent apart from as a product of the social domination or production of nature.
 - Rejects the concept of metabolic rift as another form of dualism, and instead posits the truisms that the world is ultimately a unified totality and that human production creates new human-nature hybrids formation of despite the stronger theoretical position and empirical support in favor
 - * Ecological Marxism does not deny either claim, but notes that the world is a differentiated totality in which society and nature both retain degrees of autonomy, and that the formation of hybrids does not necessarily transcend the natural processes and laws that help form them.
- Production of nature: Very similar to social monism as world-ecology, but more fully developed. Nature may have existed apart from humanity in the past, and may still exist in space or buried beneath the Earth's crust (which Smith, 2008, dismisses as ideal, abstract nature), but all nature around us is now produced by capitalism, and external contradictions between capital and nature are replaced by internal social contradictions. This concept has already been discussed above, but a few additional points merit mention here:
 - To produce nature, humans would have to be somehow independent of it, else they would just be reproducing nature. However, as humans are part of nature, they can at best transform it, not produce it.
 - Nature produces, or at least reproduces itself, apart from humanity, and human production relies on nature's ability to do so (agriculture would be impossible if crops did not grow, and crops are themselves cultivated as part of production, rather than produced from raw materials)
 - Quantitative problem: human knowledge has not achieved, and may never achieve, the ability to produce or reproduce various aspects of nature, such as a climate system immune to the effects of carbon emissions or, more fundamentally, living matter from non-living matter or matter itself from nothing
 - If nature is the material that supplies the object and instruments of labor, as well as labor-power, then claiming that nature is produced suggests that humans are capable of producing all the prerequisites of production, and that production itself is therefore entirely unreliant on first (not produced by humans) nature. This perspective readily leads to Prometheanism.
 - Castree (2002, *clav*: Castree2002a) attempts to circumvent the problems of hyper-constructionism in Smith's thesis by treating human and non-human nature as hybrid bundles (ANT). This approach, however, is either tautological insofar as reality consists of combinations of human and non-human factors, or is meant to deny that nature continues to possess any form of autonomy, thereby exposing itself to the same failings as Smith's original formulation.
 - * Also reflects confusion between actors and artifacts that characterizes ANT (Hornborg, 2017, *clav*: Hornborg2017)
 - Smith's thesis and Castree's reformulation of it both lend themselves to a reactionary position in which environmental concerns can be entirely dismissed
- Environmental history: social-constructionism that posits nature has no ontological existence, and is defined entirely as a cultural concept

- Cronon’s position regarding the cultural context of nature is reasonable insofar as it recognizes the formation of diverse conceptions of nature throughout history and in different societies (consistent with his position as a cultural historian), but becomes problematic when the ontological existence of nature itself is denied; i.e., the fact that our knowledge of nature is incomplete and socially produced does not justify the claim that nature itself — a material referent to which diverse significations are created by humans — does not exist (Evanoff, 2005, clave: Evanoff2005)
- Idealist position and one sided insofar as it focuses entirely on cultural representations of the material world. The other side of the relation is equally important: the dependence of culture on the material world.
- Monism initially developed in a particular political and social context alongside social Darwinism, and subsumed all of society to nature, thereby naturalizing social relations of domination and exploitation. Thus it was highly deterministic, and developed a strongly racist component that contributed to fascism and apartheid. Social monism, is the binary opposite of this, subsuming nature to society and thereby positing all biological relationships and natural processes as social ones, which has proven problematic insofar that it dismisses any concern with the long-term ability of non-human nature to continue providing necessary use-values as catastrophism and apocalypticism.
- Marx himself was highly critical of the nature-society dualism, as well as other dualisms, of bourgeois philosophy, but rather than retreat to monism, he dialectically transcended both positions
 - Situates dualism in the context of alienated relations to production, and therefore to social metabolism, under capitalist relations (and, to some extent, their predecessors)
 - Lead to recognition of the metabolic rift between the social metabolism and the universal metabolism of nature as the cause and manifestation of capitalist alienation, and further reason to move to socialism
 - Marx and Engels recognized science as a human product and its knowledge as social constructs, but did not deny the ontological existence of its objects of investigation

The return of the dialectics of nature and ecology

- The rejection of Engel’s dialectics of nature is apparently based on a footnote in Lukács (1971, clave: Lukacs1971) that questions the validity of extending the dialectic beyond the subject-object relation between human consciousness and human history, which implies that dialectics is severed from any conception of external nature outside of human action. However, in the same text, Lukács insisted that a limited, purely objective dialectics of nature was possible, and in later texts insisted that he did not reject the dialectics of nature. He also argued that Marx’s analysis of social metabolism identified the reciprocal relationship between humanity and nature as a necessary precondition to social reproduction and a flexible but inherent and perpetual natural boundary to human production.
- Mészáros (2005, clave: Meszaros2005) describes Marx’s theory of alienation in terms of a triadic relation of human–production–nature in which the relationship between humanity and nature is mediated by production. Capital introduces wage labor and private property as second-order mediations (as well as exchange, money, etc.) that alienate human from nature and production, resulting in alienated production and alienated nature. Thus, humans become alienated from their own nature as well as non-human nature.
 - An issue arises regarding the extent to which the theory of metabolic rift is consistent with class struggle as the fulcrum of change in Marxist theory. Foster (2002, clave: Foster2002) observes that Marx did not relate the ecological problems he identified in capitalism to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, as he saw the latter as imminent.

- The analysis of alienation offered by Mészáros offers a basis on which metabolic rift can be related to class struggle, as it situates the alienation of nature in the separation of the worker from the means of production and the alienation of labor, thus suggesting that ecological concerns fit into the broader concerns of the working class with transcending their alienation and ending their exploitation. Foster (2013, clave: Foster2013a) similarly suggests that the growing convergence of struggles against workplace exploitation and environmental degradation is a key trend bringing about the potential for a revolutionary change to establish socialism and the conditions for metabolic restoration.
- Recovery on a higher level of the dialectics of nature in a way that organically connects them to the dialectics of society is an important pursuit in contemporary ecosocialism.
 - The universality of Marx’s conception of humanity’s metabolic relation to the rest of nature constitutes outer and inner set of conditions or boundary in his conception of reality that allowed him to link the different moments of his critique.
- Marxist theory offers an open-ended, materialist-dialectical approach that comprehends the totality without closure, revealing both the limitations and possibilities of the present, pointing to the need for revolutionary change to a society that transcends the alienation of labor and of nature.

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