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COMMENT ON “CRITICISM OF FEUERBACH THOUGHT BY MARX AND ENGELS THROUGH THE REFLECTION ON THE TEXT OF THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY”

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According to Yang (2024), Marx’s critique of Feuerbach, in “The German Ideology, played a significant role in the development of Marxist materialist historiography. Marx’s critique primarily focused on contrasting materialism and idealism, as well as analyzing the state of German ideology during that time. One of Marx’s key criticisms of Feuerbach was directed at his conception of “human nature.” Marx argued that Feuerbach’s understanding of human nature was abstract and devoid of historical and social context. According to Marx, human nature is not an isolated and fixed essence, but it is shaped and transformed through material and social conditions (An; Yang, 2012, p. 13). Marx emphasized the importance of historical materialism in understanding human nature and the role of material conditions in shaping human development. Marx also criticized Feuerbach’s materialism, highlighting its limitations. While acknowledging the significance of Feuerbach’s emphasis on the material world, Marx argued that Feuerbach’s materialism remained abstract and failed to grasp the concrete social relations that underpin material conditions. Marx emphasized the need to understand the totality of social relations and the dialectical interplay between material conditions and human consciousness.

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Marx criticized Feuerbach's understanding of "reality." Feuerbach viewed reality primarily in terms of sensory perception and individual experience (Chen, 2022, p. 6). In contrast, Marx argued for a dialectical understanding of reality that considers the contradictions and conflicts inherent in social relations and the transformative power of human praxis. Marx also challenged Feuerbach's understanding of historical relations. Feuerbach focused on the contemplative and speculative aspects of human activity, neglecting the role of practical activity, particularly labor, in shaping historical development. Marx, on the other hand, emphasized the central role of production and class struggle in driving historical change. He argued that historical materialism should be grounded in the analysis of real people, their material conditions and the social relations of production. Marx's critique of Feuerbach laid the foundation for the development of Marxist materialist historiography. It highlighted the importance of understanding historical development through the lens of material conditions, social relations and class struggle. Marx's dialectical and historical materialist approach formed the basis for his analysis of capitalism and his vision of a communist society.

1 THE OPPOSITION BETWEEN THE MATERIALIST VIEW AND THE IDEALISTIC VIEW

The opposition between the materialist view and the idealistic view is a fundamental philosophical and ideological divide concerning the nature of reality, knowledge and human agency. Materialism and idealism represent two contrasting philosophical perspectives on how the world and human experience should be understood. Materialism posits that the material world, consisting of matter and energy, is the primary reality. It asserts that the physical and material aspects of existence, such as the natural sciences, social and economic conditions, and the body, are fundamental in shaping human thought, consciousness and social relations. Materialists argue that matter is objective and exists independently of human perception or consciousness. According to this perspective, the mind and consciousness are products of material processes, such as the workings of the brain.

The early development of Marx's thought involved both critiquing the German ideology and constructing historical materialism, which were interconnected processes. This journey began with Marx's examination of Hegel's view of the rational state, in the *Rheinische Zeitung*, and culminated in the "liquidation" of German thought in the *German Ideology*. In the *German Ideology*, Marx emphasized that consciousness is rooted in real-life processes, highlighting the intertwined relationship between his revolutionary ideological system and the established historical materialism.

Historical materialism represented a theoretical revolution in Western philosophy and intellectual traditions as it challenged Plato's tradition, which regarded the conceptual world as the foundation of the sensory world and considered spiritual history as the validation of secular history. This thesis delves into the connection between Marx's philosophical thought

and the Western metaphysical tradition, with a focus on the *Rheinische Zeitung* and the *German Ideology*, as well as Marx’s critique of German thought.

Marx critiqued Hegel’s “theory-only” conception of the state. Although Marx had initially been a proponent of Hegel’s philosophy, his perspective shifted during the *Rheinische Zeitung* era due to the “material difficulty” he encountered. He realized that Hegel’s notion of the “Rationalism state” lacked a practical basis. The influence of societal interests always influenced the state’s behavior, and private interests played a significant role in shaping state conduct. Marx came to the conclusion that the state could not solely be judged based on abstract principles, such as private property rights, as it needed to consider the practical realities of limited private property rights. This experience led him to question the state’s rationality as an ethical entity and the practical implications of Hegel’s ideas in the context of real-world challenges.

Idealism, on the other hand, holds that ideas, thoughts, or consciousness are the primary reality, and the material world is dependent on or derived from these mental or spiritual phenomena. Idealists argue that the mind or consciousness shapes and determines human experience and social relations. They emphasize the importance of ideas, values, beliefs, and spiritual or metaphysical principles in understanding the world. Idealism often involves a focus on subjective experience, individual perception and the power of human thought to shape reality. The opposition between materialism and idealism has existed throughout the history of philosophy and has implications across various disciplines, including metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and social and political theory. The two perspectives offer different explanations for the nature of reality, the origins of knowledge, and the possibilities for human agency and social change. In the context of Marxist philosophy, Marx criticized idealism, particularly the Hegelian variant, for prioritizing ideas and consciousness over material conditions and social relations. He argued for a materialist understanding of history and society, emphasizing the role of economic structures, class struggle and material conditions in shaping human history (Liu, 2008, p. 1). Marx’s dialectical materialism sought to overcome the limitations of both idealism and traditional materialism by emphasizing the dynamic interplay between material conditions and human consciousness in historical development. Overall, the opposition between materialism and idealism reflects a broader philosophical debate about the fundamental nature of reality and the extent to which material or mental factors shape human experience, knowledge and social relations.

2 MARX AND ENGELS’ CRITIQUE OF FEUERBACH’S “HUMAN NATURE”

Through their critique of German ideology from the perspective of historical materialism, Marx and Engels not only exposed the limitations of abstract philosophical systems, but also laid the foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of society and

history. They sought to shift the focus of philosophical inquiry from abstract speculations to the concrete realities of human existence and the material conditions that shape social life. This approach was a pivotal step in the development of historical materialism, which would later become a fundamental component of Marxist theory and its revolutionary praxis.

Marx and Engels criticized Ludwig Feuerbach's concept of "human nature" in their work, particularly in "The German Ideology." Feuerbach, a prominent figure among the Young Hegelians, emphasized the human nature's importance as the individuals' essence and as a foundation for ethics, religion and philosophy. Marx and Engels argued that Feuerbach's concept of human nature was abstract and idealistic. They contended that Feuerbach treated human nature as an inherent, unchanging essence that existed independently of social and historical conditions. According to Marx and Engels, Feuerbach failed to recognize the human beings' dynamic and historical nature and their social relations.

In "The German Ideology," Marx and Engels criticized Feuerbach's approach as a form of "philosophical idealism." They rejected the notion that human nature could be understood apart from the concrete material conditions in which people exist. They argued that human nature is not a fixed essence, but it is socially and historically constructed through the individuals' practical activities and interactions within specific economic and social structures. Marx and Engels proposed a materialist understanding of human nature that emphasized the importance of social production and the life's material conditions. They argued that it is through the transformative process of production, where individuals interact with nature and produce the means of their existence, that human beings create and shape their own nature.

According to Marx and Engels, the human nature's development is intrinsically linked to the development of productive forces and the social relations of production. They contended that the prevailing mode of production, in a society, determines the social and economic relationships that individuals enter into, thereby shaping their consciousness, values and ideas. In critiquing Feuerbach's concept of human nature, Marx and Engels sought to establish a materialist understanding of human beings as social beings whose nature is shaped by historical and material conditions. They argued that understanding human nature requires an analysis of the concrete social and economic relations in which individuals are situated, rather than relying on abstract philosophical speculation. This critique of Feuerbach's conception of human nature played a significant role in the development.

3 UNDERSTANDING CRITIQUE OF FEUERBACH BASED ON THE ISSUE OF "REALITY"

Marx and Engels also critiqued Feuerbach's understanding of "reality" in their critique of his philosophy. Feuerbach argued that reality is limited to sensory perception and that true

knowledge can only be gained through direct sensory experience of the external world. He emphasized the importance of empirical observation and sensory perception in understanding the world. Marx and Engels, however, challenged Feuerbach's limited understanding of reality. They argued that Feuerbach's conception of reality, as solely determined by sensory experience, neglected the role of social and historical mediation in shaping human perception and understanding of the world (Wang, 2021, p. 88). Marx and Engels proposed a materialist understanding of reality that goes beyond individual sensory perception. They argued that reality is not solely determined by immediate sensory experience, but it is shaped by social, historical and material conditions. They contended that individuals do not exist in isolation, but they are part of a complex web of social relations and structures.

According to Marx and Engels, the society's material conditions, including the mode of production, class relations and the division of labor, play a crucial role in determining the form and content of individuals' perceptions and understanding of reality. They argued that the dominant ideas, beliefs and values, in a society, are shaped by the ruling class's material interests and relations. Marx and Engels criticized Feuerbach for neglecting the role of social and historical context in shaping human perception and understanding. They emphasized the need to analyze the underlying economic and social structures that give rise to different ideas, ideologies and forms of consciousness. By critiquing Feuerbach's understanding of reality, Marx and Engels sought to establish a dialectical and historical materialist approach to comprehending the social world. They argued that reality is not static or fixed, but it is constantly changing and shaped by social contradictions and historical development.

Marx's basic evaluation of Feuerbach's materialism was conducted from two perspectives: affirmation and negation. It was on this basis of affirmation and negation that Marx criticized and surpassed Feuerbach's materialism, and established historical materialism on this basis. Firstly, from the perspective of Feuerbach's materialism, Marx's criticism transcends pure objectivity and, thus, it achieves a dynamic understanding of the world. When Marx was contemplating the direction of capitalism, he proposed using social reform to overthrow capitalism and establish a socialist and communist society. Marx believed that, in fact, the real world is an object of human emotional activity and a process in which humans truly participate. In this process, humans truly participate in this process, and its characteristic is that it constantly generates and develops in this process. In this way, Marx thoroughly eliminated the drawbacks of idealism, in Feuerbach's historical concept of materialism, and achieved a rational understanding of the objective world in historical criticism of Feuerbach's materialism, thus achieving a real sense of materialism and realizing a revolutionary understanding of the law of human social development. Secondly, by criticizing Feuerbach's materialism, Marx's emotional and abstract understanding of human beings enables the realization of the concept of "historical generation" of them. Marx believed that the social and historical relationships, in which humans live, are different, and the

humans' nature is also vastly different. Therefore, human nature has historical and special characteristics, and it is constantly evolving. Therefore, Marx put forward the necessity of examining people from their perceptual activities, thus getting rid of the fetters of Feuerbach's materialism, and combining it with the proletariat's revolutionary practice, thus forming a scientific, adaptive and unproductive theoretical system. It is through this understanding of human social nature that Marx further realized the human society's important role in human liberation and, finally, stood on the ideological height of historical materialism to scientifically explain the capitalist and communist societies' historical destiny.

CONCLUSION

Marx and Engels criticized Feuerbach's limited understanding of reality, which focused solely on sensory experience. They emphasized the importance of social and historical mediation in shaping human perception and understanding of the world, and proposed a dialectical and historical materialist approach to grasp the complex and dynamic nature of reality.

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