Hegel once famously stated: “The Owl of Minerva folds her wings at daybreak.” The American Ecological Marxist, James O’Connor, complains that some people today have turned Marxism into “The Owl of Minerva who folds her wings at daybreak.” His argument is that “when world economy simulates the model (no only this model) that Marx developed in Capital, Marxism is dismissed as fatally flawed, a failed enterprise, like the ex-really existing socialism of the ex-soviet Union.” He thinks that in such a circumstance, the most important task is to establish the “credibility of Marxism itself,” that is, to explain that Marxism far from being “The Owl of Minerva who folds her wings at daybreak,” is rather the eagle spreading her wings to fly at dawn.

In O’Connor’s view, the contemporary value of Marx’s economic and political theory is self-evident. Even though the globalization of the circulation of capital has created possibilities unimaginable in the 19th century, in fact, the main contour of world economy today can be practically gleamed from the theoretical lines found in Marx’s classic text, and this forms a striking contrast with the theory of Adam Smith, which seems to have less and less practical value as changes proceed in the trends of the world economy. The essence of the political theory of Marxism lies in identifying the concept and fact of class struggle, which mainly connotes capital’s struggle to impose labor on the working class on the former’s terms, and the objective facts today prove that everything which Marx exposed is not only still happening but is still happening with greater intensity, “today’s hyper capitalist world economy- and the process of what Marx called global accumulation through crisis- have made this war of capital on labor of life-and-death necessity for the world’s ruling classes”. James O’Connor thinks that the world’s development is constantly verifying Marx’s following prediction: “there are multiple, overlapping tendencies toward fiscal and financial crises, and political and cultural crises among

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
other expressions of the deep contradiction of capital and capitalist politics, culture, and society.”

In O’Connor’s view, now the problem is, even if some people do not deny the contemporary value of Marx’s economic and political theory, “those who concern themselves about these matters are even more skeptical of any wedding (or even engagement) between ecology and Marxism,” that is, they completely erase the ecological implications of Marx’s theory, and construe Marx as an “anti-ecological” thinker. In this case, O’Conner focuses on explaining the intrinsic connection between Marxism and ecology, that is, he reveals the hidden ecological value in Marx’s theory in order to prove that Marxism is still a banner guiding humanity progressively forward today. What he wants to prove is:

Marx and Engels and a number of Marxist theories viewed (and today view) human history and natural history as dialectically interconnected; understood (and understand) the anti-ecological nature of capitalism and the need for a theory that articulates the contradictory relationship between exchange value and use value; and had (and have) at least a latent ecological socialist vision.5

O’Connor specifically reveals the ecological implications of Marx’s theory mainly with respect to three facets, namely “history and nature,” “capitalism and nature” and “socialism and nature”, and concretely explains the intrinsic connections between Marxism and ecology. Here we dissect them one by one.

Marx’s View on “History and Nature”

How should we look at the relationship between humanity and nature, and specifically this is to say: what at bottom could nature possibly turn into? What at bottom is nature? What is nature in the process of becoming? What could humankind possibly make nature become? What kind of relationship should be established between humanity and nature? These are the questions that humanity must answer today in order to get rid of the ecological crisis. O’Connor thinks that the ecological significance of Marx’s theory is firstly that it provides the methodological foundation needed to correctly answer this question, and his purpose of writing *Natural Causes* is precisely to make a profound

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4 Ibid., p. 2.
5 Ibid., p. 4.