

The Intrinsic Logic of Marx's Need for Theory and Common Prosperity in Spiritual Life

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Abstract: Shared prosperity in spiritual life constitutes a pivotal link and crucial focal point for achieving Chinese modernization and realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Marxist theory must provide an ontological foundation for shared prosperity in spiritual life by addressing the objective social nature of individual needs; drive the dialectical unity of individual spiritual development and human civilization's progress through the spiral ascension of class needs; and establish a benchmark for measuring shared prosperity in spiritual life by leveraging the interactive relationship between social needs and societal development. Deeply understanding the logical convergence between the goal of common prosperity in spiritual life and people's needs at the normative level constitutes a concrete interpretation of Marx's theory of "the full development of human beings" in the new era. It also provides a value-based guide for steering spiritual production and dissemination back onto the normative track of "satisfying the people's spiritual and cultural needs."

Keywords: Marx's theory of needs; spiritual life; common prosperity

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The common prosperity of the people's spiritual life is not only an inherent requirement for advancing common prosperity but also the cornerstone for building the spiritual foundation of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Achieving this historic goal is, at its core, a process of self-transcendence driven by the inherent nature of human needs, with the people as the historical agents. Human needs encompass three dimensions—individual survival, species-essential development, and community-building—serving as the intrinsic driving force of spiritual practice. The development of needs constitutes "a new affirmation of man's essential power and a new enrichment of man's essence." Thus, deeply understanding the logical alignment between the goal of common prosperity in spiritual life and people's needs at the normative level holds core significance: it expands the spiritual dimension of Marx's theory of "the free and comprehensive development of man"; It provides a theoretical basis for accurately grasping the contradictions between supply and demand in spiritual and cultural life, avoiding both the blindness of the "supply side" and the fragmentation of the "demand side" in spiritual life construction, while also offering a value anchor for building an inclusive and high-quality spiritual and cultural supply system.

All human activities originate from and revolve around needs. As the connecting point between material production modes and the subject-object relationship of humanity, needs are intrinsically linked to the ultimate realization of human essence. Humanity's unique spiritual life is grounded in the universal and expansive nature of individual needs. It gains endogenous momentum through the evolution of collective needs and is complemented by social needs to dynamically grasp spiritual practices. Only by thoroughly understanding and analyzing the logic of Marx's theory of needs in advancing the realization of common prosperity in spiritual life can we more accurately grasp the real-time progress of spiritual development and achieve the free and comprehensive development of humanity.

1 Marx's Theory of Needs: The Foundational Basis for Common Prosperity in Spiritual Life

Marx asserted, "The first premise of all human history is undoubtedly the existence of living individuals" . This transcends a mere biological observation, profoundly emphasizing the historical inevitability of individual existence and its inherent connection to objective needs. Driven by instincts for survival and development, individuals generate objective needs. These multifaceted needs differentiate into material and spiritual production through practical activities, thereby initiating the continuous process of human history."The need for food, drink, shelter, clothing, and other things" —these survival needs based on biological functions, shared by humans and animals, reveal humanity's natural attributes. Yet Marx's conception of needs extends far beyond this. Its dialectical nature transcends Feuerbach's notion of a unidirectional relationship between humans and nature, rejecting the one-sided view that human-object interactions occur spontaneously. Instead, it regards the "real human being" as a "passionate" natural entity. Marx emphasized the human nature of needs. By analyzing how "real human beings" do not passively adapt to nature but actively engage in thought and action centered on their own needs, he further highlighted the human character of these needs. This human character is confirmed in the fundamental distinction between human and animal needs.

Animal production activities exhibit limitations, partiality, and singularity compared to human production. Their productive role is confined to satisfying the physiological survival of their own species, unable to transcend instinctual constraints and perpetually bound by immediate physical needs—"constructed only according to the measure and needs of the species to which it belongs" .Human production, however, achieves essential transcendence. It produces not only to satisfy basic needs but also to fulfill higher, more social and spiritual requirements—even for production's own sake or for the creation of beauty. Humans understand how to produce according to the measure of any species and apply inherent standards to objects everywhere; thus, they also "construct according to the laws of beauty" .This endows human production with breadth and richness, mirroring the boundlessness and diversity of human needs. It is precisely this infinite extension that drives humanity to continually develop new tools and social relations while satisfying survival needs, ultimately transcending the material realm toward spiritual pursuits. The quest for spiritual enrichment and fulfillment of growing cultural demands is inherently tied to the comprehensive development of the individual and the realization of humanity's essential nature.

Common prosperity in spiritual life is by no means a pie-in-the-sky fantasy. It is rooted in humanity itself, symbolizing the noble pursuit of free and comprehensive self-realization. It represents the advanced form to which human needs inevitably evolve in the course of historical development—a conscious aspiration for self-affirmation, holistic growth, and the fulfillment of one's social essence after basic survival needs are met. Without a profound grasp of the essence of individual needs and their historical logic, the pursuit of common prosperity in spiritual life loses its inherent necessity and solid theoretical foundation.

2 Marx's Theory of Needs: The Internal Driving Force of Common Prosperity in Spiritual Life

Throughout human societal development, individual spiritual needs undergo a dynamic evolution from "nothingness" to "existence," and from "existence" to "abundance." This progression inevitably culminates in humanity's collective demand for spiritual fulfillment and the shared goal of achieving common prosperity in spiritual life. This historical process embodies a dual dialectical logic: First, the elevation of individual spiritual needs fundamentally represents the return of the individual to their species essence. Driven by the infinite expansiveness of human needs, individuals advance continuously. After transcending the constraints of mere material survival, their pursuit of knowledge, aesthetics, morality, value recognition, and self-actualization actively affirms and expands their inherent power as "free and conscious beings."

Second, the development of the human species is realized through the accumulation and elevation of individual needs. The diversity of individual spiritual needs is stimulated in daily life. In the process of satisfying these needs, individuals continuously explore, innovate, and accumulate experience. Ultimately, this converges into collective cultural wealth, transforming into the spiritual resources of the human species and promoting its spiritual development. The level of satisfaction of individual spiritual needs and the spiritual products created by individuals objectively participate in shaping the overall spiritual and cultural atmosphere and evaluation standards of society. Conversely, society's existing spiritual wealth and value standards provide a reference framework and norms for the formation, fulfillment, and evaluation of individual spiritual needs. This guides their development away from straying from the proper path of human civilization's progress, moving toward a realm of mutual enrichment. It is precisely this continuous interaction and mutual construction between the individual and the "species" in the spiritual realm that lays a solid practical foundation for the common prosperity of spiritual life.

"The overall characteristics of a species, the species-specific traits, lie in the nature of its life activities, and free, conscious activity is precisely the human species-specific trait." As an essential human characteristic, the need for community demands not only the free and comprehensive development of humanity but also inherently encompasses the enrichment of spiritual life. After driving individuals toward material fulfillment, this need naturally gives rise to a yearning for spiritual fulfillment—achieved through social spiritual interaction, free cultural creation, and collective recognition of meaning. This process facilitates the return to our "human essence" and promotes the co-creation and shared enjoyment of spiritual wealth. Once humanity's spiritual dimension reaches a certain level of elevation, it gives rise to higher-order material needs. When these new material needs are fundamentally satisfied, the urgency of spiritual needs becomes tangibly apparent. This dynamic unfolds as a spiral of ascent and a wave-like progression, mutually reinforcing and guiding societal advancement. This cyclical mechanism profoundly embodies the hierarchical, developmental, and intrinsically transcendent nature of "species-being needs." It is not a static ideal state but an endless historical process driven by the very essence of "species-being needs." Each cycle propels the further enrichment of individual spiritual life and the accumulation and sharing of collective spiritual wealth, steadily advancing toward the "species goal" of "common prosperity in spiritual life." This dialectical movement of material and spiritual demands, inherently determined by "species needs," constitutes the most fundamental and enduring internal driving force for achieving and continuously advancing toward common prosperity in spiritual life. Rooted in human essence and unfolding through social-historical practice, its direction points toward the true liberation of humanity.

3 Marx's Theory of Needs: The Yardstick for Measuring Common Prosperity in Spiritual Life

Marx critically transcended Feuerbach's narrow conception of human needs precisely by exploring the needs of "real human beings" from a societal perspective. Feuerbach lacked the historical perspective to analyze industrial development, overlooking the need to satisfy the sensuous realities of "real human beings." This prevented him from examining the "sensuous world" upon which humanity depends through a dynamic historical lens, instead reducing human needs to instinctual desires within a static natural context. Marx, however, demonstrated the dual effects of needs by analyzing the dialectical relationship between the polarization of needs under capitalist logic and the enrichment of needs in the socialist stage. Through dynamic thinking, he emphasized the comprehensive development of needs and their relationship with society, overcoming the crude and barbaric simplification of "human needs." This reveals that achieving common prosperity in spiritual life also requires precise grasping of social needs and real-time dynamic feedback.

"The mode of production of material life conditions the entire process of social, political, and intellectual life" . The development of spiritual life is fundamentally constrained by the economic foundation, technological conditions, and legal systems of social life. These factors determine the material conditions and possibilities for spiritual development. In essence, the economic foundation—as the bedrock of social existence—dictates people's basic survival conditions. Only when fundamental material needs are met do individuals gain sufficient time and space to pursue high-quality, profound spiritual life and advance cultural industries. Science and technology provide more convenient means of dissemination and more open, free platforms for the circulation of spiritual products, holding boundless potential in fostering new art forms and nurturing new cultural products. Legal systems, meanwhile, safeguard the free development, directional control, and orderly regulation of spiritual life. These factors interact to collectively shape the specific content and forms of spiritual life. Yet the development of spiritual life can, under the regulation of social needs, exert a reciprocal influence on social production. This ultimately fosters a virtuous cycle between social spiritual development and material progress, achieving common prosperity.

When individual needs coalesce into collective demands and further evolve into societal requirements, they can stimulate human creative potential to advance technological innovation and artistic creation. This, in turn, drives consumption upgrades that fuel economic growth, becoming a new engine for social development. In this process, social needs quantify the journey toward common prosperity in spiritual life, providing tangible metrics for each step of societal advancement. These metrics serve as the basis for policy guidance and resource allocation adjustments. Precisely because individual spiritual needs are elevated to social needs, the people's role as the main force is manifested not only in the consumption of spiritual and cultural products but also in defining the direction of cultural development and the innovation of literary and artistic works. Contemporary China's practice of advancing common prosperity in spiritual life essentially constructs a dialectical cycle mechanism of "practice-recognition-re-practice" for spiritual and cultural development: members of society express their spiritual and cultural needs through democratic channels and digital platforms; the Party and government transform these needs into cultural policies and development plans; cultural producers engage in creative transformation based on these plans; and the resulting spiritual and cultural products ultimately feed back into satisfying the people's needs and enhancing their quality. This cyclical mechanism overcomes the alienation inherent

in capitalist societies while avoiding the disconnect between existing cultural products and public demand. It continually enriches the contemporary relevance of Marxist theory on the comprehensive development of humanity. This social operating mechanism not only provides an objective standard for measuring the realization of common prosperity in spiritual life but, more importantly, translates abstract value pursuits into concrete, actionable, and assessable forms, offering scientific governance tools for socialist cultural development.

4 Conclusion

"The degree to which a theory is realized in a country always depends on the degree to which it meets the needs of that country." This assertion by Marx has been profoundly validated in China's developmental practice. Throughout the formation and two transformations of China's principal contradiction, the core issue has consistently revolved around the people's needs. At each historical stage, the principal contradiction manifests as the tension between the people's "new needs" and the factors constraining their fulfillment. This evolutionary logic profoundly aligns with the intrinsic mechanism of Marx's theory of needs. Consequently, in the current era, analyzing the authentic spiritual needs of the people and the means to satisfy them has become the key pathway to resolving modern spiritual dilemmas and accelerating the construction of a new form of human civilization. Therefore, to achieve common prosperity in spiritual life, we must accurately understand and grasp the focal points and influencing factors of this goal. This requires not only deeply analyzing the logical alignment between the objective of common prosperity in spiritual life and people's needs at the normative level, but also using this understanding to critically examine the alienation of spiritual life in the digital age, transcend the exploitative mechanisms driven by capital accumulation, and scientifically assess the potential risks and developmental trends of future digital technologies in the construction of spiritual civilization. Only by fully leveraging the strengths of the socialist system, applying the Marxist stance, viewpoint, and methodology to guide practice, and adhering to the developmental laws of spiritual needs can we continuously explore new heights in the development of spiritual life.

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