

Study Guide for *On Practice* by Mao Tse-Tung

First Edition

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This document is in the public domain; however, I would like to emphasize that I disapprove of its usage in any generative, “AI,” for any reason.

Introduction

On Practice by Mao Tse-Tung is part of a three-part series that these study guides will be covering, followed by *On Contradiction* and *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, respectively. Mao Tse-Tung primarily wrote for largely illiterate peasants, meaning his documents tend to be very easy to understand.

Mao’s works largely function as a common-sense filter, with a particular focus on ensuring Marxist-Leninists actually perform their party work instead of just regurgitating theory. *On Practice* will begin this discussion, and will be elaborated upon in the aforementioned subsequent works.

As new terms come up in the document that may be unfamiliar or have experienced lingual drift, they’ll be clarified for their individual sections. Additionally, to encourage reading the document rather than seeking summaries, key takeaways for different sections will be presented as questions for the reader to answer, allowing them to seek the answers themselves and come to a greater understanding of the document.

This is unfortunately due to the fact that—while being somewhat viable as onboarding to reading Socialist theory, assuming someone is actively encouraged to learn and possibly assisted in doing so (as opposed to berated)—summarized Socialist theory significantly waters down the original documents and will only provide a rudimentary understanding.

On Practice is a unified document without subsections, and consequently this will be partitioned into the unlabeled introduction highlighted in red on the Marxists Internet Archive, and roughly demarcated by the nine citations within the Marxists Internet Archive copy of this work.

Unlabeled Introduction

Important Context:

- An empiricist is someone who believes that all knowledge is derived from the senses; i.e., these people refused to accept theory under the assumption that they could learn everything from their subjective experiences. A dogmatist, inversely, is someone who blindly follows theory without understanding that they also need to perform investigations to determine their specific

conditions and come up with specific solutions to those conditions, failing to treat Marxism as a method rather than a dogma.

Key Takeaways:

- What is the quote that attention is drawn to?
- What is the purpose of *On Practice*?

Beginning of *On Practice* (Inclusive of Sources 1 and 2)

Key Takeaways:

- What was the change in understanding of how knowledge is derived from before to after Marx's analysis of the world through dialectical materialism? (Note: Dialectical materialism is an inversion of the Hegelian dialectic, prioritizing the material world over human thought as the primary catalyst to change.)
- Why is production understood to be the primary source of human knowledge?
- What are the two outstanding characteristics of Marxism?

After Source 2, until the end of the paragraph which contains Source 4

Key Takeaways:

- What is the perceptual stage of cognition? (Note: Only using this would be the empiricist view.)
- What is the conceptual (second; logical) stage of cognition?
- What is the distinction between these two stages?
- What was the distinction that allowed the first Marxist theorists to understand the conditions of capitalism, and its highest stage, imperialism?
- How can a scholar come into contact with someone else's practice? (Essentially, why is reading theory from people who participated in struggle integral to understanding the general and specific conditions others have experienced, and how does this help you begin to investigate and solve your own specific conditions?)
- Why is all knowledge inseparable from experience? (Note: Why does this additionally make someone who neither reads theory nor investigates espouse nonsense?)

Following the paragraph containing Source 4, until the end of the paragraph which contains Source 5

Key Takeaways:

- How should Marxist-Leninists deal with hesitant Party workers? What will happen if this method isn't employed?
- What is the basis for developing correct concepts and theory?
- Why does idealism lead to incorrect theory? (Note: Idealism is the primary ideology backing anarchism.)
- Why does empiricism lead to incorrect theory? (Note: This paragraph, which contains Source 5, describes exactly how much of the Western leftist movement has functioned for the past 200-ish years, particularly in the North. This is why no Communist revolution has occurred in the USA or Canada.)

Following the paragraph containing Source 5, until Source 8 (end of paragraph)

Key Takeaways:

- How is theory meant to be used?
- Why is Marxism-Leninism understood to be true? (Note: Why is it applicable to the general conditions, and how does it help solve for specific conditions?)

Following Source 8, until the paragraph preceding Source 9

Important Context:

- The, "Left," in quotes which Mao refers to is *ultraleftists*. For more information, please consult "*Left-Wing*" *Communism: An Infantile Disorder* by Vladimir Lenin.

Key Takeaways:

- Why is attempting the praxis based on correct theory the only method to completing that theory? (Note: Marx added notes within the introductions to *The Communist Manifesto* following the Paris Commune (which was Marxist—albeit underdeveloped, and in need of practical experience—in nature, despite this having been fraudulently claimed to have been an anarchist movement) which explained what he learned from the attempt, and helped to solidify his understanding of the need for a proletarian state.)
- What should truly revolutionary Marxist-Leninists do in response to practical attempts?

From the paragraph containing Source 9, until the end of *On Practice*

Important Context:

- Mechanical materialism is an underdeveloped form of materialism which preceded dialectical materialism, viewing the material world as something static and unchanging, or something which only undergoes cyclical processes, denying the existence of changes over time from interactions.

Examples of modern mechanical materialism are the denial of evolution and of climate change, both of which occur due to cycles interacting with other cycles, changing both cycles in turn; for examples, the cycles of reproduction with the numerous other cycles of Earth (water, nitrogen, climate, etc.), or the cycles of climates with the cycles of commodity production.

Key Takeaways:

- What are the tasks of the proletariat?
- What is the summarization of how dialectical materialism works in relevance to changing society and developing human knowledge?