

KARL MARX

THESES ON FEUERBACH

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page 61

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I

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism -- that of Feuerbach included -- is that the thing [*Gegenstand*], reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object* [*Objekt*] or of *intuition* [*Anschauung*],* but not as *human sensuous activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in contradistinction to materialism, was developed by idealism -- but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the objects of thought, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* [*gegenständliche*] activity. Hence, in the *Essence of Christianity*, he regards the theoreti-

* *Anschauung* -- in Kant and Hegel means awareness, or direct knowledge, through the senses, and is translated as intuition in English versions of Kant and Hegel. It is in this sense that Marx uses *Anschauung* and not in the sense of contemplation, which is how it has usually and incorrectly been translated. --Ed.

page 62

cal attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and fixed only in its dirty Jewish manifestation. Hence he does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary," of "practical-critical," activity.

II

The question whether objective [*gegenständliche*] truth can be attained by human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. It is in practice that man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness [*Diesseitigkeit*] of his thinking. The dispute over the reality or unreality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question.

III

The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that men themselves change circumstances and that the educator himself must be educated. Hence, this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, of which one is superior to society (in Robert Owen, for example).

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionizing practice*.

IV

Feuerbach starts out from the fact of religious self-alienation, the duplication of the world into a religious, imagined

page 62

world and a real one. His work consists in the dissolution of the religious world into its secular basis. He overlooks the fact that after completing this work, the chief thing still remains to be done. For the fact that the secular foundation detaches itself from itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm is precisely only to be explained by the very self-dismemberment and self-contradictoriness of this secular basis. The latter itself must, therefore, first be understood in its contradiction and then revolutionized in practice by the elimination of the contradiction. Thus, for instance, once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be criticized in theory and revolutionized in practice.

V

Feuerbach, not satisfied with *abstract thinking*, appeals to *sensuous intuition*; but he does not conceive sensuousness as *practical*, human-sensuous activity.

VI

Feuerbach dissolves the religious essence into the *human* essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations.

Feuerbach, who does not enter on a critique of this real essence, is consequently compelled:

1. To abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment [*Gemüt*] as something for itself and to presuppose an abstract -- *isolated* -- human individual.

page 64

2. Therefore, with him the human essence can be comprehended only as "genus," as an internal, dumb generality which links the many individuals merely *naturally*.

VII

Consequently, Feuerbach does not see that the "religious sentiment" is itself a *social product*, and that the abstract individual he analyses belongs in reality to a determinate form of society.

VIII

Social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which lead theory astray into mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.

IX

The highest point attained by *intuiting* materialism, that is, materialism which does not understand sensuousness as practical activity, is the outlook of single individuals in "civil society."

X

The standpoint of the old materialism is "*civil*" society, the standpoint of the new is *human* society, or socialized humanity.

page 65

XI

The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.