Karl Marx

Theses on Feuerbach

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Marx on Feuerbach

(Jotted down in Brussels in the spring of 1845.)

I.

The chief lack of all materialistic philosophy up to the present, including that of Feuerbach, is that the thing, the reality, sensation is only conceived of under the form of the object which is presented to the eye, but not as human sense—activity, "praxis," not subjectively. It therefore came about that the active side in opposition to materialism was developed from idealism, but only abstractly; this was natural, since idealism does not recognize real tangible facts as such. Feuerbach is willing, it is true, to distinguish objects of sensation from objects existing in thought, but he conceives of human activity itself not as objective activity. He, therefore, in the "Wesen des Christenthums," regards only theoretical activity as generally human, while the "praxis" is conceived and fixed only in its disgusting form.

II.

The question if objective truth is possible to human thought is not a theoretical but a practical question. In practice man must prove the truth, that is the reality and force in his actual thoughts. The dispute as to the reality or non-reality of thought which separates itself, "the praxis," is a purely scholastic question.

III.

The materialistic doctrine that men are the products of conditions and education, different men therefore the products of other conditions and changed education, forgets that circumstances may be altered by men and that the educator has himself to be educated. It necessarily happens therefore that society is divided into two parts, of which one is elevated above society (Robert Owen for example).

The occurrence simultaneously of a change in conditions and human activity can only be comprehended and rationally understood as a revolutionary fact.

IV.

Feuerbach proceeds from a religious self-alienation, the duplication of the world into a religious, imaginary, and a real world. His work consists in the discovery of the material foundations of the religious world. He overlooked the fact that after carrying this to completion the important matter still remains unaccomplished. The fact that the material foundation annuls itself and establishes for itself a realm in the clouds can only be explained from the heterogeneity and self-contradiction of the material foundation. This itself must first become understood in its contradictions and so become thoroughly revolutionized by the elimination of the contradiction. After the earthly family has been discovered as the secret of the Holy Family, one must have theoretically criticised and theoretically revolutionised it beforehand.

V.

Feuerbach, not satisfied with abstract thought, invokes impressions produced by the senses, but does not comprehend sensation as practical sensory activities.

VI.

Feuerbach dissolves religion in humanity. But humanity is not an abstraction dwelling in each individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the conditions of society.

Feuerbach, who does not enquire into this fact, is therefore compelled:

1. To abstract religious sentiment from the course of history, to place it by itself, and to pre-suppose an abstract, isolated, human individual.

2. Humanity is therefore only comprehended by him as a species, as a hidden sort of merely natural identity of qualities in which many individuals are embraced.

VII.

Therefore Feuerbach does not see that religious feeling is itself a product of society, and that the abstract individual which he analyses belongs in reality to a certain form of society.

VIII.

The life of society is essentially practical. All the mysteries which seduce speculative thought into mysticism find their solution in human practice and in concepts of this practice.

IX.

The highest point to which materialism attains, that is the materialism which comprehends sensation, not as a practical fact, is the point of view of the single individual in bourgeois society.

X.

The standpoint of the old materialism is “bourgeois” society; the standpoint of the new, human society, or associated humanity.

XI.

Philosophers have only interpreted the world differently, but the point is to change it.