

1843-1844: Marx's Feuerbachian Phase

It is a widespread, incorrect, and ridiculous stereotype that Marx became a materialist because of Feuerbach. This myth stretches back to the years following the former's death, thanks to, in part, Engels, Franz Mehring, and, above all, Georgi Plekhanov. As I have shown, Marx was already a materialist before he studied Feuerbach's works.¹ If he did not break with idealism thanks to Feuerbach, then the following questions arise: did Feuerbach actually influence Marx, and, if so, how? Marx was, in fact, a Feuerbachian, but only for the briefest time, at most a year and a half. Further, having previously adopted Hegel's dialectic method, he was never a pure Feuerbachian, who suddenly became the mature Marx. We may wake up at some point feeling like we are truly now, this day, an adult, but becoming one is not marking a day on a calendar. Rather it is a *gradual* process of maturing followed by a *revolution* in outlook, thoughts, and activities.

Marx's period of Feuerbachianism followed an arc of *rising* and then *descending* enthusiasm. This is seen in a number of his published and unpublished works between the years 1843 and 1844. In fact, his most intense period of accepting Feuerbach was only a year. The reports of the latter's influence on Marx are, therefore, greatly exaggerated. He did not become "at once" a Feuerbachian.² It was ultimately because of the fatal defects in Feuerbach's materialism, which were based in his anti-dialectics, and because Marx had already accepted Hegel, which enabled him to perceive Feuerbach's limitations. The logic of Marx's development was such that he would rapidly accept and then discard Feuerbach's ideas, after filling them with a new content. Analysing this development will show both the continuity of Marx's project of critique and the genesis of his method.

The Feuerbach Myth only exists thanks to sheer assertions and illogical arguments that appeal to authority. I will prove my points, however, by the only way possible, viz., an actual critical analysis of the sources themselves. This is the only historical scientific approach possible. It may be asked: Even if this is true, why is the myth harmful? Let us consider the words of Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray: "He who tells the people false revolutionary myths, he who amuses them with sensational stories, is as criminal as the geographer who would draw up false charts for navigators."³ Of course, *truth* does not exist without *error* and the path to reason is *necessarily* littered with falsity. Still, it is only by means of negating, overcoming the false, that the true is established. Hence the truth is *liberatory* and error is *oppressive*. The only Marxist path is to reject *philosophical myth* and choose *scientific truth*.

Feuerbach

Only three of Feuerbach's works had any significant impact on Marx's intellectual development. These were *The Essence of Christianity*, the "Provisional Theses for the

¹ Jason Devine, "How Hegelian was Marx? A contribution to the history of Marx and Young Hegelianism", accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/how-hegelian-was-marx-contribution-history-marx-and-young-hegelianism>.

² Frederick Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), 603.

³ Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *History of the Paris Commune of 1871*, tran. Eleanor Marx (London: Verso, 2012), 5.

Reformation of Philosophy,” and the *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*. They were all steps in his project of critiquing religion. *The Essence of Christianity* initiated it and the next two works were merely a replication and extension of the former’s arguments and themes. An analysis of these writings, therefore, is the only possible foundation for ascertaining the actual influence that Feuerbach had on Marx. Any discussion of the relationship between the two men without actually engaging with the works of the former must be considered unscientific and mere myth peddling.

The Essence of Christianity was not Feuerbach’s first book, but it was his most important, his “most celebrated work.”⁴ Published in 1841, it immediately placed him among the leaders of the Young Hegelian movement.⁵ A second, revised edition was then published in early 1843.⁶ His work joined the general critique of religion within the Young Hegelian movement, in part responding to the work of David Strauss and Bruno Bauer.⁷ While it was therefore quite influential inside and outside Young Hegelianism, the book’s impact on Marx has been overstated by Engels and others.

The basic critique that Feuerbach set forth in his book built off of Hegel and developed a general critique of religion. This he accomplished by inverting the relations between God and humanity, between subject and object. As a result of this reversal, “the object of any subject is nothing else than the subject’s own nature taken objectively.”⁸ Since humans made God, therefore the latter is an expression of the former and not vice versa: “Such as are a man’s thoughts and dispositions, such is his God.”⁹ Hegel’s had shown that humanity was a process of becoming, that it makes itself, finds itself, in its various creations.¹⁰ Feuerbach, drawing on this, argued that “Man first of all sees his nature as if *out of* himself, before he finds it in himself. His own nature is in the first instance contemplated by him as that of another being.”¹¹ He then linked this insight of Hegel’s with yet another:

Religion is the childlike condition of humanity... Hence the historical progress of religion consists in this: that what by an earlier religion was regarded as objective, is now recognised as subjective; that is, what was formerly contemplated and worshipped as God is now perceived to be something *human*. What was at first religion becomes at a later period idolatry; man is seen to have adored his own nature.¹²

Here Feuerbach simply repeated Hegel on how religion developed through successive forms with each preceding stage seen as false, as human invented. As I have previously shown, this was a

⁴ Johann Eduard Erdmann, *A History of Philosophy, Volume III: German Philosophy Since Hegel*, tran. Williston S. Hough (London: George Allen & Company, Ltd., 1913), 74.

⁵ Marx W. Wartofsky, *Feuerbach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), xviii, xix.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁷ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, tran. George Eliot (New York: Prometheus Book, 1989), xxii.

⁸ Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰ Devine, “How Hegelian was Marx?,” accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/how-hegelian-was-marx-contribution-history-marx-and-young-hegelianism>.

¹¹ Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, 13.

¹² *Ibid.*, 13.

general argument of the Young Hegelian movement, and not specific simply to Feuerbach. The former, especially on the question of religion, truly was taking Hegel to his logical conclusion.¹³ What was unique to Feuerbach was his treatment of the relations between subject and object, and between subject and predicate.

Feuerbach was the first Young Hegelian to focus on this aspect of the question in a systematic and public manner. The reduction of God to humanity implied that both were actually equal in some aspect. Thus Feuerbach argued that “the antithesis of human and divine is altogether illusory, that it is nothing else than the antithesis between the human nature in general, and the human individual.”¹⁴ Stated more explicitly, the “divine being is nothing else than the human being,” it is “human nature purified, freed from the limits of the individual man, made objective...All the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature.”¹⁵ This equation of the two lead to their inversion. According to Feuerbach, religious dogma is under an illusion and it therefore “makes the secondary primitive, and the primitive secondary. To it God is the first; man the second. Thus it inverts the natural order of things! In reality, the first is man, the second the nature of man made objective, namely, God.”¹⁶ Or as he stated even more explicitly, “we need only...invert the religious relations – regard that as an end which religion supposes to be a means – exalt that into the primary which in religion is subordinate, the accessory, the condition, – at once we have destroyed the illusion.”¹⁷ This illusion is precisely religious consciousness.¹⁸

By inverting the relation between God and humanity, Feuerbach was also led to reverse the subject and predicate relationship. Thus “that which in religion is the predicate we must make the subject, and that which in religion is a subject we must make a predicate, thus inverting the oracles of religion; and by this means we arrive at the truth.”¹⁹ In other words, humanity is not a predicate, an aspect, of God, i.e., simply one of his creations, but quite the reverse. It is not God who made humanity, it is humanity who made God, and who, therefore, actually made itself in the form of an external other. By reducing the divine to the human and hence equating them, Feuerbach actually inverted their relations, thus abolishing any true equality. While I have shown elsewhere that Marx was the first to invert God and Hegel, Feuerbach was the first to do so publicly, explicitly, and to explain the principles thereof.²⁰

¹³ Devine, “How Hegelian was Marx?,” accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/how-hegelian-was-marx-contribution-history-marx-and-young-hegelianism>.

¹⁴ Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, 13-14.

¹⁵ Ibid., 14. However it should be noted that Hegel had made this argument first: “The divine nature is the same as the human.” See, G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, tran. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 460.

¹⁶ Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, 118.

¹⁷ Ibid., 274-275.

¹⁸ “The essence of religion, its latent nature, is the *identity* of the divine being with the human; but the form of religion, or its apparent, conscious nature, is the *distinction* between them. God is the human being; but he presents himself to the religious consciousness as a distinct being.” Ibid., 247.

¹⁹ Ibid., 60.

²⁰ Devine, “How Hegelian was Marx?,” accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/how-hegelian-was-marx-contribution-history-marx-and-young-hegelianism>.

However, it must be noted that Feuerbach was not arguing that religion and God were historical creations, a product of socio-economic development. Thus he argued that “all the attributes which make God God, are attributes of the species – attributes which in the individual are limited, but the limits of which are abolished in the essence of the species.”²¹ Further, “God is nothing else than the idea of the species invested with a mystical form.”²² Elsewhere he referred to “the *functions characteristic*” to the human “*species* – thought and speech,” and he defined “species” as humanity’s “essential mode of being.”²³ This was actually biological determinism and, ergo, mechanical materialism. Feuerbach, in his next two works, would openly move to epistemological sensationalism, making explicit what was only implicit at this point.

That this was already biological determinism can be seen when Feuerbach wrote that the “species is not an abstraction; it exists in feeling, in the moral sentiment, in the energy of love. It is the species which infuses love into me... Thus Christ, as the consciousness of love, is the consciousness of the species.”²⁴ For Feuerbach, feelings, emotions, were not a matter of moral consciousness, but were truly rooted in the material reality of the species. This is because, as he wrote, it is “the species which infuses love into me,” and not an act of will, of consciousness. Feuerbach’s whole insipid emphasis on love, which would only intensify with time, was rooted in his transference of religious sentiment to biological determinism. Thus the heart would become more important than the head, and the senses greater than conscious reasoning. Yet, substituting “species” for “man,” while sounding more concrete, did not actually remove the abstract, idealist character of the category he deployed.

Feuerbach’s implicit idealism, in this historical milestone of materialist thought, can especially be seen in his recovery of religion, which became more explicit in his subsequent writings. He did this by making a distinction between religion and theology, the latter being “reflection on religion.”²⁵ He provided a clearer explanation in his 1843 preface to the second edition of his book. There he referred to theology as “the reflection of religion upon itself.”²⁶ This could only mean that theology, as the thought of religion, is the consciousness of religion, *religious consciousness*, ergo it is *still religion*. Hence to use this distinction, in order to cut theology away from religion, was ridiculous, illogical, and self-defeating. It was tantamount to calling for a thoughtless religion, a religion of the heart, of emotions, of mere feeling. As Hegel argued elsewhere, this would be to lower humans to the level of animals. And yet this is precisely where Feuerbach was heading.

Speaking about the importance of his book he argued that he had “found the key to the cipher of the Christian religion, only extricated its true meaning from the web of contradictions and delusions called theology; – but in doing so I have certainly committed a sacrilege.”²⁷ This meant that, in his view, not only was theology the thought of religion, but, further, that it was

²¹ Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, 152.

²² *Ibid.*, 247.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 268-269.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, xvii.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, xvi.

utterly untrue. One could infer from this that religion itself, as opposed to theology, was true or had an element of truth. Continuing on, he expressly stated that if his

work is negative, irreligious, atheistic, let it be remembered that atheism – at least in the sense of this work – is the secret of religion itself; that religion itself, not indeed on the surface, but fundamentally, not in intention or according to its own supposition, but in its heart, in its essence, believes in nothing else than the truth and divinity of human nature.”²⁸

As can be seen, while Feuerbach did not expressly affirm or deny that his work was atheistic, he did argue that atheism expressed a truth of religion. Again, he emphasised that his book was “negative, destructive; but, be it observed, only in relation to the unhuman, not to the human elements of religion.”²⁹ Thus, as far as he was concerned, there was truth to religion. However, this was not the general idea that this or that religion contains some truth content, some rational ideas and arguments, but rather that the *truth* in religion is *religious* truth. To this line of thinking, religion is consequently *necessary*. The recovery of religion and the rejection of atheism would become the major theme of his next work.

Feuerbach’s “Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy,” was first published in early 1843 by his fellow Young Hegelian, Arnold Ruge, in the second volume of the latter’s journal *Anekdoten zur neuesten deutschen Philosophie und Publicistik*.³⁰ While Feuerbach’s theses replicated his themes and method from *The Essence of Christianity*, what was novel here was the extension of the critique of theology to include speculative philosophy and, therefore, Hegel. As he wrote in his first thesis: “The secret of *theology* is *anthropology*, but the secret of *speculative philosophy* is *theology*, the speculative *theology*. Speculative theology distinguishes itself from *ordinary* theology by the fact that it transfers the divine essence into this world.”³¹ This is the essence, the crux, of both this work and of his critique of Hegelian philosophy.³² For Feuerbach, humanity was the basis of theology, but the basis of speculative philosophy was theology, viz., the former was a recuperation of the latter.

One of the important aspects of Feuerbach’s theses was the explicit expression of the developments already underway in the Young Hegelian movement. For example, he wrote that “*Pantheism* is the *necessary consequence* of theology (or of theism). It is *consistent* theology. *Atheism* is the *necessary consequence* of pantheism. It is *consistent* pantheism.”³³ As I have shown elsewhere, Hegelianism was the transition point from Christianity to pantheism and

²⁸ Ibid. xvi.

²⁹ Ibid., xvi.

³⁰ Ludwig Feuerbach, “Vorläufige Thesen zur Reformation der Philosophie,” in *Anekdoten zur neuesten deutschen Philosophie und Publicistik* von Bruno Bauer, Ludwig Feuerbach, Friedrich Köppen, Karl Nauwercck, Arnold Ruge und einigen Ungenannten, Zweiter Band, ed. Arnold Ruge (Zürich and Winterthur: Verlag des Literarischen Comptoirs 1843), 62-88. I was therefore incorrect when I wrote that this work had been published in 1842. See, Devine, “How Hegelian was Marx?,” accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/how-hegelian-was-marx-contribution-history-marx-and-young-hegelianism>.

³¹ Ludwig Feuerbach, “Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy (1843),” in *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence S. Stepelevich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 156.

³² “*Spinoza* is the originator of speculative philosophy, *Schelling* its restorer, *Hegel* its perfecter.” Ibid., 156.

³³ Ibid., 156.

atheism.³⁴ However, it would be wrong to conclude that Feuerbach identified with the atheist logic of Young Hegelianism, for he added in a footnote to the above that “As little as Spinoza’s and Hegel’s philosophy is pantheism (pantheism is an orientalism) is the new philosophy atheism.”³⁵ By the designation “new philosophy” Feuerbach was referring to his project and so he was openly denying that he or his work was atheist. This shows that Feuerbach was an inconsistent materialist, i.e. he was a semi-idealist.

Feuerbach, in extending his method to the question of philosophy, repeated its basic essentials and gave it a name as well. In his words:

The method of the reformatory critique of *speculative philosophy in general* does not differ from the critique already applied in the *philosophy of religion*. We only need always make the *predicate* into the *subject* and thus, as the subject, into the *object* and *principle*. Hence we need only *invert* speculative philosophy and then have the unmasked, pure, bare truth.³⁶

Again, it was Marx who first inverted Hegel, in his doctoral thesis, but it was Feuerbach who did so explicitly, publicly, and systematically.³⁷ However, this only concerned Hegel’s philosophy “in general,” viz., his system and not a specific aspect, *not the dialectic*. Thus I was quite wrong when I wrote years ago, among other things, that “the inversion of Hegel’s dialectic was actually carried out by Feuerbach, not Marx.”³⁸ At the time I had not carried out sufficient study and was still under the influence of the Feuerbach Myth. The only cure for the latter is further, critical study of the actual sources. As will be seen later on, Marx inverted Hegel’s dialectic. The question though, is why Feuerbach did not?

The reason why is because Feuerbach viewed Hegel’s dialectic method in a very narrow manner, viz., a one-sided, abstract, undialectical manner. That is, he could not separate Hegel’s method from his system, and he reduced the former to one aspect. The pinnacle of Hegel’s system is the Absolute Idea or God. Thus Feuerbach rightly pointed out that the “absolute or infinite of speculative philosophy” is “nothing other than the old theological-metaphysical entity or non-entity which is *not* finite, *not* human, *not* material, *not* determined and *not* created – the pre-worldly nothing.”³⁹ This attack on Hegel’s system as replicating theology was then extended to include Hegel’s method, his logic: “The Hegelian logic is the *theology* brought to *reason* and brought *up to date*, *theology* rendered as *logic*...The essence of Hegel’s *Logic* is *transcendent* thinking, the thinking of the human-being *supposed outside human beings*.”⁴⁰ However, all that Feuerbach was asserting merely concerned what Hegel *had done* with his method. Feuerbach did

³⁴ Devine, “How Hegelian was Marx?,” accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/how-hegelian-was-marx-contribution-history-marx-and-young-hegelianism>.

³⁵ Feuerbach, “Provisional Theses,” 156.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

³⁷ Devine, “How Hegelian was Marx?,” accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/how-hegelian-was-marx-contribution-history-marx-and-young-hegelianism>.

³⁸ Jason Devine, “On the “Philosophy” of “Dialectical Materialism”,” accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/philosophy-dialectical-materialism>.

³⁹ Feuerbach, “Provisional Theses,” 157.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

not *actually ever prove* that the dialectical method must be used in that manner, viz., that it *necessarily* led to *theological* results. For him there was no difference between Hegel's method and system; he confused them both. This is why in getting rid of the one, he got rid of the other: because to him they were synonymous.

Feuerbach's confusion on this question, and the absurd conclusions it lead to, can especially be seen where he argued that

'To abstract' means to suppose the *essence* of nature *outside nature*, the *essence* of the human being *outside the human being*, the *essence* of thinking *outside the act of thinking*. In that its entire system rests upon these acts of abstraction, Hegelian philosophy has *estranged* the human-being *from its very self*. It of course re-identifies what it separates, but only in a manner which is itself in turn *separable* and *intermediate*. Hegelian philosophy lacks *immediate unity*, *immediate certainty*, *immediate truth*.⁴¹

This is all wrong. First, not all abstraction does what he asserts; not all abstractions are the same. In fact, one cannot think, reflect, argue, reason, etc., without some abstractions. "To abstract" is an inherent part of the process of thinking, of all cognition, as Hegel had proven and as developments in educational research and theory have subsequently shown.⁴² It is absolutely true that abstractions can lead to erroneous conclusions, but every step in the process of cognition can do that, because human thinking is not inherently flawless. Thus, Feuerbach overgeneralised and missed the truth and genius of Hegel. Second, since he misunderstood abstraction and Hegel's use of it, he consequently did not and could not understand the rational aspects of Hegel's system and its relation to the dialectical method. For Hegel's system in no way merely "rests upon these acts of abstraction." As anyone who has read Hegel closely knows, all abstraction are constantly sublated, negated into higher concrete notions. Hegel's system is based upon both *how he applied* his method and on a wide empirical scope. Feuerbach's treatment of the role of abstraction in Hegel was itself *abstract*.

Finally, it was simply untrue that Hegel's philosophy lacked "*immediate unity, immediate certainty, immediate truth*." Hegel's *Phenomenology* literally starts with sense-certainty, with immediate knowledge i.e. with immediate truth!⁴³ Yet Hegel also quite rightly went on to point out that "this very *certainty* proves itself to be the most abstract and poorest *truth*. All that it says about what it knows is just that it *is*; and its truth contains nothing but the sheer *being* of the thing."⁴⁴ Hegel then went on to show that in the dialectic of consciousness, knowledge cannot remain at the level of mere abstract, immediate sense-certainty, but must ever move on to more

⁴¹ Ibid., 159.

⁴² Jason Devine, "On Lenin's Materialism and Empirio-Criticism: Critical Comments on a Confused Philosophy," accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/lenins-materialism-and-empirio-criticism-critical-comments-confused-philosophy>.

⁴³ "The knowledge or knowing which is at the start or is immediately our object cannot be anything else but immediate knowledge itself, a knowledge of the immediate or of what simply *is*." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 58.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 58.

concrete forms of knowledge.⁴⁵ Hegel also noted in his *Science of Logic* that the *Phenomenology* was the beginning of his philosophy.⁴⁶ Hegel's system, therefore, *literally contains* immediate certainty and truth right at its beginning. Its limited truth was openly recognised and sublated. Thus, it is absolutely clear that Feuerbach never fully grasped Hegel's system or his method of dialectical logic.

Hence it is no surprise that between the *Essence of Christianity* and the "Provisional Theses" Feuerbach only mentioned dialectic once.⁴⁷ Feuerbach had no sustained, let alone systematic, discussion of Hegel's dialectical method. Instead, there were only general assertions of the results of the method masquerading as explanations as to the nature of that same method. Indeed, consider the muddle Feuerbach displayed concerning Hegel's categories:

Philosophy which derives the finite from the infinite or the determined from the undetermined *never arrives at a true position of the finite and determined*. The finite is derived from the infinite – that means, the undetermined is determined, is *negated*. It is admitted that the infinite is *nothing without* determination, *i.e. without finitude*, that thus as the *reality* of the infinite the finite is supposed. Yet the negative non-entity of the absolute remains at the basis. The supposed finitude is thus suspended again and again. The finite is the *negation* of the *infinite* and the *infinite* in turn the *negation* of the *finite*. The philosophy of the absolute is a contradiction.⁴⁸

Here Feuerbach was projecting a spurious infinity onto Hegel. Yet the latter had expressly dealt with this in his *Logic*. There he wrote that the

infinite – in the usual meaning of the spurious infinity – and the progress to infinity are, like the ought, the expression of a contradiction which is itself put forward as the final solution... This *incomplete reflection* has completely before it both determinations of the genuine infinite: the *opposition* of the finite and infinite, and their *unity*, but it does not bring these two thoughts together; the one inevitably evokes the other, but this reflection lets them only *alternate*.⁴⁹

The spurious infinity is therefore the unresolved contradiction between infinite and finite, where both are ultimately finite and simply replace each other in turn. Such an infinite, sunken down to the level of finite, is therefore a *false*, spurious infinite.⁵⁰ The *true* infinite must be that which integrally contains the finite, which is truly united with it, and vice versa. To quote Hegel's crystal clear words:

⁴⁵ "Immediate certainty does not take over the truth, for its truth is the universal, whereas certainty wants to apprehend the This." *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁶ G.W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, tran. A.V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1969), 28-29.

⁴⁷ Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, 23

⁴⁸ Feuerbach, "Provisional Theses," 160.

⁴⁹ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 150-151.

⁵⁰ "But it has been shown that it is at once evident without going into further detail about the determination of the finite and infinite, that the infinite as understood by said reflection, namely, as opposed to the finite, has in it its other, just because it is opposed to the finite, and therefore is already limited and itself finite — the spurious infinite." *Ibid.*, 153.

The answer, therefore, to the question: how does the infinite become finite? is this: that *there is not* an infinite which is first of all infinite and only subsequently has need to become finite, to go forth into finitude; on the contrary, it is on its own account just as much finite as infinite...Neither such a finite nor such an infinite has truth; and what is untrue is incomprehensible. But equally it must be said that they are comprehensible, to grasp them even as they are in ordinary conception, to see that in the one there lies the determination of the other, the simple insight into their inseparability, means to comprehend them; *this inseparability is their Notion*.⁵¹

Here Hegel was not simply talking about two categories, but, above all, about how their relations should be grasped, viz., as a unity, or identity of opposites, a self-resolving contradiction. This is exactly one of the core aspects of the dialectic method. In light of this, it can only be that either Feuerbach did not truly read Hegel or he did not understand him. Unsurprisingly, the Old Hegelian Johann Eduard Erdmann already noted back in 1889 that Feuerbach's first book, *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*, "made no impression on the rest of the Hegelians, but in particular because its arguments rested wholly on the contrast of infinite and finite, essence and appearance, etc., beyond which, according to Hegel, only the abstract understanding does not get."⁵² Feuerbach was thus a Hegelian by outlook and subject matter, but not by method.⁵³

It should be recalled that Feuerbach wrote these theses in order to reform philosophy; that is he sought "true philosophy."⁵⁴ Where did he find its location though? In the human senses: "The *subjective* origin and course of philosophy is also its *objective* course and origin. Before you think the quality, you *feel* the quality. The *suffering* precedes the thinking."⁵⁵ By premising philosophy, a most unique act of cognition, on the physical senses, he expressed the sheerest sensationalism. Yet, one can comprehend different qualities and suffering without experiencing it directly. The power of human thought is exactly its ability to rise above the concrete life of any single human being. This reduction of the origin of philosophy to the senses was followed by the reduction of its goal: "Philosophy is the knowledge of *what is*. Things and essences are to be thought and to be known *just as they are* – this is the highest law, the foremost task of philosophy."⁵⁶ Here we see that the reform of philosophy amounted merely to knowing the world around us, viz., mere passive observation. Instead of an advancement on Hegel, we get the banal *tautology* that philosophy as the knowledge of the truth should truthfully know what truthfully is.

If there was any doubt about Feuerbach's goal of saving philosophy by basing it on sensationalism, by reducing thought to senses, he did eventually and explicitly state that true philosophy "has to begin not *with itself*, but with its *antithesis*, with *what is not philosophy*. This

⁵¹ Ibid., 153.

⁵² Erdmann, *A History of Philosophy, Volume III*, 58-59.

⁵³ Hence I was also wrong when I wrote in my last essay that Feuerbach's first work was "actually a fully Hegelian work, both in method and in outlook." See, Devine, "How Hegelian was Marx?," accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/how-hegelian-was-marx-contribution-history-marx-and-young-hegelianism>.

⁵⁴ Feuerbach, "Provisional Theses," 160.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 161.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 162.

unphilosophical, absolutely antischolastic essence in us, distinguished from thinking, is the principle of sensualism.”⁵⁷ More explicitly he wrote that the

essential tools or organs of philosophy are the *head*, the source of activity, of freedom, of metaphysical infinity, and of idealism, and the *heart*, the source of suffering, of finitude, of need, of sensualism... True, objective thought, the true and objective philosophy, is generated only from thinking's *negation*, from *being determined* by an object, from *passion*... Therefore, only where the existence unites with the essence, the intuition with the thinking, the passivity with the activity, *where the anti-scholastic, sanguine principle of French sensualism and materialism unite with the scholastic stodginess of German metaphysics*, is there alone *life and truth*.⁵⁸

First, from the point of view of the Young Hegelian movement, this was a definite shift to a form of materialism, and thus was progress beyond Hegel. However, as it was mechanical materialism, this was also a retrogression to pre-Hegelian thought. Despite Feuerbach's confusion, it is clear that he was striving to break with German idealism by seeking a sort of synthesis of aspects of the latter and French materialism which Hegel himself had not been able to achieve. However, Feuerbach did this by dropping dialectics and thus the unity, the integration, he sought was not truly accomplished. Second, this mixture of progress and retrogress was a reflection of Feuerbach's reductionist method and the resultant dualism in which he was trapped. In reducing thinking to feeling, head to heart, finite to infinite, etc., he was essentially treating each as a duality of primary and secondary. One of Hegel's great achievements was to develop a *monistic* outlook. He did this precisely by his dialectical method which enabled him to integrate all previous positions and sublimate all dualities. This is, consequently, one major reason why the dialectic method was not and cannot be binary.⁵⁹

It will be recalled that Feuerbach had made the illegitimate division between religion and theology, and that this gave him the basis for holding the former positive and the latter negative. It was also the basis for his division between his “new philosophy” and that of Hegel's:

Religion is only emotion, feeling, heart, love, i.e., the negation and *dissolution* of God in the human being. Thus, as the *negation of the theology* which denies the truth of religious emotion, the new philosophy is the *position of religion*. Anthropotheism is the *self-*

⁵⁷ Ibid., 164.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 164.

⁵⁹ This is why Lenin was quite incorrect when he wrote that “The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts (see the quotation from Philo on Heraclitus at the beginning of Section III, ‘On Cognition,’ in Lassalle's book on Heraclitus) is the *essence* (one of the ‘essentials,’ one of the principal, if not the principal, characteristics or features) of dialectics. That is precisely how Hegel, too, puts the matter.” See, V.I. Lenin, “On the Question of Dialectics,” in V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works, Volume 38: Philosophical Notebooks* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 359. That was, of course, not “precisely how Hegel” put the matter, and it is no accident that the actual work he cited was not Hegel, but Lassalle. The dialectic cannot be reduced to number for a number of reasons. See, See, Jason Devine, “From Kautsky and the Bolsheviks, to Hegel and Marx: Dialectics, the triad and triplicity,” accessed 4 August 2024, <http://links.org.au/kautsky-bolsheviks-hegel-marx-dialectics-triad-triplicity>.

conscious religion, the religion which understands itself. In contrast to it, theology negates religion under the illusion of *positing* it.⁶⁰

First, it should now be clear that Feuerbach's reformation of philosophy was only the reformation of religion. The new philosophy was merely a new religion, "Anthropotheism." This is what Feuerbach's much-vaunted materialism truly amounted to. Secondly, we can see that although Feuerbach, along with other Young Hegelians, helped lay the theoretical basis for atheism, neither he nor his work was atheistic. Thus, again, we see his contradictory development *vis à vis* Hegel. For he rightly argued that

Hegelian philosophy is the suspension of the contradiction of thinking and being, as in particular Kant had articulated it. But, note well, the suspension of this contradiction is only *within contradiction*, i.e., within the *one* element, *within thinking*. For Hegel *thought is being, thought the subject, being the predicate*.⁶¹

This is incontestably true and it correctly highlights the inversion of subject and predicate which is contained in both religion and Hegel's philosophy.⁶² But clearly Feuerbach did not grasp that he had critiqued religion and not merely theology. It was this confusion that led him to write that "Whoever fails to give up the Hegelian philosophy, fails to give up theology," and "The Hegelian philosophy is the last place of refuge and the last rational support of theology."⁶³ Yet, there simply is no religion without theology and no theology without religion. Hence, Feuerbach's reform and recovery of the philosophy of religion could only ever be the creation of a *new theology* and, hence, the *restoration* of the latter after *negating* it.

The height of Feuerbach's confusion can be seen in his definition of the nature of his reformatory project:

The new philosophy is the *negation* as much of *rationalism* as of *mysticism*, as much of *pantheism* as of *personalism*, and as much of *atheism* as of *theism*. It is the *unity of all these antithetical truths* as an *absolutely self-sufficient* and *explicit truth*. The new philosophy has already articulated itself as a philosophy of religion in a manner as *negative* as it is *positive*.⁶⁴

Here he sought to include multiple strands in his new religious philosophy *à la* Hegel. However, since he lacked the latter's dialectical method, all he ended up with was a hodgepodge: an eclectic mishmash of theoretical confusion. This was exactly the result of his dualism, his false dialectic. Without an organic unfolding i.e. a dialectical development of the different positions, categories, etc., any unity can only be an external, mechanical unity, viz., a false, forced unity. On this basis, Feuerbach's critique could only ever have been limited. It was logically doomed to

⁶⁰ Feuerbach, "Provisional Theses," 165.

⁶¹ Ibid., 166.

⁶² "The Hegelian doctrine, that nature or reality is *posited* by the idea, is merely the *rational* expression of the theological doctrine that nature is created by God, that the material essence is created by an immaterial, i.e., abstract, essence." Ibid., 167.

⁶³ Ibid., 167.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 168.

fail. If, therefore, someone thought that the essence of Feuerbach's work was the critique of religion, that certainly was not how the man himself understood it.

The final section of Feuerbach's theses combined his declaration of a new philosophy of religion with his mechanical materialist views. As opposed to Hegel's inversion, Feuerbach set forth what he held was the correct relation between thinking and being: "*Being is subject and thinking a predicate* but a predicate such as contains the *essence* of its subject. Thinking comes from being but being does not come from thinking. Being comes from itself and through itself."⁶⁵ This would seem to be correct, formally. However, these were mere generalisations, viz., quite abstract and ahistorical. It was still metaphysical philosophy, and thus simply the inversion of Hegel's philosophy *within philosophy*. For it is not being that produces thinking; being produces nothing. Thought is produced by humans. Feuerbach, partially realising this rightly argued that,

All speculation about right, willing, freedom, personality without the human being, i.e., outside of or even beyond the human being, is speculation *without unity, without necessity, without substance, without foundation, and without reality*.⁶⁶

A correct, actual grasp of reality cannot be achieved with a metaphysical juggling of terms, but only with concrete, empirically-based science. However, Feuerbach understood science in a simplistic, mechanical manner. In his view, since being produced thought, and nature produced humans, so the sheer external observation of reality would produce the truth: "Look upon nature, look upon the human being! Here right before your eyes you have the mysteries of philosophy."⁶⁷ He further argued that all "sciences must ground themselves in *nature*."⁶⁸ While this could be taken to mean that science should be grounded in reality, in empirical concreteness, it was not so. He literally meant nature and thus he finally argued that for progress to be made "*Philosophy must again combine itself with natural science and natural science with philosophy*."⁶⁹ As humans do not produce themselves but, instead, are the products of nature, there was no need for social sciences. History simply did not exist for Feuerbach. It also did not occur to him that while philosophy might need science, science certainly had no need of philosophy.

Feuerbach's *Principles of Philosophy of the Future* was published in mid-1843. According to him, this work contained "the continuation and further justification" of his "Provisional Theses."⁷⁰ Hence this work was not novel and did not intend to be. At best it was only a deepening and refinement of his views and concerns; at worst, only sheer repetition. In fact, it was an aggressively repetitious piece of writing. By this time though, the Young Hegelian

⁶⁵ Ibid., 167.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 170.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 168.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 170.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 170.

⁷⁰ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, tran. Manfred H. Vogel (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1966), 3.

movement was ending and the following year it would no longer exist.⁷¹ For both of these reasons its influence, compared to the previous two works, was considerably muted. Thus, the basic reason for studying it is for understanding the *development* of the views of Feuerbach and Marx.

Feuerbach started with the bold proclamation that the “task of the modern era was the realization and humanization of God – the transformation and dissolution of theology into anthropology.”⁷² For him, then, the Young Hegelian movement had carried out the revolutionary task set before it. The destructive phase was clearly over and the constructive period had begun. This work was, to some extent, a summing up of the progress achieved and a philosophical programme setting forth the agenda for future work. However, there was no common agreement that this was “the task” of the movement. Some Young Hegelians held that religious critique was only one goal among others, or that the primary task was political. For example, in Arnold Ruge’s view the

minute philosophy comes forward critically (Strauss broke the ground), the conflict is here... Thus it is clear that the times, or the standpoint of consciousness, have been essentially altered. Development is no longer abstract, but the *times are political*, even though there is much to do before they are political enough.⁷³

Or, as Bruno Bauer wrote even earlier and more explicitly:

And so, a theoretical principle must not merely play a supportive role, but must come to the act, to practical opposition, to turn itself directly into praxis and action... philosophy must be active in politics, and whenever the established order contradicts the self-consciousness of philosophy, it must be directly attacked and shaken.⁷⁴

It should, therefore, be kept in mind that the *Principles of Philosophy of the Future* was one of the last works of Young Hegelianism, a product of a dying movement, not one undergoing efflorescence. This was reflected directly in the quality of the writing. Further, it was, decidedly, not a political work. In fact, politics had never been a core focus of Feuerbach. Hence, as more of his compatriots sought to turn the theoretical revolution into a practical revolution, the importance of Feuerbach and his work would and could only rapidly shrink over time.

Feuerbach, summarising the critique of God, repeated all the points he made in his last piece. Thus he wrote that “Speculative philosophy is the rational or theoretical elaboration and dissolution of God, who is, for religion other-worldly.”⁷⁵ Speculative philosophy, which began with Spinoza, had negated, replaced God and ended up reconstituting the latter and producing a more consistent theology: “The essence of speculative philosophy is nothing other than the

⁷¹ Devine, “How Hegelian was Marx?,” accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/how-hegelian-was-marx-contribution-history-marx-and-young-hegelianism>.

⁷² Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 5.

⁷³ Arnold Ruge, “Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’ and the Politics of our Times (1842),” in *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence S. Stepelevich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 225.

⁷⁴ Bruno Bauer, “The Trumpet of the Last Judgement over Hegel (1841),” in *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence S. Stepelevich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 184.

⁷⁵ Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 5-6.

rationalized, realized, presented essence of God. The speculative philosophy is the true, consistent, and rational theology.”⁷⁶ To truly dissolve God, subject and object must, again, be inverted. So we find that “God is, however, an object only of man... But, if God is only an object of man, what is revealed to us in his essence? Nothing but the essence of man.”⁷⁷ Page after page of this work, especially its first third, is simply a repetition, with more details provided, of his theses.

The real significance of this work is that it provided a more detailed expression of Feuerbach’s mechanical materialism. He once again came out against abstraction arguing that “abstraction from all that is sensuous and material was once the necessary condition of theology, so it was also the necessary condition of speculative philosophy.”⁷⁸ More specifically, absolute idealism, “is nothing but the realized divine mind of Leibnizian theism; it is the pure mind systematically elaborated, which divests all things of their sensuousness, transforming them into pure entities of the mind, into thought-objects.”⁷⁹ Feuerbach’s point here was correct, but he could not distinguish degrees of abstraction. Again, some level of abstraction is inherent in all cognition, but for Feuerbach, all abstraction was necessarily abstraction taken to extremes. Thus there was only ever a dualism between abstraction and sensuous reality, between thought objects and real objects. As he went on to stress: “one should not overlook the important difference, which has already been mentioned several times, between that which is only imagined and the real object.”⁸⁰ Yet this was only Kantian dualism! For who else in German idealist philosophy put such an emphasis on the difference between thought and object? It was Kant who gave the following famous example:

A hundred thalers contain no more than a hundred possible thalers. For, as the latter indicate the concept, and the former the object, on the supposition that the content of the former was greater than that of the latter, my concept would not be an expression of the whole object, and would consequently be an inadequate concept of it. But in reckoning my wealth there may be said to be more in a hundred real thalers than in a hundred possible thalers – that is, in the mere concept of them.⁸¹

Kant had published his *Critique of Pure Reason* over 60 years before Feuerbach’s *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*. Yet Feuerbach repeated this time-worn, common-sense platitude as if it were a major point of theoretical import, a profound philosophical truth. Here we see, again, that Feuerbach’s materialist advance beyond Hegel, was actually a retrogression to pre-Hegelian conceptions; in this case, *Kantianism*.⁸²

⁷⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 14.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁸¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tran. J.M.D. Meiklejohn and ed. Vasilis Politis (London: J.M. Dent, 2002), 410-411.

⁸² “The example of the difference between a hundred dollars in conception and a hundred dollars in reality – which was chosen by Kant in the critique of the ontological proof to designate the difference between thought and being

It is highly significant that Marx, in his 1841 doctoral dissertation, i.e. before he read the works of Feuerbach which I am discussing, also touched upon this issue. In fact, in the very section where he dealt with Hegel and the different proofs of God's existence, where he subsequently "inverted the Hegelian conception of God before Feuerbach did," Marx actually critiqued and demolished Kant's example in a mere passing comment.⁸³ There he brilliantly argued that

Kant's critique means nothing in this respect. If somebody imagines that he has a hundred talers, if this concept is not for him an arbitrary, subjective one, if he believes in it, then these hundred imagined talers have for him the same value as a hundred real ones. For instance, he will incur debts on the strength of his imagination, his imagination will work, in the same way as all humanity has incurred debts on its gods. The contrary is true. Kant's example might have enforced the ontological proof. Real talers have the same existence that the imagined gods have. Has a real taler any existence except in the imagination, if only in the general or rather common imagination of man? Bring paper money into a country where this use of paper is unknown, and everyone will laugh at your subjective imagination. Come with your gods into a country where other gods are worshipped, and you will be shown to suffer from fantasies and abstractions.⁸⁴

Here Marx was discussing what he would term, in the following decades, the *ideal* existence of money and commodities.⁸⁵ The collective creations of humanity have a social signification, which means they have a meaning and import above and beyond any single human individual. This includes conceptual productions such as beliefs, values, myths, etc. Thus, these most *subjective* of entities have an *objective* existence. It does not matter how *unreal* they are, for they are *real* in some sense, viz., *socially*. Marx's point was that Kant's distinction between real and thought objects was of extremely limited truth and, in practice, could lead to impractical consequences. Therefore, Marx in 1841, at the beginning of his intellectual career, was already further in advance than Feuerbach in 1843! This is one of the reasons why his Feuerbachian phase would be so short.

and which was, however, mocked by Hegel – is essentially quite true." Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 39.

⁸³ Devine, "How Hegelian was Marx?," accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/how-hegelian-was-marx-contribution-history-marx-and-young-hegelianism>.

⁸⁴ Karl Marx, "Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 1: 1835-1843* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 104.

⁸⁵ "By 'ideal' Marx referred to thought. Yet he did not mean the subjective consciousness of a single human, but rather the objectively existing thought of society, viz., the world of ideas, concepts, theories, etc., that each new generation and individual finds pre-existing, and which are embodied in objects and forms of activity. An example of this is the value of commodities, i.e. their value-form. A commodity has two aspects: use-value and exchange-value. This latter 'can of course exist only symbolically, although in order for it to be employed as a thing and not merely as a formal notion, this symbol must possess an objective existence; it is not merely an ideal notion, but is actually presented to the mind in an objective mode.' That is, people must actively treat a product as having value in order to *confer upon* it the status of a commodity, and this is exactly what they do in exchange." Jason Devine, "The Dialectics of the Historical and Logical in Hegel and Marx," accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/dialectic-s-historical-and-logical-hegel-and-marx>.

Although Feuerbach's constant, if understandable, war with abstraction led him to crude mechanical materialism, he still achieved a crucial, fundamental insight on its basis. That is, he disclosed the mechanism of the construction of Hegel's system. More specifically, the latter

abstracts from all objects given immediately, that is, objects given in sensation and thus distinguished from objects given in thought. In short, it abstracts from everything from which it is possible to abstract without stopping to think, and makes this act of abstraction from all objectivity the beginning of itself. What is, however, the absolute being... if not the being removed from all objects, from all sensuous things distinct and distinguishable from itself?⁸⁶

The movement of Hegel's system from the abstract to the concrete is the self-development of the Absolute Idea, or God. Thus, from the latter being a product of everything via abstraction, everything is its product via concretisation. Here, instead of one man brilliantly constructing a grand philosophical system, God calmly creates all of reality. Feuerbach was the first to make this specific critique of Hegel's idealism and it was repeated by Marx at least three times. The first was in *The Holy Family*, written in late 1844. There he wrote in detail about "the mystery of *speculative*, of *Hegelian construction*" and he gave a quite humorous example of its functioning:

If from real apples, pears, strawberries and almonds I form the general idea 'Fruit', if I go further and *imagine* that my abstract idea 'Fruit', derived from real fruit, is an entity existing outside me, is indeed the *true* essence of the pear, the apple, etc., then in the *language of speculative philosophy* – I am declaring that 'Fruit' is the 'Substance' of the pear, the apple, the almond, etc. I am saying, therefore...that what is essential to these things is not their real existence, perceptible to the senses, but the essence that I have abstracted from them and then foisted on them, the essence of my idea – 'Fruit'...

Having reduced the different real fruits to the *one* 'fruit' of abstraction – 'the Fruit', speculation must, in order to attain some semblance of real content, try somehow to find its way back from 'the Fruit', from the *Substance* to the *diverse*, ordinary real fruits, the pear, the apple, the almond, etc....If apples, pears, almonds and strawberries are really nothing but 'the Substance', 'the Fruit', the question arises: Why does 'the Fruit' manifest itself to me sometimes as an apple, sometimes as a pear, sometimes as an almond?...This, answers the speculative philosopher, is because 'the Fruit' is not dead, undifferentiated, motionless, but a living, self-differentiating, moving essence. The diversity of the ordinary fruits is significant not only for *my* sensuous understanding, but also for 'the Fruit' itself and for speculative reason. The different ordinary fruits are different manifestations of the life of the 'one Fruit'.⁸⁷

The second instance occurred in his *The Poverty of Philosophy*, written in the first half of 1847. There he repeated the above argument with a new example and in an abbreviated form:

⁸⁶ Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 19.

⁸⁷ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family, Or Critique of Critical Criticism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 72-73.

All that exists, all that lives on land and under water, exists and lives only by some kind of movement. Thus, the movement of history produces social relations; industrial movement gives us industrial products, etc. Just as by dint of abstraction we have transformed everything into a logical category, so one has only to make an abstraction of every characteristic distinctive of different movements to attain movement in its abstract condition – purely formal movement, the purely logical formula of movement. If one finds in logical categories the substance of all things, one imagines one has found in the logical formula of movement the *absolute method*, which not only explains all things, but also implies the movement of things...

So what is this absolute method? The abstraction of movement. What is the abstraction of movement? Movement in abstract condition. What is movement in abstract condition? The purely logical formula of movement or the movement of pure reason... Just as from the dialectic movement of the simple categories is born the group, so from the dialectic movement of the groups is born the series, and from the dialectic movement of the series is born the entire system.⁸⁸

The third occasion can be found in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*, which Marx wrote in late 1857. In discussing his method in political economy, he briefly commented on Hegel's creation of his idealist system:

The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation and conception. Along the first path the full conception was evaporated to yield an abstract determination; along the second, the abstract determinations lead towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought. In this way Hegel fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself, by itself, whereas the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind...

Therefore, to the kind of consciousness – and this is characteristic of the philosophical consciousness – for which conceptual thinking is the real human being, and for which the conceptual world as such is thus the only reality, the movement of the categories appears as the real act of production – which only, unfortunately, receives a jolt from the outside – whose product is the world; and – but this is again a tautology – this is correct in so far as the concrete totality is a totality of thoughts, concrete in thought, in fact a product of thinking and comprehending; but not in any way a product of the concept which thinks

⁸⁸ Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy: Answer to the "Philosophy of Poverty" by M. Proudhon* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), 99, 100-101.

and generates itself outside or above observation and conception; a product, rather, of the working-up of observation and conception into concepts.⁸⁹

Feuerbach's insight into the relation between abstraction and the formation of Hegel's system of philosophy, based upon the inversion of subject and predicate, was important. The beginning of the system, the manner in which it was created was, therefore, by means of wholesale abstraction followed by a reverse process of concretising that same abstraction as the real generative force. As can be seen from above, this had a lasting impact on Marx. However, this, and the inversion, were the *only* parts of Feuerbach's project that had any serious influence on the development of Marx's thinking. What the latter got from the former was not materialism, but simply the above. Yet, even this truth was of limited value because of how Feuerbach related it to dialectics.

Feuerbach rejected Hegel's dialectic method. Why? The reason for this can be seen in his basic attitude to the latter's system. According to Feuerbach, his "new philosophy" was actually "the realization of the Hegelian philosophy or, generally, of the philosophy that prevailed until now, a realization, however, which is at the same time the negation, and indeed the negation without contradiction, of this philosophy."⁹⁰ What he meant by "contradiction" is shown by the following: "The contradiction of the modern philosophy...is due to the fact that it is the negation of theology from the viewpoint of theology or the negation of theology that itself is again theology; this contradiction especially characterizes the Hegelian philosophy."⁹¹ Feuerbach here made an implicit reference to an aspect of the dialectic known as the negation of the negation, and this was the "contradiction" he was speaking of. The various categories that make up not simply Hegel's *Logic*, but his entire system are moments, phases in its self-development. While the overall march of this organic whole is from the abstract to the concrete, this is repeated at each step. That is, each new category is posited, affirmed as the truth. However, upon analysis it is shown to be limited, deficient, abstract, etc., and it produces its opposite. This new category is more concrete and negates the previous category, so affirming itself. The whole process is repeated, and this negation is in turn negated, is shown to still be abstract. In producing its opposite, *aspects* of the earlier category return, but on a higher level.⁹² Each new category carries with it all the preceding ones.

Therefore, when Feuerbach wrote that he was going to negate Hegel's philosophy "without contradiction," what he meant was that he would not *dialectically* negate that system. In his view, such a negation would only reconstitute Hegelianism. As he went on to write: "God is God only because overcomes and negates matter; that is, the negation of God. And, according

⁸⁹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, tran. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 101.

⁹⁰ Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 31.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹² "The lower grade often reveals types in which the higher already has its analogy. It is the types which may deceive, but they are only the humoristic prelude, not yet the thing itself; as the Rosaceae envelope their kernel with the superfluity of a flesh which is yet no real, feeling flesh — as the ape seems to foreshadow the human form, yet is separated from man by an impassable gulf — as relief extends picture-like over surfaces, but is as yet no painting." Karl Rosenkranz, *Hegel as the National Philosopher of Germany*, tran. Geo. S. Hall (St. Louis: Gray, Baker & Co., 1874), 37.

to Hegel, it is only the negation of the negation is the true affirmation.”⁹³ This is the source, the basis, the reason why Feuerbach opposed the negation of the negation, and ultimately discarded the dialectical method, viz., he viewed it as a tool of restoring theology. In fact, he referred to it as “the main principle of Hegel’s philosophy,” and depicted how it functioned there:

The secret of the Hegelian dialectic lies...only in the fact that it negates theology by philosophy and then, in turn, negates philosophy by theology. Theology constitutes the beginning and the end; philosophy stands in the middle as the negation of the first affirmation, but the negation of the negation is theology.⁹⁴

We can see why, until now, Feuerbach had no discussion of Hegel’s dialectic. For, in his view, the latter could be simply reduced to the negation of the negation, and his narrow interpretation of this led him to reject dialectics *in toto*. That Feuerbach’s view of the negation of the negation was quite limited is shown by his very presentation. He merely asserted that this aspect of the dialectic functioned in this way; he *nowhere* provided any arguments detailing why it had to occur in the manner he claimed. That is, he merely *assumed* that the negation of the negation must always produce a simple repetition. It did not in any way occur to him that Hegel may have been making a mistake and misapplying the dialectic.

In fact, that was a very real possibility and was already known inside and outside the Hegelian school, i.e. even before the birth of Young Hegelianism. Again, the repetition of the lower category at a higher point is not pure, absolute; rather, only certain aspects re-occur. However, even with this broader understanding the possibility for error still existed. As the Old Hegelian Karl Rosenkranz noted, “Hegel’s thought strove toward the absolute independence of the idea from the philosopher. The part of the latter should be only that of looking on its movement.”⁹⁵ The role of the philosopher or scientist would, then, only be to accurately depict the self-movement of the phenomena under study. Yet it is precisely here where it was most possible to make mistakes: that is, in “its presentation,” to make an “error in regard to that which is posited as the negative.”⁹⁶ More specifically, “here in the transition from the general to the special the distinction necessary in itself could very easily be varied, and the immanent antithesis be falsified,” and thus “the abstract generality might be transposed with the concrete, the first with the last.”⁹⁷ Rosenkranz also pointed out that Hegel was not above this and so

examples may be found where he is deluded and vacillating in this respect; e.g. in the *Philosophy of Right*, under the conception of the state power, he has set up royal sovereignty as the first, therefore abstract, moment; while in the second edition of the *Encyclopedia* it is the final and concrete moment. Among the adherents of Hegel, the differences are still greater.⁹⁸

⁹³ Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 33.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁹⁵ Rosenkranz, *Hegel as the National Philosopher*, 34.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

Did this mean that the dialectic method, dialectical logic, was inherently incorrect, or too prone to error? According to Rosenkranz, Hegel's opponents took all this "as proof of the falsity of his method," but he argued that the real reason for errors and discrepancies rested "only in" the "uncritical use" of the dialectical method.⁹⁹ Thus, like the anti-Hegelian philosophers before him, Feuerbach confused Hegel's method and system. To him they were synonymous and both had to be disposed of. So, when he said he was going to negate Hegel's philosophy, he only meant this in a *formal logical* manner, viz., he was returning to pre-Hegelian, Aristotelian logic. Once again, we can see that Feuerbach's *progression* beyond Hegel was really a *retrogression*.

This is further shown in his more detailed attacks on Hegel's *Science of Logic*. According to Feuerbach, the "essence of Hegelian logic is thought deprived of its determinateness in which it thinks, i.e. in which lies the activity of subjectivity."¹⁰⁰ This was, of course, wrong. The essence of Hegel's logic is rather the dialectical development and self-structuring of Aristotelian logic.¹⁰¹ In this way Hegel effected a revolution in logic. Feuerbach's criticism of "thought deprived of its determinateness" only focused on one aspect of the system, one not inherent in the method itself. Feuerbach, continuing his attack, argued that the

third part of the *Logic* is...the subjective logic; and yet the forms of subjectivity that are the object of that part are not to be subjective. The concept, the judgment, the conclusion...are not our concepts, judgments, and conclusions; no, they are objective, absolute forms existing in and for themselves. So does absolute philosophy externalize and alienates from man his own essence and activity!¹⁰²

In his opposition to theology Feuerbach had completely missed one of the great accomplishments of Hegelian logic. The fact is that the forms of thought *are* actually *external* to the individual. A human is not born with a knowledge of logic, and logic is not in the essence of the individual, nor is it its inherent activity. The forms of thought are the product of over two thousand years of human practical and theoretical activity. When the individual human is born, it finds this body of thought already present, *existing objectively* before it. The only way to overcome this externality is for the individual to *internalise* those forms, to master this collective product of humanity precisely through its own conscious activity. Hegel's error was not in postulating the objective existence of human thought, but rather in conceiving it in an idealist manner, viz., as the thought of God. It was precisely Feuerbach's lack of dialectics that prevented him from solving the problem of the ideal from the point of view of materialism. This is exactly what *Marx achieved* in his future theses on Feuerbach.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 35.

¹⁰⁰ Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 37.

¹⁰¹ "Even if we are to see in logical forms nothing more than formal functions of thought, they would for that very reason be worthy of investigation to ascertain how far, on their own account, they correspond to the *truth*. A logic that does not perform this task can at most claim the value of a descriptive natural history of the phenomena of thinking just as they occur. It is an infinite merit of Aristotle, one that must fill us with the highest admiration for the powers of that genius, that he was the first to undertake this description. It is necessary however to go further and to ascertain both the systematic connection of these forms and their value." Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 595.

¹⁰² Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 37.

Another aspect of Hegel's dialectics that Feuerbach objected to was what I have already referred to as the unity or identity of opposites. Why did Feuerbach oppose this? Again, because he thought it was merely another theological prop. In his words, the "identity of thought and being" was "nothing other than a necessary consequence and unfolding of the notion of God," and hence this "identity of thought and being is therefore only an expression for the divinity of reason."¹⁰³ It is quite understandable then, that on this question, Feuerbach retrogressed and sided with Kant against Hegel, arguing: "Being is the boundary of thought."¹⁰⁴ Here there is no dialectical identity or unity, only an impassible dualism. Hence, one of his problems with Hegel was that the latter "did not overcome the contradiction of thought and being."¹⁰⁵ This was, though, only a repeat of what he wrote in the "Provisional Theses": "Hegelian philosophy is the suspension of the contradiction of thinking and being, as in particular Kant had articulated it."¹⁰⁶ This position was enunciated in his first critique of Hegel, published in 1839: "the meaning of the identity of spirit and nature was also a purely idealistic one in the beginning."¹⁰⁷ Finally, he expressly stated that the "immediate unity of opposite determinations is only possible and valid in abstraction."¹⁰⁸ Feuerbach, then, did not just oppose this or that aspect of Hegel's dialectics, but rather dialectics *as method*, viz., *dialectical logic* itself.¹⁰⁹ From all of this no one could possibly argue that Feuerbach held that there was an identity between thought and being.¹¹⁰

Finally, Feuerbach, in starting from Kantian dualism and adopting mechanical materialism only further deepened his sensationalism in his *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*. For him sense perception was not only theoretically better than thought, it was downright morally superior: it is in thought that humans begin to dictate to reality, to shape it according to their whims, and not perceiving how it really is, fall into theological abstractions. Thus he wrote:

¹⁰³ Ibid., 38.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰⁶ Feuerbach, "Provisional Theses," 166.

¹⁰⁷ Ludwig Feuerbach, "Towards a Critique of Hegelian Philosophy (1839)," in *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence S. Stepelevich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 117.

¹⁰⁸ Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 63.

¹⁰⁹ "The only means by which opposing and contradicting determinations are united in the same being in a way corresponding to reality is time." Ibid., 63; "Again, if when the assertion is true, the negation is false, and when this is true, the affirmation is false, it will not be possible to assert and deny the same thing truly at the same time... But not even at different times does one sense disagree about the quality, but only about that to which the quality belongs. I mean, for instance, that the same wine might seem, if either it or one's body changed, at one time sweet and at another time not sweet; but at least the sweet, such as it is when it exists, has never yet changed, but one is always right about it, and that which is to be sweet is of necessity of such and such a nature." Aristotle, "Metaphysica," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 742, 747.

¹¹⁰ Feuerbach, however, did hold that there was a unity of thought and being in a limited, specific sense. In his view, the "unity of thought and being has meaning and truth only when man is comprehended as the ground and subject of this unity. Only a real being recognizes real objects; only where thought is not the subject of itself but a predicate of a real being is the idea not separated from being." See, Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 67. Being a crude mechanical materialist, Feuerbach could only see this unity achieved in the physical existence, of a human. However, it did not occur to him, that when humans actively shape their world according to their ideas and plans, they precisely bring about an identity of thought and being.

In thought, I am an absolute subject; I accept everything only as my object or predicate, that is, as object or predicate of a thinking self; I am intolerant. In the activity of the senses, on the other hand, I am a liberal; I let the object be what I myself am – a subject, a real and self-actualizing being. Only sense and perception give me something as subject.¹¹¹

This is, of course, quite ridiculous and unscientific, for there is no binary of thought versus senses. As if, when considering an object I am unable to grasp its uniqueness and difference for other things, including myself; as if I cannot perceive that it exists outside of me; as if, in seeing, smelling, or hearing an object I do not simultaneously reflect on my perception; as if I do not and cannot form plans and designs on what I sense. Since everything that I see and hear right now is the product of previous human decision and action, then everything, including myself, is, to an extent, an object and not only subject. While Feuerbach had a wonderful aphoristic style, the beauty of his words simply could not hide the theoretical emptiness and absurdity of his conceptions.

Lest it be thought that I am being unfair to Feuerbach, or that I am misinterpreting him, I will provide a few more quotations from him. There can be no doubt about my argument, because he wrote the following: “Truth, reality, and sensation are identical. Only a sensuous being is a true and real being. Only through the senses, and not through thought for itself, is an object given in a true sense.”¹¹² Feuerbach explicitly asserted that the senses give one direct access to the truth. This implies that, as far as the senses of humans and other great apes are commensurate, they have roughly equal access to the truth. In fact, if any animal has any greater sense perception than us, then they have greater access to the truth! As he himself wrote: “But only the sensuous is as clear as daylight; all doubt and dispute cease only where sensation begins. The secret of immediate knowledge is sensation.”¹¹³ Who needs logic when I have my eyes and ears? Why have school for children when knowledge is immediate? In fact, Feuerbach had written previously that “Existence, empirical existence, is proved to me by the senses alone.”¹¹⁴ Yet, where does this leave science? What need for hypothesis, ideal types, models, etc.? To this Feuerbach could have no answer.

Yet, as I have pointed out in a previous essay, the idea that sense perception affords immediate knowledge and gives the only basis for attaining truth, had already been argued by the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus.¹¹⁵ This, then, was the actual height of Feuerbach’s materialism. One which, in his own words “takes the place of religion and has the essence of religion within itself. In truth, it is itself religion.”¹¹⁶ Feuerbach’s *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* were, in truth, the *Principles of the Philosophy of the Past*. Thus, his “new

¹¹¹ Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 40.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 51.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹¹⁴ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 201.

¹¹⁵ Devine, “On Lenin’s Materialism and Empirio-Criticism,” accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/lenins-materialism-and-empirio-criticism-critical-comments-confused-philosophy>.

¹¹⁶ Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 73.

philosophy” was a confused, eclectic jumble and a retrogression to the views of Kantian dualism, Aristotelian logic, and Epicurean sensationalism.

Marx

The interval from early 1843 to late 1844 constituted Marx’s Feuerbachian phase. It followed an arc of growing and then descending enthusiasm. That is, he went from being positive, though critical of Feuerbach’s work, to very enthusiastic, and finally to being utterly critical. This occurred over the course of a year and a half. Thus he was a dedicated and enthusiastic Feuerbachian for only a year. After 1845, all mention and citations of Feuerbach in the work of Marx precipitously drop off and disappear. As opposed to this, up to the end of his life he still made references to Hegel in both his published and unpublished writings.¹¹⁷ Truly, then, Feuerbach’s influence has been inflated out of all proportion. This inflation is a barrier to grasping that Marx was *never a pure* Feuerbachian and that it was the *logic of Marx’s own development* that led him beyond Feuerbach.

This chapter of Marx’s intellectual life consisted of three succeeding moments in the character of his writings. First was the early Feuerbachian period: *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, “On the Jewish Question,” “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction,” and his letters to Ruge and Feuerbach. Next was the middle period: his last letter to Feuerbach, “Comments on James Mill,” “Critical Notes on the Article: ‘The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian,’” and the *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Finally there was his late period: *The Holy Family*. The arc of Marx’s development here was marked not only by his degree of enthusiasm, but also by the shift of his attention from religion to state to political economy, and from “Man” and “human essence” to social relations, viz., from species to the proletarian class.

Marx’s first mention of *The Essence of Christianity* occurred in early 1842. On March 20 he wrote a letter to Ruge discussing, among other things, his proposed contributions to an upcoming issue of the *Anekdoten*. One of his articles concerned religious art and he reported to Ruge that he “had to speak about the general essence of religion; in doing so I come into conflict with Feuerbach to a certain extent, a conflict concerning not the principle, but the conception of it.”¹¹⁸ Marx had read *The Essence of Christianity*, thought well of aspects of it, and so he did not give it an unalloyed endorsement. He agreed with Feuerbach’s basic principle, but not with how the latter conceived it. Was Marx referring to how Feuerbach applied his principle or to how the latter understood it? In the absence of more documentation there is no way to definitively answer this question. However, what is evident is that Marx was at this time not yet a Feuerbachian.

The next reference we find to one of Feuerbach’s three works occurs, again, in a letter that Marx wrote to Ruge, this time in March 1843. There he made a comment in passing concerning Feuerbach’s “Provisional Theses.” According to Marx, “Feuerbach’s aphorisms”

¹¹⁷ It is thus no accident that, unlike with Hegel, there are no references to Feuerbach in Marx’s *magnum opus*, *Capital*.

¹¹⁸ Karl Marx, “To Arnold Ruge. March 20, 1842,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 1: 1835-43* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 386.

seemed to him “incorrect only in one respect, that he refers too much to nature and too little to politics. That, however, is the only alliance by which present-day philosophy can become truth.”¹¹⁹ Here Marx’s estimation was totally positive. He had no critical comment for its basic approach, methodology, or principles, viz., regarding its quality. No, the only aspect that he considered “incorrect” was a question of quantity: too much talk of nature and not enough of politics. As we will see, Marx’s one reservation here would only grow and shows that already he was in advance of Feuerbach in terms of the scope of his theoretical focus. Still, with this letter it can be seen that Marx had now truly come under Feuerbach’s influence.

Marx repeated this theme, in September 1843, in yet another letter to Ruge which was published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. In this work Marx expressed the shift of the Young Hegelian project of criticism, from religion to politics. Echoing Kant, he argued that it was now necessary to carry out the “*ruthless criticism of all that exists*, ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be.”¹²⁰ Here Marx was highlighting that, regardless of target, criticism takes place within a social context which is made up of forces with different material interests. Hence, the struggle of criticism had to go further and deeper because in the same degree “as *religion* is a register of the theoretical struggles of mankind, so the *political state* is a register of the practical struggles of mankind.”¹²¹ The largely *theoretical* struggle of Young Hegelianism had to become *practical*. Thus, there was nothing essentially stopping them from “making criticism of politics, participation in politics, and therefore *real* struggles, the starting point of our criticism, and from identifying our criticism with them.”¹²² The beginning of this practical turn was not to come forth with an already-made, finished political programme, instead it would consist of research and education. In Marx’s words,

we do not confront the world in a doctrinaire way with a new principle... We develop new principles for the world out of the world’s own principles... We merely show the world what it is really fighting for, and consciousness is something that it *has to* acquire, even if it does not want to.¹²³

Finally, Marx wrote even more explicitly about what this effort to educate the public would entail:

The reform of consciousness consists *only* in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in awakening it out of its dream about itself, in *explaining* to it the meaning of its own actions. Our whole object can only be – as is also the case in

¹¹⁹ Karl Marx, “To Arnold Ruge. March 13, 1843,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 1: 1835-43* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 400.

¹²⁰ Karl Marx, “Letters from the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 3: 1843-44* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 142.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 144.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 144.

Feuerbach's criticism of religion – to give religious and philosophical questions the form corresponding to man who has become conscious of himself.¹²⁴

This is the basic summation of the whole letter. First, Marx was arguing that struggles, especially practical political struggles, were inevitable. Second, there was a logic to this process, in that the participants must come to some form of consciousness about present and future fights. In order to help the forces of progress to win, the job of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, and those who support its ideals, had to be to aid in that change of consciousness. Third, this was to be achieved not by demanding that people simply change their ideas by accepting new ones, but by educating them as to the nature, *the logic*, of their situation and what it necessarily implied. Finally, Marx clearly stated that this project was analogous to what Feuerbach had done in criticising religion, viz., in removing the illusion of the higher powers by reducing their existence to humanity itself. Thus, Feuerbach's work provided Marx with a model, which he argued must be extended and applied to the political realm and further.

This move towards a critique of politics was expressed in the following three pieces by Marx: the "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," "On the Jewish Question," and the "Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right." All of these works share the same themes, and were written back-to-back. In 1842 Marx announced his intention to submit an article to Ruge's *Deutsche Jahrbücher* which would be "a criticism of Hegelian natural law, insofar as it concerns the *internal political system*," and its "central point" would be "the struggle against *constitutional monarchy* as a hybrid which from beginning to end contradicts and abolishes itself."¹²⁵ Later, on March 20, Marx informed Ruge that because of certain circumstances he would be unable to send his "criticism of the Hegelian philosophy of law for the next *Anekdoten*."¹²⁶ Finally, in his August letter to Dagobert Oppenheim, Marx made mention of his "article against Hegel's theory of constitutional monarchy," but gave no indication of where or when it was to be published.¹²⁷ In fact, the article was never published and no manuscript of it was ever found. This is undoubtedly because it grew to the size of a small book and it was, therefore, no longer feasible to be published in a journal.

The "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," was actually written in mid-1843, was never published in Marx's lifetime, and has come down to us as a manuscript fragment.¹²⁸ While a critique of Hegel i.e. an essentially theoretical critique, may not seem overtly political, let alone practical, the context needs to be kept in mind. First, Hegel's views had previously been quite dominant and still enjoyed a wide currency. This had to be challenged. Second, being a member of a movement which was the product of the dissolution of the Hegelian School, Marx needed to settle accounts with ideas that he and others had accepted.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 144.

¹²⁵ Karl Marx, "To Arnold Ruge. March 5, 1842," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 1: 1835-43* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 382-383.

¹²⁶ Marx, "To Arnold Ruge. March 20, 1842," 385.

¹²⁷ Karl Marx, "To Dagobert Oppenheim. Approximately August 25, 1842," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 1: 1835-43* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 393.

¹²⁸ Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 3: 1843-44* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 4.

Third, this project of clarification would lay the basis for getting down to critiquing the political system as it actually existed, not its *ideal reflection*. This work failed to be published because, as was to be repeated constantly through Marx's life, circumstances did not permit, other pressing matters called for his attention, and his self-clarification was ultimately achieved.¹²⁹

The essential import of this work is that Marx, through his analysis of Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, critiqued the latter's basic approach and conception of the dialectical method. However, unlike Feuerbach, Marx did not reject Hegel's logic, but accepted it; he was opposed only to the latter's misuse of it. According to Marx, the real development of the state was as follows: "Family and civil society are actual components of the state, actual spiritual existences of the will... Family and civil society *constitute* themselves as the state. They are the driving force."¹³⁰ Hegel, though, argued that they were "on the contrary *produced* by the actual idea. It is not the course of their own life which unites them in the state; on the contrary, it is the idea which in the course of its life has separated them off from itself."¹³¹ That is to say, instead of the family and civil society making themselves moments in the development of the state, they are merely moments in the self-development of the Idea.

Marx perceptively argued that Hegel's basic approach therefore consisted of the following: "The transition is thus derived, not from the *particular* nature of the family, etc., and from the particular nature of the state, but from the *general* relationship of *necessity* to *freedom*."¹³² Hegel was not guided by the specific natures of different phenomena, but instead by a universal model of development which originated in his *Science of Logic* and which was repeated throughout the whole of his system:

It is exactly the same transition as is effected in logic from the sphere of essence to the sphere of the concept. The same transition is made in the philosophy of nature from inorganic nature to life. It is always the same categories which provide the soul, now for this, now for that sphere. It is only a matter of spotting for the separate concrete attributes the corresponding abstract attributes.¹³³

In other words, Hegel was merely replacing the actual development with an ideal one; he was hoisting his logic onto history. In this way, the latter was made to fit the former. Hence, we have yet another example of what Rosenkranz had stated was well known, viz., that the dialectic method was easily misapplied, could result in a false construction, and that Hegel himself was not above this.

In light of this, Marx understandably did not limit himself to this general point, but went on to explain how exactly Hegel carried out the above. In his words, "Hegel everywhere makes the idea the subject and turns the proper, the actual subject... into a predicate. It is always on the side of the predicate, however, that development takes place."¹³⁴ In other words, although "there

¹²⁹ This was most famously seen with the so-called *German Ideology* manuscripts.

¹³⁰ Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law," 8-9.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

can be no political state without the natural basis of the family and the artificial basis of civil society,” since “they are for it a *conditio sine qua non*,” with Hegel it was reversed and “the condition is postulated as the conditioned, the determinant as the determined, the producing factor as the product of its product.”¹³⁵ The actual situation was that “the state issues from the multitude in their existence as members of families and as members of civil society,” but Hegel “expresses this fact as the idea’s deed.”¹³⁶ Therefore, what were the actual facts of the matter, that “which is the starting point, is not conceived to be such but rather to be the mystical result” of the Absolute Idea.¹³⁷ Marx’s critique of Hegel here was a reversal of his reversal.

What was this, if not Feuerbach’s “method of the reformatory critique”? Indeed, as Marx would write later: “Subjectivity is a characteristic of the subject, personality a characteristic of the person,” but, rather than “conceiving them as predicates of their subjects, Hegel gives the predicates an independent existence and subsequently transforms them in a mystical fashion into their subjects.”¹³⁸ Hegel had inverted the real relations and so the “existence of predicates is the subject, so that the subject is the existence of subjectivity,” and as a result of this inversion, Hegel turned “the predicates, the objects, into independent entities, but divorced from their actual independence, their subject.”¹³⁹ Marx repeated this essential point again and again.¹⁴⁰ Any true critique must, therefore, invert Hegel’s inversion and give an explanation of how things actually develop. If Hegel had been able to do the latter and “set out from real subjects as the bases of the state he would not have found it necessary to transform the state in a mystical fashion into a subject”¹⁴¹ But Hegel did not do that, because in his presentation he did not provide “the logic of the matter, but the matter of logic,” and so his logic did “not serve to prove the state, but the state” served “to prove the logic.”¹⁴² Or as Marx wrote elsewhere, “Hegel gives a political body to his logic: he does not give the logic of the body politic.”¹⁴³

Although Marx neither mentioned, nor cited Feuerbach in his “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” it is clear that he had accepted Feuerbach’s method of critiquing Hegel’s speculative approach. He was, at this time, incontestably a Feuerbachian in terms of method, focus, and categories deployed. Yet Marx’s extension of these elements to the realm of politics revealed his independent-mindedness. More importantly, and this cannot be stressed enough, Marx did not call for discarding Hegel’s logic. As his comments cited above show, Hegel’s basic

¹³⁵ Ibid., 9.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 9.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁴⁰ “The process by which ‘matters of general concern’ – which are in this way turned into an independent entity – come to be a subject, is here presented as a phase in the life-process of the ‘matters of general concern’. Instead of the subjects making themselves objective in the ‘matters of general concern’, Hegel brings the ‘matters of general concern’ to the point of being the ‘subject’...But Hegel is content that in the state, which he demonstrates to be the self-conscious mode of being of ethical spirit, this ethical spirit should only *as such*, in the sense of the general idea, be the *determining factor*. He does not allow society to become the actually determining factor, because that requires an *actual* subject, and he has only an abstract one – an *imaginary* one.” Ibid., 61, 122.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁴² Ibid., 18.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 48.

weakness was imposing his logic on reality and not using it as a tool to explain reality, i.e. serving as an aid to disclose “the logic of the matter.” This was especially shown by a point Marx made near his final section. There he criticised “vulgar criticism,” which “criticises the constitution” by pointing to “the antagonism of the powers, etc. It finds contradictions everywhere,” and so merely “ *fights with its subject-matter.*”¹⁴⁴ As opposed to this approach, the “truly philosophical criticism of the present state constitution not only shows up contradictions as existing; it *explains* them, it comprehends their genesis, their necessity. It considers them in their *specific* significance.”¹⁴⁵ This is exactly what Hegel had carried out in his *Science of Logic* for the forms of thought, but which he was unable to continue within the rest of his system.¹⁴⁶ Marx’s criticism was precisely that Hegel did not consistently apply his own method. It was, therefore, in this work that Marx inverted Hegel’s dialectic, a conclusion which *only he* drew from applying Feuerbach’s general approach.

Of Marx’s next two works, “On the Jewish Question,” and the “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction,” the first was written in late 1843, and the second was written between December 1843 and January 1844. Both pieces were published in 1844 in the same issue of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, and, further, they were expressions of the *end* of the Young Hegelian movement, for 1843 was precisely its last year of existence. More importantly, they were Feuerbachian works, but they also showed Marx’s independence from Feuerbach. This is seen, first, in that state and civil society were categories that the latter did not use. For Marx state and civil society were *both* objects and categories of analysis. Second, Marx’s *whole approach* proceeded by way of critically analysing dialectical contradictions. Finally, these two essays were the *first Marxist works* which laid the basis for communist revolution. Thus these pieces reveal that even in his embrace of Feuerbachianism, Marx already was advancing beyond Feuerbach’s abstract discussion of man’s essence and the domination of ideas, viz., theology and old philosophy. This was thanks to his own genius and his critical application of the dialectic method.

Marx’s essay “On the Jewish Question” took the occasion of two recent works by his fellow Young Hegelian and former friend Bruno Bauer to present his rapidly developing views. Bauer had written a book and an essay tackling the issue of Jewish people gaining full civil rights. Unfortunately Bauer was ensconced in a dogmatic, idealist understanding of Hegel’s dialectic. In his view, no Germans were truly free, as they were under the yoke of an undemocratic Christian state. To achieve a universal freedom Jewish people had to give up their particular identity, their religion, and join the nation. Although he also held that Christians had to do likewise, his argument that atheism had to precede political freedom only had the effect of

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 91.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 91.

¹⁴⁶ “*Objective logic* therefore, which treats of *being* and *essence* constitutes properly the *genetic exposition of the Notion*. More precisely, *substance* is already *real essence*, or *essence* in so far as it is united with *being* and has entered into actuality. Consequently, the *Notion* has *substance* for its immediate presupposition; what is *implicit* in *substance* is *manifested* in the *Notion*. Thus the *dialectical movement* of *substance* through causality and reciprocity is the immediate *genesis* of the *Notion*, the exposition of the process of its becoming.” Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 577.

denying in practice actual political struggles and, further, of leaving the question on purely religious, theoretical grounds.¹⁴⁷

In Marx's view, Bauer's first error was that he "transforms the question of Jewish emancipation into a purely religious question," while he himself was "trying to break with the theological formulation of the question."¹⁴⁸ This meant that Bauer was reducing what was, in fact, a political question to a religious question. Therefore he could not deal with the more fundamental issue of "the relation of religion to the state."¹⁴⁹ According to Marx, the "criticism of this relation ceases to be theological criticism as soon as the state ceases to adopt a theological attitude toward religion, as soon as it behaves towards religion as a state – *i.e.*, *politically*."¹⁵⁰ Although religion and politics were related via the state, Bauer was ignoring the specificity of the political nature of the question. Hence criticism must become "*criticism of the political state*."¹⁵¹ Here Marx publicly proclaimed not just the shift, but the necessary *break* with religious criticism and the need for criticism to become political. The question of religion was over and could at most only be a subsidiary matter. The time was for politics.

Marx, however, got even more specific, arguing that Bauer erred because he subjected "to criticism *only* the 'Christian state', not the 'state as such'," that is, he did not "investigate *the relation of political emancipation to human emancipation*."¹⁵² This distinction that Marx introduced would become even more important as his essay progressed. What is crucial to point out for now, is that Marx saw freedom from religion *i.e.* atheism as only one, secondary aspect of human freedom. That is, Marx was already implying that the latter was an umbrella term encompassing emancipation from different, though related oppressions. Thus, although political freedom was necessary, it was also inherently *limited* compared with human freedom *as a totality*.

In light of this, the "question of the *relation of political emancipation to religion*" had to become "the question of the *relation of political emancipation to human emancipation*."¹⁵³ Marx's understanding here was broader than may appear at first sight. He was not simply referring to the political emancipation of religious people, but also the religious emancipation of the state. As such, "the state as a *state* emancipates itself from religion by emancipating itself from the *state religion* – that is to say, by the state as a state not professing any religion, but, on the contrary, asserting itself as a state."¹⁵⁴ In looking at both of these aspects it is quite clear that

political emancipation from religion is not a religious emancipation that has been carried through to completion and is free from contradiction, because political emancipation is

¹⁴⁷ Karl Marx, "On The Jewish Question," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 3: 1843-44* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 146-148.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 151-152.

not a form of *human* emancipation which has been carried through to completion and is free from contradiction.¹⁵⁵

That is, while the state can be freed from religious domination, humans can still be dominated by religion. In other words, “the state can be a *free state* without man being a *free man*.”¹⁵⁶ This makes it abundantly clear that Marx saw belief in religion as being in a state of enslavement. And yet, at no time did he make a call for people to give up their religious beliefs in this essay. Why? The reason for this is that “the existence of religion is not in contradiction to the perfection of the state.”¹⁵⁷

The lack of a contradiction between these two spheres was because they were both expressions of the same phenomena of human alienation. Marx reminded his readers that “the attitude of the state, and of the *republic* in particular, to religion is, after all, only the attitude to religion of the *men* who compose the state.”¹⁵⁸ Humans were the basis of their own oppression and so political emancipation was not and could be direct liberation. Hence, if “man frees himself through the *medium of the state*...frees himself *politically* from a limitation” then he only does so “in an *abstract, limited, and partial way*.”¹⁵⁹ In other words, “by freeing himself *politically*, man frees himself in a *roundabout way*, through an *intermediary*.”¹⁶⁰ This *indirect, mediated* emancipation was precisely why political freedom was *limited*. Here we now see not only the parallel between politics and religion, but Marx’s real relation to Feuerbach:

It follows, finally, that man, even if he proclaims himself an atheist through the medium of the state, that is, if he proclaims the state to be atheist, still remains in the grip of religion, precisely because he acknowledges himself only by a roundabout route, only through an intermediary. Religion is precisely the recognition of man in a roundabout way, through an *intermediary*. The state is the intermediary between man and man’s freedom.¹⁶¹

This was the extension of Feuerbach’s analysis of religion to the state. Where Feuerbach argued that God was the expression of the attributes of humanity and hence the unhuman reflection of humanity, so Marx wrote that the same process occurred in the republic, the democratic state. Thus, religion and state were not simply interrelated in terms of the role each played in each other’s sphere, but at a deeper level they were concomitant manifestations of human powers standing over humanity and dominating them.

Yet Marx, in extending Feuerbach, again broke with the former. The democratic state, the republic was the “perfect political state,” and this was “by its nature, man’s *species-life*, as *opposed* to his material life.”¹⁶² What Marx meant was that when a bourgeois democratic

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 152.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 152.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 151.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 152.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 152.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 152.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 152.

¹⁶² Ibid., 153.

revolution was carried out (in this case the French Revolution) human life becomes divided into the state and civil society.¹⁶³ Here

man – not only in thought, in consciousness, but in *reality*, in *life* – leads a twofold life, a heavenly and an earthly life: life in the *political community*, in which he considers himself a *communal being*, and life in *civil society*, in which he acts as a *private individual*, regards other men as a means, degrades himself into a means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers.¹⁶⁴

Note that Marx had referred to human “species-life” as the “political community,” which stood in contradiction to the competitiveness and egoism of civil society. It will be recalled that Feuerbach had understood species in a purely *biological* determinist manner. Marx, however, referred to it as *socially* constructed, viz., a politically-formed community.¹⁶⁵ Thus he utilised a Feuerbachian category in a most unFeuerbachian way: the human species-life was not the realm of Man’s body, but of society’s body politic.

The contradiction between the state and civil society was therefore the basis for the seeming contradiction between state and religion. Within the division of public and private life, people find a contradiction between themselves as separate individuals and as a collective of citizens. Thus, a person “as the adherent of a *particular* religion, finds himself in conflict with his citizenship and with other men as members of the community,” and this conflict, in turn, “reduces itself to the *secular* division between the *political* state and *civil society*.”¹⁶⁶ Thus, when Marx wrote that as “the existence of religion is the existence of defect, the source of this defect can only be sought in the *nature* of the state itself,” that was only on the surface.¹⁶⁷ The real basis was because the

members of the political state are religious owing to the dualism between individual life and species-life, between the life of civil society and political life...because men treat the political life of the state, an area beyond their real individuality, as if it were their true life. They are religious insofar as religion here is the spirit of civil society, expressing the separation and remoteness of man from man.¹⁶⁸

Here Marx rooted the religious illusion, not in ignorance as Feuerbach argued (lack of science, belief in old philosophy and theology), but in the contradiction between the state and civil

¹⁶³ “It is puzzling enough that a people which is just beginning to liberate itself, to tear down all the barriers between its various sections, and to establish a political community, that such a people solemnly proclaims (*Declaration of 1791*) the rights of egoistic man separated from his fellow men and from the community, and that indeed it repeats this proclamation at a moment when only the most heroic devotion can save the nation, and is therefore imperatively called for, at a moment when the sacrifice of all the interest of civil society must be the order of the day, and egoism must be punished as a crime.” *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁶⁵ Thus human rights are a product of social activity, are human creations: “Their content is *participation* in the *community*, and specifically in the *political* community, in the *life of the state*. They come within the category of *political freedom*, the category of *civic rights*, which, as we have seen, in no way presuppose the incontrovertible and positive abolition of religion, nor therefore of Judaism.” *Ibid.*, 160-161.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

society, and, further, the contradictions within civil society. Marx thus differed from Feuerbach firstly, in applying the idea of the alienation of human powers to *politics and civil society*, and, secondly, he based religious illusion not in ignorance, but in objective social conditions.¹⁶⁹

The contradiction between state and civil society had been simultaneously created by the democratic revolution, because removing “the political yoke meant at the same time throwing off the bonds which restrained the egoistic spirit of civil society. Political emancipation was, at the same time, the emancipation of civil society from politics.”¹⁷⁰ As a result, “Feudal society was resolved into its basic element – *man*, but man as he really formed its basis – *egoistic man*...the member of civil society, is thus the basis, the precondition, of the *political state*.”¹⁷¹ Here Marx *rooted* the state *in* civil society, arguing that they are not simply separate spheres, but that the latter was the *basis* of the former and so the former *grows out* of the latter. That is, while both, *historically*, found their presupposition in the change from feudalism, *logically*, one developed out of the other. Here we have an early example of the dialectics of the historical and logical which Marx got from Hegel.¹⁷² The revolutionary break with feudalism was merely the *past* presupposition for capitalist society, not its *current* presupposition, which is posited by itself in its development. More specifically, the “*political revolution* resolves civil life into its component parts, without *revolutionising* these components” and so it “regards civil society, the world of needs, labour, private interests, civil law, as the *basis of its existence*, as a *precondition* not requiring further substantiation and therefore as its *natural basis*.”¹⁷³ Society’s history has been effaced and naturalised. This is how life is seen and experienced; this is just how things are.

Yet civil society was not some abstraction, but, like the state, consisted of concrete individual humans. Therefore, in this naturalisation, man “as a member of civil society, *unpolitical man*, inevitably appears, however, as the *natural man*. The *droits de l’homme* [rights of man] appears as *droits naturels* [natural rights], because *conscious activity* is concentrated on the *political act*.”¹⁷⁴ The state thus appears as the realm of planned, intentional activity, while that of civil society as unplanned, unintentional activity. This was why, since civil society was the true basis, the true presupposition of the state, therefore not one of the “rights of man...go beyond egoistic man, beyond man as a member of civil society, that is, an individual withdrawn

¹⁶⁹ “We no longer regard religion as the *cause*, but only as the *manifestation* of secular narrowness. Therefore, we explain the religious limitations of the free citizen by their secular limitations. We do not assert that they must overcome their religious narrowness in order to get rid of their secular restrictions, we assert that they will overcome their religious narrowness once they get rid of their secular restrictions.” Ibid., 151. This idea would be repeated years later, in the first volume of *Capital*: “The religious reflections of the real world can, in any case, vanish only when the practical relations of everyday life between man and man, and man and nature, generally present themselves to him in a transparent and rational form. The veil is not removed from the countenance of the social life-process, i.e. the process of material production, until it becomes production by freely associated men, and stands under their conscious and planned control.” See, Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, tran. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 173.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 166.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 166.

¹⁷² Devine, “The Dialectics of the Historical and Logical,” accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/dialectics-historical-and-logical-hegel-and-marx>.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 167.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 167.

into himself, into the confines of his private interests.”¹⁷⁵ The perfected state, the republic, was thus both an expression and servant of civil society.¹⁷⁶ Further, in regards to the “rights of man,” a man

is far from being conceived as a species-being; on the contrary, species-life itself, society, appears as a framework external to the individuals, as a restriction of their original independence. The sole bond holding them together is natural necessity, need and private interest, the preservation of their property and their egoistic selves.”¹⁷⁷

Thus, the *true* species-life of humanity was now seen as not merely the political community, community in general, but *society itself*, viz., included civil society. For the separateness, the division of the latter, while real, was still ultimately an inverted illusion. This was a clear precursor to Marx’s “Theses on Feuerbach,” where he wrote that the “standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society or social humanity.”¹⁷⁸ Marx there meant both himself and Feuerbach. For although civil society was not a category used by Feuerbach, but by Hegel, Marx had written that the “highest point reached by contemplative materialism...is the contemplation of single individuals and of civil society.”¹⁷⁹

Since both religious and political emancipation were limited and subsumed under human emancipation, therefore the roots of both oppressions lay deeper in a common basis. Near the end of this essay Marx explicitly pointed out that this was not merely civil society, but in the actual material conditions of life. He argued that

Money degrades all the gods of man – and turns them into commodities. Money is the universal self-established *value* of all things. It has therefore robbed the whole world – both the world of men and nature – of its specific value. Money is the estranged essence of man’s work and man’s existence, and this alien essence dominates him, and he worships it.¹⁸⁰

Right here, Marx already pointed towards the need to understand political economy. The root of the oppression was not civil society *in general*, but, more exactly, the system of money exchange, the commodity system, and also that of labour. These were the real bases of religious belief and state power. Marx further noted that the “view of nature attained under the domination of private property and money is a real contempt for and practical debasement of nature.”¹⁸¹ So it was not only money and labour, but also private property that had to be critically analysed. Marx was here far beyond Feuerbach, but still Feuerbachian, viz., he was and was not a Feuerbachian.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 164.

¹⁷⁶ Hence the “contradiction between politics and the power of money in general. Although theoretically the former is superior to the latter, in actual fact politics has become the serf of financial power.” Ibid., 171.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 164.

¹⁷⁸ Karl Marx, “[Theses On Feuerbach],” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology: Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 617.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 617.

¹⁸⁰ Marx, “On The Jewish Question,” 172.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 172.

It should now be clear why, in this essay, Marx repeatedly stressed that “*political emancipation*” was “not *human* emancipation” and that its limitation was “inherent in the *nature* and *category* of political emancipation.”¹⁸² He did note that it was “of course, a big step forward,” but it was not and could not be “the final form of human emancipation in general,” but was only “the final form of human emancipation *within* the hitherto existing world order.”¹⁸³ When he was speaking of human liberation he was “speaking here of real, practical emancipation,” viz., he was speaking of the liberation of humanity in the conditions of its everyday life.¹⁸⁴ Again, by saying there was a higher level of emancipation than political and religious, Marx was arguing that we must go deeper to find the real basis of oppression. Here we see him pointing to the economy.

Human emancipation therefore meant emancipation from all those oppressions which were produced by the alienation of humanity’s own powers: religious, political, economic, etc. Marx argued that “*All* emancipation is a *reduction* of the human world and relationships to *man himself*.”¹⁸⁵ The ultimate basis of oppression and liberation lay within humanity itself; it forges its own chains, only it can break them. In making this shift Marx was emphasising that humanity as it existed was self-created, was the product of its own actions. If it had enslaved itself, it could free itself. With this understanding Marx painted the following picture:

Only when the real, individual man re-absorbs in himself the abstract citizen, and as an individual human being has become a *species-being* in his everyday life, in his particular work, and in his particular situation, only when man has recognised and organised his ‘*forces propres*’ [own powers] as *social* powers, and consequently no longer separates social power from himself in the shape of *political* power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished.¹⁸⁶

Marx here implied the need for a new, greater revolution, viz., clearly a *social revolution*. This also implied that the contradiction between state and civil society would be abolished and the state ended, and that money and commodities would no longer rule daily human life and labour. Here, then, in broad outline, Marx *first* provided the goal of the future communist revolution. He was, therefore, already beyond liberalism and was no simple revolutionary democrat. This would be even more apparent in his next essay in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*.

In Marx’s “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction,” he made his most explicit declaration yet concerning the relation of religion to politics: “For Germany the criticism of religion is in the main complete, and criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism.”¹⁸⁷ The criticism of religion was thus the crucible in which Young Hegelianism was born, it was the stage which set forth the latter’s basic approach, and it had essentially ended. He then gave a summary of the essentials of this critique: “*Man makes religion*, religion

¹⁸² Ibid., 160.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 155.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 155.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 168.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 168.

¹⁸⁷ Karl Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law. Introduction,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 3: 1843-44* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 175.

does not make man. Religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again.”¹⁸⁸ This is, as I have pointed out previously, not an insight unique to any one Young Hegelian. The idea that religion was a human creation was contained in Hegel and was a basic premise of all Young Hegelians, from David Strauss onward. The only aspect here which rings of Feuerbach was the emphasis on “*man*.” However, Marx quickly added that,

man is no abstract being encamped outside the world. Man is *the world of man*, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion, an *inverted world-consciousness*, because they are an *inverted world*.¹⁸⁹

Marx, thus far, had been using the same category as Feuerbach i.e. “Man,” hence showing the influence of the latter thinker. Yet it is quite clear, from the last essay and especially the above, that Marx had given this category a *different content*. For Feuerbach, “Man” alternately refers to the entire biological species and to the particular individual. For Marx however, the same category was used increasingly to refer to the *social world* of humanity, not its sheer *biological existence*. This transition from the last writing to this one, will be intensified in this same essay.

Still, the Feurbachianism here is undeniable. For Marx, in some of his most beautiful writing, argued that religion was the, “*fantastic realisation* of the human essence because the *human essence* has no true reality. The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly a fight against *the world* of which religion is the spiritual *aroma*.”¹⁹⁰ The idea that religion was an illusory expression of the human essence was, of course, Feuerbach’s. But, the idea that religion was a necessary product of this world, viz., of its material conditions, and that therefore the fight against this illusion was actually an indirect fight against these same conditions, and, further, a direct, political fight was needed, was pure Marx. Thus we can see that Marx, although accepting some aspects of Feuerbach’s thought, was constantly straining at its limitations, added his own insights, and thus was never a pure Feuerbachian. This is why he rapidly dropped Feuerbach: Marx will judged the theoretical tools of Feurbachianism in the struggle and find them wanting.

Religion was a necessary product of society, but not merely because it was a tool of the ruling powers. Marx’s view was far more nuanced and so he also pointed out that “*Religious* distress is at the same time the *expression* of real distress and also the *protest* against real distress.”¹⁹¹ Since the religious *illusion* was not merely a *real* expression of oppression, but also a consolation to those oppressed, therefore, the “demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs is the *demand to give up a state of affairs which needs illusions*.”¹⁹² We see here, again, Marx’s point that religion was not a mere matter of ignorance, of mistaken ideas, i.e. not ideology, but was an objective reflection of actual contradictions, and therefore, was *necessary* for the functioning of the current system. Religious belief, then, was not primarily a matter of personal choice, but an objective social fact.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 175.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 175.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 175.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 175.

¹⁹² Ibid., 176.

This would seem to imply a contradiction. If religion was a necessary product of the system, and therefore, could only truly be removed with the system, then what was the point of criticising religion and being an atheist? The discrepancy is only seeming. For if a fight is ultimately necessary to change the system, then people are needed to carry it on. They, in turn, will need to know not merely *how* to fight and *what* they are fighting, but *why* they are fighting. Hence some level of anti-religious criticism was needed. As Marx argued, the “criticism of religion disillusioned man to make him think and act and shape his reality like a man who has been disillusioned and has come to reason.”¹⁹³ Without directing people’s focus away from religion and to the actual state of affairs, they would be unable to set about the task of reshaping society. Hence, according to Marx, it was the

task of history, therefore, once the *world beyond the truth* has disappeared, is to establish the *truth of this world*. The immediate *task of philosophy*, which is at the service of history, once the *holy form* of human self-estrangement has been unmasked, is to unmask self-estrangement in its *unholy forms*. Thus the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*.¹⁹⁴

The contradiction between humanity and religion was only an expression of the contradiction between humanity and the state. And, as we know from Marx’s previous essay, this contradiction was, in turn, only an expression of the contradictions *between humans within* civil society. Thus, the different levels of Marx’s critique were aimed at showing that not merely were various aspects of human self-estrangement and oppression related, but that they existed in a hierarchy of determination. Marx’s criticism was a continuous, developing project which changed only by its focus, range, and categories.

When Marx wrote this introduction, he still intended to publish his study in some format, thus he viewed it as “a contribution to that task,” viz., the critique of law and politics.¹⁹⁵ However, he noted that it was concerned “not with the original, but with a copy, the German *philosophy* of state and of law.”¹⁹⁶ Here he explicitly referred to Hegel’s philosophy as a copy, and so a mere reflection. This was the first signal of his shift from philosophy to science. This, of course, would continue and he eventually considered all philosophy a mere ideological reflection, and he spoke only of the task of science. Therefore he repeatedly spoke of *Capital* as a scientific work, and not a work of philosophy.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Ibid., 176.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 176.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 176.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 176.

¹⁹⁷ As he wrote in the manuscripts of the third volume of *Capital*, “it is a task of science to reduce the merely phenomenal movement to the actual inner movement.” See, Karl Marx, *Marx’s Economic Manuscript of 1864–1865*, tran. Ben Fowkes and ed. Fred Moseley (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 419. Earlier, decades before Engels, Marx noted the difference between utopian socialist and scientific socialists: “Just as the *economists* are the scientific representatives of the bourgeois class, so the *Socialists* and *Communists* are the theoreticians of the proletarian class. So long as the proletariat is not yet sufficiently developed to constitute itself as a class, and consequently so long as the struggle itself of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie has not yet assumed a political character...these theoreticians are merely utopians who, to meet the wants of the oppressed classes, improvise systems and go in

Marx then launched into a discussion of Germany's past and current state of affairs and their reflections in different schools of thought.¹⁹⁸ He argued that conditions were wretched and must be exposed in theory and practice. Thus every "sphere of German society must be shown as the *partie honteuse* [shameful part] of German society; these petrified relations must be forced to dance by singing their own tune to them!"¹⁹⁹ In this critical fight the main point was that the "struggle against the German political present is the struggle against the past of the modern nations."²⁰⁰ That is, Germany had lagged behind other nations in terms of economic and political development. Whereas France and England had some forms of democracy, Germany was still stuck in the dictatorship of a monarchy. Thus the "tragedy" of the "*ancien régime*" had taken the form of a "comedy as a German ghost."²⁰¹ German criticism was, therefore, dealing with a unique situation *vis-à-vis* other western countries.

More specifically Marx argued that "once *modern* politico-social reality itself is subjected to criticism, once criticism rises to truly human problems, it finds itself outside the German *status quo*."²⁰² That is, the reference points in criticising German conditions could not be merely limited to the latter; account had to be taken of the international arena. As an example of this, Marx pointed out that the "relation of industry, of the world of wealth generally, to the political world is one of the major problems of modern times."²⁰³ He then drew attention to the fact that not only did Germany lag politically, but economically as well.²⁰⁴ Yet, if this was so, then where did this leave the intellectual sphere?

Here Germans were actually in advance of other countries. That is, the uneven development of life had expressed itself in the curious combination of Germany being politically and economically *regressive*, but theoretically *progressive*. As a result, just as

ancient peoples went through their pre-history in imagination, in *mythology*, so we Germans have gone through our post-history in thought, in *philosophy*. We are

search of a regenerating science. But in the measure that...the struggle of the proletariat assumes clearer outlines, they no longer need to seek science in their minds; they have only to take note of what is happening before their eyes and to become its mouthpiece...From this moment, science...has associated itself consciously with it, has ceased to be doctrinaire and has become revolutionary." See, Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy Answer to the "Philosophy of Poverty" by M. Proudhon* (Toronto: Norman Bethune Institute, 1976), 120. Finally, we have the following points, among many others, from the first volume of *Capital*: "I welcome every opinion based on scientific criticism." "Even a history of religion that is written in abstraction from this material basis is uncritical. It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly kernel of the misty creations of religion than to do the opposite, i.e. to develop from the actual, given relations of life the forms in which these have been apotheosized. The latter method is the only materialist, and therefore the only scientific one." See, Marx, *Capital*, 93, 493-494.

¹⁹⁸ Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy," 176-177.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 178. Compare this with what Marx wrote years later: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce." See Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1987), 15.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 179.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 179.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

philosophical contemporaries of the present without being its *historical* contemporaries.²⁰⁵

German theory thus matched other nations' economic and political evolution, but not its own. This was the reason why what "in advanced nations is a *practical* break with modern political conditions, is in Germany, where even those conditions do not yet exist, at first a *critical* break with the philosophical reflection of those conditions."²⁰⁶ Thus, the contradiction between intellectual and politico-economic circumstances necessitated that Germans had to break with their "ideal history, *philosophy*," before they could break with their actual history, viz., in practice. The turn from theory to practice was not merely rooted in the logic of the dialectical development from Hegel to the Young Hegelians, but in the very logic of Germany's politico-economic history. Thus, Marx was arguing that criticising Hegelianism was a necessary prerequisite to criticising the actual state of affairs. Germans therefore had to "subject to criticism not only these existing conditions but at the same time their abstract continuation."²⁰⁷ The fight had to combine a criticism of both the *material* conditions and their *ideal* expression.

Although Marx had spoken of the "task of philosophy," he was not really talking about philosophical criticism. In his analysis of the struggle with the past, he made a reference to the "*practical* political party in Germany" that demanded "the *negation of philosophy*."²⁰⁸ This was the pro-democratic forces, the liberals. He quickly added that this party was "wrong, not in its demand but in stopping at the demand, which it neither seriously implements nor can implement."²⁰⁹ While this party was content to get rid of philosophy by ignoring it, it actually was ignoring the fact that it was a necessary aspect of German reality. In his view, "*you cannot supersede philosophy without making it a reality*."²¹⁰ The move beyond Germany's belated conditions was thus simultaneous with the move beyond Hegelianism, and these were both concurrent with the overcoming of philosophy itself via its practical implementation.

Yet Marx also took aim at another grouping. In his view the "same mistake, but with the factors *reversed*, was made by the *theoretical* political party originating from philosophy."²¹¹ This was precisely the Young Hegelians. Marx's critique of the essence of his erstwhile comrades is so crucial, it must be quoted:

In the present struggle it saw *only the critical struggle of philosophy against the German world*; it did not give a thought to the fact that the *hitherto prevailing philosophy* itself belongs to this world and is its *complement*, although an ideal one. Critical towards its adversary, it was uncritical towards itself when, proceeding from the premises of philosophy, it either stopped at the results given by philosophy or passed off demands and results from somewhere else as immediate demands and results of philosophy,

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 180.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 180.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 180.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 180.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 180.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 181.

²¹¹ Ibid., 181.

although these, provided they are justified, can be obtained only by the *negation of hitherto existing philosophy*, of philosophy as such.²¹²

Although Marx did not mention any names in this essay, it is abundantly clear that the above summed up the fatal weakness of the movement. Young Hegelianism was thus exhausted as a vehicle of progress. Just as the other party thought philosophy could be negated with its being made real, so this party “*thought it could make philosophy a reality without superseding it.*”²¹³ Marx literally expressed, in a positive and direct style, that philosophy *had to be negated*, that the overall situation demanded it, and that to do so meant giving it a practical realisation. In his criticism of these two parties, Marx therefore signalled that he himself was no longer a Young Hegelian and, consequently, that he stood *outside both parties*, viz., he was putting forth an independent position. We see here with this work, and the last, the birth of Marxism.

Marx’s summation of the essence of the current stage of critique, i.e. his work on Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, provided a definition of how exactly he understood criticism to function. Here the “criticism of the *German philosophy of state and law*...is both a critical analysis of the modern state and of the reality connected with it, and the resolute negation of the whole *German political and legal consciousness as practised hitherto.*”²¹⁴ This was precisely what Marx would do with his critique of political economy. That is, he carried out a critical analysis and critique of both the reality of capitalism and its ideal reflection in the system of political economy. When Marx wrote in *Capital* that his goal was to examine “the capitalist mode of production, and the relations of production and forms of intercourse that correspond to it,” this examination also included the “economic categories,” because they expressed “the forms of being, the characteristics of existence” of “modern bourgeois society.”²¹⁵ This explains what he meant when he wrote to Lassalle that “The work I am presently concerned with is a *Critique of Economic Categories* or, IF YOU LIKE, a critical exposé of the system of the bourgeois economy. It is at once an exposé and, by the same token, a critique of the system.”²¹⁶ Marx’s critique of Hegel, though inspired by Feuerbach, was an application of Hegel’s own dialectics, though materialistically conceived, to the latter. Marx later took the same approach in applying the dialectic method to political economy.

Marx posed the question: can Germany make a “*revolution* which will raise it not only to the *official level* of the modern nations but to the *height of humanity* which will be the near future of those nations?”²¹⁷ That is, would the upcoming revolution not only bring a democratic state, but go even further? The movement, though, was not in form in which it could achieve this; hence Marx’s famous statement that the “*weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a*

²¹² Ibid., 181.

²¹³ Ibid., 181.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 181.

²¹⁵ Marx, *Capital*, 90; Marx, *Grundrisse*, 106.

²¹⁶ Karl Marx, “Marx to Ferdinand Lassalle, 22 February 1858,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works Volume 40: 1856-59* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1983), 270.

²¹⁷ Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy,” 182.

material force as soon as it has gripped the masses.”²¹⁸ This shows that, unlike the rest of the former Young Hegelians, Marx was not an abstract propagandist and he understood the need to bring radical ideas to the oppressed. Since the roots of oppression lay in the very system created by humanity, therefore Marx proclaimed that to “be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But for man the root is man himself.”²¹⁹ Despite the Feuerbachian category, Marx’s essential meaning was clearly that humanity was both the problem and solution. Only those ideas which addressed this material fact could truly be considered *radical* and hence *revolutionary*.

This was, then, the criteria for determining who or what was actually radical, and how far that same radicalism actually went. In regards to those who were centered on the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, Marx argued that the “proof of the radicalism of German theory, and hence of its practical energy, is that it proceeds from a resolute *positive* abolition of religion.”²²⁰ This positivity referred to the fact that their criticism had not simply denied religion, but, simultaneously, had posited “Man” in its place. As a result, the “criticism of religion ends with the teaching that *man is the highest being for man*, hence with the *categorical imperative to overthrow all relations* in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being.”²²¹ It was precisely because humanity was the *basis of everything* that it was of the most importance, viz., the *highest*. So, again, while Marx was using the category of “Man” he gave it a different content by using it in connection with revolution and the need to remove material conditions of oppression. This does not simply mark him as a most unFeuerbachian Feuerbachian, but shows that Marx was *leaving* Feuerbach at the same time as he *embraced* him.

Marx underlined the revolutionary nature of the project that he and others were engaged in by drawing a parallel with the past. He argued that “theoretical emancipation has specific practical significance for Germany,” because its “*revolutionary* past is theoretical, it is the *Reformation*. As the revolution then began in the brain of the *monk*, so now it begins in the brain of the *philosopher*.”²²² Marx was clearly *not* comparing himself to Luther, and thus not referring to himself, but rather to *Hegel*. Indeed, just as Luther was outstripped by the Reformation, so was Hegel outstripped by Young Hegelianism, and which, in turn, was being outstripped by those in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. However, as was and is well known, the most radical phase of the Reformation, the Peasant War, had ultimately failed to carry through a bourgeois-democratic revolution. This was precisely why German conditions were so backwards. What was the possibility that this would not re-occur?

Marx’s answer to this was a result of his analysis of German conditions. That is, since Germany lagged, Marx again posed the question of how could it not only catch up, but move beyond: “How can it do a *somersault*, not only over its own limitations, but at the same time over the limitations of the modern nations, over limitations which in reality it must feel and strive for as bringing emancipation from its real limitations?”²²³ In other words, how could a German

²¹⁸ Ibid., 182.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 182.

²²⁰ Ibid., 182.

²²¹ Ibid., 182.

²²² Ibid., 182.

²²³ Ibid., 183.

revolution leap over the bourgeois-democratic stage and land right into the higher human revolution? His answer to this was also his answer to why the modern Reformation could succeed. That is, it *had* to make that “somersault,” viz., Germany “will not be able to throw down the specific German limitations without throwing down the general limitation of the political present.”²²⁴ So, precisely because of the *unevenness* of Germany’s development, which resulted in a *combination* of backward and advanced conditions, it could not catch up without going beyond.

Marx’s conclusion from this was that it was not “*radical* revolution, not the *general human* emancipation which is a utopian dream for Germany, but rather the partial, the *merely* political revolution...which leaves the pillars of the house standing.”²²⁵ This partial, i.e. political revolution could only be one carried out by a “*part of civil society*...a definite class, proceeding from its *particular situation*,” i.e. those who “possesses money and education.”²²⁶ This was exactly the bourgeoisie. For this reason, then, the future of Germany could not be a bourgeois-democratic revolution, it had to go further. This is what Marx and Engels would say later at the end of the German revolutions of 1848-1849, viz., the workers cannot stop at a bourgeois-democratic revolution, but must go further: “Their battle cry must be: The Revolution in Permanence.”²²⁷

For Marx, then, “the *positive* possibility of a German emancipation,” could only consist in the “formation of a class with *radical chains*, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society...a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering... which can no longer invoke a *historical* but only a *human title*.”²²⁸ This was precisely “the *proletariat*.”²²⁹ Through the course of this essay Marx’s was increasingly emphasising *class*, and here he openly proclaimed the necessity of the proletarian revolution. This and the last essay mark them, despite the Feuerbachian influence, as the first Marxists texts. Together they called for a post-bourgeois-democratic, i.e. a proletarian revolution on the basis of an analysis of material conditions. Also, note that Marx had characterised only the proletariat with the terms “universal” and “human.” Human emancipation was, hence, synonymous proletarian emancipation. Here we are witnessing the genesis of Marxism.

The radical nature of this new revolution was not simply because it would be proletarian, but also because the rise of the proletariat proclaimed the “dissolution of the hitherto existing world order,” because it demanded the “negation of private property.”²³⁰ The future, therefore, belonged to the proletariat. And so, just as “philosophy finds its *material* weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *spiritual* weapons in philosophy.”²³¹ Only the proletariat

²²⁴ Ibid., 184.

²²⁵ Ibid., 184.

²²⁶ Ibid., 184.

²²⁷ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Address of the Central Authority to the League, March 1850,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 10: Marx and Engels: 1849-51* (New York: International Publishers, 1978), 287.

²²⁸ Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy,” 186.

²²⁹ Ibid., 186.

²³⁰ Ibid., 187.

²³¹ Ibid., 187.

can carry out the radical insights of critical German theory, and only the latter can aid the former in carrying out its historic mission. Hence, both philosophy and the proletariat will negate themselves the critical practice of the proletarian revolution.²³²

Marx finally applied a Feuerbachian metaphor to the above, writing that the “*emancipation of the German is the emancipation of the human being. The head of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart is the proletariat.*”²³³ It will be recalled that the dualism of head and heart was deployed by Feuerbach in his “Provisional Theses.” Yet even here Marx’s dialectical skill enabled him to transcend this dualistic Feuerbachian concept. But this was not all. Marx’s final sentence declared that when “all inner requisites are fulfilled the *day of German resurrection* will be proclaimed by the *ringing call of the Gallic cock.*”²³⁴ The concept of French-German unity was also taken from Feuerbach, but where the latter was writing of the need to synthesise different theoretical traditions, Marx here was speaking of the international nature of the coming proletarian revolution. Although he was an enthusiastic Feuerbachian, he was constantly filling up Feuerbach’s concepts and ideas with new content and connections, thus *radically changing* them.

In October 1843, Marx wrote to Feuerbach while he was working on his essays for the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. Marx told Feuerbach that, in his opinion, the latter was “one of the first writers who expressed the need for a Franco-German scientific alliance,” and so he was sure that he would support the new journal and contribute some piece of writing.²³⁵ Marx noted that he had read the preface to the second edition of the *Essence of Christianity* and presumed from it, that Feuerbach was about to come out with a criticism of Schelling. For Marx, this would be a great opportunity for all and Feuerbach would “be doing a great service to our enterprise, but even more to truth, if you were to contribute a characterisation of Schelling to the very first issue.”²³⁶ Feuerbach, as it turned out, was not planning a work on Schelling and, subsequently, only contributed a single, small letter the first and only issue ever published.²³⁷

Still, Marx was undaunted and he wrote Feuerbach a second letter the following year, in August. Marx sent him a copy of his “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction,” and he proceeded to shower Feuerbach with compliments. Marx reported that he was “glad to have an opportunity of assuring you of the great respect and – if I may use the word – love, which I feel for you.”²³⁸ He then stated that Feuerbach’s “*Philosophie der Zukunft*, and your *Wesen des Glaubens*, in spite of their small size, are certainly of greater weight

²³² “Philosophy cannot be made a reality without the abolition of the proletariat, the proletariat cannot be abolished without philosophy being made a reality.” *Ibid.*, 187.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 187.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

²³⁵ Karl Marx, “To Ludwig Feuerbach, October 3, 1843,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 3: 1843-44* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 349.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 350.

²³⁷ Karl Marx, Arnold Ruge, Mikhail Bakunin, and Ludwig Feuerbach, “Ein Briefwechsel von 1843,” in *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher, 1ste und 2te Lieferung*. (Paris, 1844), 35.

²³⁸ Karl Marx, “To Ludwig Feuerbach, August 11, 1844,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 3: 1843-44* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 354.

than the whole of contemporary German literature put together.”²³⁹ While it is undoubtedly true that these works impressed Marx, there is also no doubting that his comment was exaggerated and that he was indulging in flattery. This is especially seen when he went on to tell Feuerbach that in these two works he “provided – I don’t know whether intentionally – a philosophical basis for socialism and the Communists have immediately understood them in this way.”²⁴⁰ This was, of course, a claim that Marx never again made anywhere else. But how, exactly, was Feuerbach supposed to have made that achievement? According to Marx, the latter had proven the “unity of man with man...the concept of the human species brought down from the heaven of abstraction to the real earth, what is this but the concept of *society!*”²⁴¹ However, as I have shown, Feuerbach did not interpret the human species socially, but rather biologically. Therefore, despite the flattery, Marx was likely convinced that this was the truth, and did not yet realise that he was reading into Feuerbach what was not there. Moreover, Marx also reported that plans were in motion to translate the *Essence of Christianity* into English and French, and that German communists had been receiving lectures on it.²⁴² So, if he did feel that Feuerbach had provided a theoretical basis for communism, this belief would not last long, as he would soon realise the limitations of the latter’s work.

When Marx arrived in Paris in late 1843, he began his life-long study of political economy in earnest. It was sometime during the first half of 1844 that he was reading a book by James Mill. Marx’s method of study was generally to make copious extracts from the work he was studying and then to add a critical commentary in response. The importance of Marx’s comments on Mill is that they represent his first analysis of the logic of commodity exchange and how it related to human alienation. It is therefore of inestimable value in studying the origin of his account later given in his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and the first volume of *Capital*. This commentary was written while Marx was still in the flush of Feurbachianism, but it would also be one of the last things written under that influence. Thus can be seen the tension in Marx between an ahistorical philosophical understanding and a historical scientific reasoning.

Marx started with what appeared to be the most basic social category, reflecting the most basic fact of present-day life, viz., exchange. For him, exchange, “both of human activity within production itself and of *human products* against one another, is equivalent to *species-activity* and *species-spirit*, the real, conscious and true mode of existence of which is *social* activity and *social* enjoyment.”²⁴³ First it should be noted that while Marx was in a space far from Feuerbach, he was still using the latter’s terminology of “species” and its different possible inflections.

²³⁹ Ibid., 354. Feuerbach’s *Das Wesen Des Glaubens Im Sinne Luther’s: Ein Beitrag Zum „Wesen des Christenthums“* was published in 1844. It was an essay that he had written as an addendum to his *Essence of Christianity*. More exactly it “was an attempt to provide documentary evidence” to support his arguments in the latter work. See, Melvin Chernov, “Introduction,” in *The Essence of Faith According to Luther*, tran. Melvin Chernov (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967), 8, 9, 11. Because of its merely supplementary character, I have not discussed this work in the present essay

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 354.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 354.

²⁴² Ibid., 354, 357.

²⁴³ Karl Marx, “Comments on James Mill, *Elémens d’économie politique*,” in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Collected Works, Volume 3: 1843-44* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 216-217.

Second, we can see why he would soon drop that same category as he filled it with a thoroughly social content. That is, Marx's point was that the nature of humanity is to live with, be with, and *interact* with each other. Therefore, exchange, in the broadest sense, epitomised what it meant to be a human, especially since humans only exist by their self-producing *social* labour.

It is this socialness, this *social activity* that Marx considered to be the essence of human nature, of the species. That is to say, social interaction is human nature and human nature is social interaction. As Marx put it, "*human nature is the true community,*" therefore, it is "by manifesting their *nature* men *create*, produce, the *human community*, the social entity, which...is the essential nature of each individual, his own activity, his own life."²⁴⁴ He summarised this by writing that "*this true community...is produced directly by their life activity itself.*"²⁴⁵ Marx was here right on the tipping point, the *break* with Feurbachianism. If the nature of being a human was self-production via social activity, then human nature was *produced by humans themselves*. Marx already knew that social life, and hence activity, changed over time. Hence, it had *not yet* dawned on him, as it would within a year, that there was no timeless human nature, that it was an empty abstraction, viz., that it was constantly changing with different social formations.

Indeed, Marx's whole analysis here was premised on the idea that the current situation under capitalist conditions had not and would not always exist. Thus he wrote that "as long as man does not recognise himself as man, and therefore has not organised the world in a human way, this *community* appears in the form of *estrangement*."²⁴⁶ Here he referred to the fact that present conditions were not organised in a *human* way, that is, that they were *inhuman*. More specifically, instead of human life being consciously based on social i.e. *collective* activity, it was organised in a *competitive* manner; it did not promote *social* well-being, but *individualistic* desires. Human beings estranged from one another meant they were estranged from their own creation. Therefore, society, the collective product of humans, ruled over the latter; the created dominated the creator.

Now, since exchange was the exemplification of the essence of humanity, it was precisely exchange within an estranged society, i.e. one based on private property, which was the origin point of human alienation. In this context, the "bond which connects the two property owners with each other is the *specific kind of object* that constitutes the substance of their private property."²⁴⁷ Notice already that the primary connection between humans was not *directly* their social production, but *indirectly* via the exchange of their property. The commodity relation was thus the medium of human relations and, increasingly, the fulcrum of life. More specifically, the "desire for these two objects" on the part of the two owners shows that they both wanted, both needed each other's object; hence "the need of a thing is the most evident, irrefutable proof that the thing belongs to *my* essence, that its being is for me, that its *property* is the property...of my essence."²⁴⁸ Importantly, since "both property owners are impelled to give up their private property," the fact that it is done via exchange means they "do so in such a way that at the same

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 217.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 217.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 217.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 218.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 218.

time they confirm private ownership.”²⁴⁹ Thus private property reproduced itself in the exchange of products and hence alienation, estrangement was self-reproducing.

It must be emphasised that Marx was not talking about unequal exchange, or theft by means of force or trickery. He was discussing the basic fact of the simple exchange of commodities between two producers and their reciprocal relations. There was no value judgement here, but only the actual material logic that arose from the exchange relation. What is especially crucial is that since exchange was the heart of human activity, within a system of private property, it appeared reversed. Thus, although exchange was “therefore the social act, the species-act, the community, the social intercourse and integration of men within *private ownership*, and therefore the external, *alienated* species-act,” it was also “the opposite of the *social* relationship.”²⁵⁰ That is, just as what was human was now inhumane, what was *social* was now *individual*, and what mattered was not the relations *between people*, but the relations *between things*.

Consequently, it was not simply the exchange relation which dominated humans, but, more precisely, it was by means of exchange that objects came to dominate humans. How did this occur? First, although,

in your eyes your product is an *instrument*, a *means*, for taking possession of my product and thus for satisfying your need; yet in my eyes it is the *purpose* of our exchange. For me, you are rather the means and instrument for producing this object that is my aim, just as conversely you stand in the same relationship to my object.²⁵¹

Here there is a simultaneous reversal. While my product is a means for me to get the object I want, the person who made the latter is also a mere means; for in exchange I am not fundamentally concerned with the *person*, with their ideas, thoughts, personality, etc., but merely with the *object* they have to exchange. Thus, within this relationship, not merely the objects, but the participants take on the role of mere means, mere objects. So while the products, as the goal of each person, rise to the level of importance, the person sinks to unimportance. Since this relationship is, again, reciprocal, and “each of us actually *behaves* in the way he is regarded by the other,” therefore you “have actually made yourself the means, the instrument, the producer of *your* own object in order to gain possession of mine.”²⁵² If I want a certain product, then I must exchange one for it, and to do that I must make it, *I* must serve as the *means* of its creation. Hence “our mutual thralldom to the object at the beginning of the process is now seen to be in reality the relationship between *master* and *slave*,” and, finally, our “*mutual* value is for us the *value* of our mutual objects. Hence for us man himself is mutually of *no value*.”²⁵³ The *aggrandisement* of the object is the *degradation* of the human.

Of course, though, the time in which Marx lived was not one of direct commodity exchange, of simple barter, but one where products were exchanged between people via money.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 218.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 219.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 227.

²⁵² Ibid., 227.

²⁵³ Ibid., 227.

Marx's analysis thus touched on then-current conditions by posing and answering the following question: "Why must private property develop into *the money system*?"²⁵⁴ The first reason was because "man as a social being must proceed to *exchange* and because exchange – private property being presupposed – must evolve value."²⁵⁵ That is, this was an objective process, not depending on the subjective designs of humans. This alienated process of exchange was thus not a "*human relationship*," but rather "the *abstract relationship* of private property to private property, and the expression of this *abstract* relationship is *value*, whose actual existence as value constitutes *money*."²⁵⁶ So while human interaction, exchange, became indirect with private property and barter, the development of money was an even further step removed. Hence human relations became even more indirect and abstract.

Just as objects were the medium of exchange, now objects could not be exchanged without money, and it became the ultimate means. Not merely did it have the greatest value of all objects, it therefore was the criterion of *all value*. Here the "essence of money" was that the "*mediating activity* or movement, the *human*, social act by which man's products mutually complement one another, is *estranged* from man and becomes the attribute of money, a *material thing* outside man."²⁵⁷ As a result, "the *relation* itself between things, man's operation with them, becomes the operation of an entity outside man and above man."²⁵⁸ Money, an alien power, now became the true social power. Therefore, because of "this *alien mediator* – instead of man himself being the mediator for man – man regards his will, his activity and his relation to other men as a power independent of him and them."²⁵⁹ With money as the *height* of development of exchange in the system of private property, humanity thus reached the *lowest* depths of slavery and, unsurprisingly, "this *mediator* now becomes a *real God*, for the mediator is the *real power* over what it mediates to me. Its cult becomes an end in itself."²⁶⁰ As this was an objective process, one that flowed from the very logic of the private exchange process, this "reversal of the original relationship is inevitable," and so "man becomes the poorer as man...the *richer* this mediator becomes."²⁶¹ The growth of wealth was and is the growth of poverty and the increase in the power of money was and is the growth in the weakness of humanity.

However, this was not the only reversal that occurred. That is, as the development of exchange progressed towards money, the actual relations between humanity and the society became obfuscated. This happened not simply in the minds of the participants, but also in those who sought a scientific understanding of the process, i.e. the political economists. Thus "*Society*, says Destutt de Tracy, is a *series of mutual exchanges*...*Society*, says Adam Smith, is a *commercial society*. Each of its members is a *merchant*."²⁶² In this view, then, the "*community of men*, or the manifestation of the nature of *men*, their mutual complementing the result of which is

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 212.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 212.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 213.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 212.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 212.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 212.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 212.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 212.

²⁶² Ibid., 217.

species-life, truly human life” was seen “in the form of *exchange* and *trade*.”²⁶³ The actual relations were thus reversed in the mind and, moreover, what was only a stage in the history of humanity became the latter’s timeless essence. Hence “political economy *defines* the *estranged* form of social intercourse as the *essential* and *original* form corresponding to man’s nature.”²⁶⁴ This was not the result of any malfeasance on their part, but the logical result of the overall exchange process.

Finally, Marx suggested that, for a moment, we “suppose that we had carried out production as human beings.”²⁶⁵ Here humans would work cooperatively, not competitively. Their relations would be direct and not indirect, and hence there would be no exchange and no money. So working for themselves *and* each other, they would no longer serve an alien power. In this scenario, then, one’s “work would be a *free manifestation of life*, hence an *enjoyment of life*,” whereas, currently, under “private property, my work is an *alienation of life*, for I work in *order to live*, in order to obtain for myself the *means* of life. My work *is not* my life.”²⁶⁶ Further, it would no longer be an abstract, alienated object which has value, but the concrete individual, the human personality, and so “the *specific nature* of my individuality, therefore, would be affirmed in my labour, since the latter would be an affirmation of my *individual life*.”²⁶⁷ For it was under the current system where “my individuality is alienated to such a degree that this *activity* is instead *hateful* to me...is only a *forced* activity and one imposed on me only through an *external* fortuitous need, *not* through an *inner, essential* one.”²⁶⁸ This was the earliest glimpse that Marx ever gave of the outline of life under a communist system. What should be most apparent is not the Feuerbachian terms that popped up here and there, but that Marx’s analysis was materialist *and* dialectical: it moved through a series of contradictions which rise, clash, resolve and produce new contradictions. While this piece of writing can rightfully be termed Feuerbachian, it is the Hegelian heritage and Marx’s intellectual move away from Feuerbach which truly stands out.

Marx published his “Critical Marginal Notes on the Article ‘The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian’,” in the newspaper *Vorwärts* in 1844, and it was written in response to an anonymous article written by Arnold Ruge. Ruge had written about the recent uprising of the Silesian weavers and he completely downplayed the importance of this struggle of a section of the proletariat. As a solution to the issue he also advocated merely for social reform and Christian charity.²⁶⁹ Marx took him to task for this, and his critique is significant for a number of reasons. First, it was the public announcement of Marx’s break with Ruge. Second, in the course of his systematic demolition of the latter, he set forth more precisely his political analysis. Third, even though by subject matter, approach, and analysis it has nothing to do with Feuerbach, we still find the latter’s influence.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 227.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 228.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

²⁶⁹ Karl Marx, “Critical Marginal Notes on the Article ‘The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian’,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 3: 1843-44* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 189-190.

Marx pointed out that to understand poverty or pauperism in Germany, one should also look to the experience of England because they had the longest history of dealing with it in modern European history. Thus Marx discussed the legislative and political history of how poverty was dealt with in England.²⁷⁰ Significantly, he also noted that the

most definite expression of the English view of pauperism – we are speaking always of the view of the English bourgeoisie and government – is *English political economy*, i.e., the scientific reflection of English economic conditions.²⁷¹

First, Marx was making the point that to understand social phenomena one had to look not only at political and legislative history, but also at the economic basis and its reflection in political economy. Thus we see the scientific approach in Marx's analysis as opposed to a philosophical one, viz., the former has an empirical basis, while the latter does not and cannot. This is especially significant as Marx's very first critique of Feuerbach was that the latter had too little politics. Now Marx was arguing that even politics was not enough, and one must go further to political economy. Second, as seen above, Marx had noted that political economists distort reality by presenting present-day conditions as timeless. That, of course, was anti-scientific. Similarly, he said here that political economy expressed the views of the "bourgeoisie and government." Yet he also explicitly referred to political economy as "the scientific reflection of...economic conditions." How is this contradiction to be explained? It is simply that Marx held political economy, despite its limitations and failings, to be an actual social science, one which was an absolute necessity for understanding society.²⁷²

Marx's broader point was that to understand political phenomena, one must transcend *purely political* analyses. Thus he argued that the state "will *never* see in '*the state* and the *system of society*' the source of *social maladies*," and, further, when "political parties exist, each party sees the root of *every* evil in the fact that instead of itself an opposing party stands at the *helm of the state*."²⁷³ Both the state and political parties, i.e. bodies designed to contest control of the state, were inherently incapable of taking an extra-political perspective. This was because in "the *political* point of view, the *state* and the *system of society* are not *two* different things. The state is the system of society."²⁷⁴ That is to say, the political viewpoint, precisely because it was *political*, was inherently one-sided, abstract, i.e. *undialectical*. Thus it could not perceive different, non-political factors and instead painted them all in its political monochrome.

However, this limitation had a deeper basis. Marx, repeating the ideas of his essays in the *Deutsch–Französische Jahrbücher*, argued that the

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 194-195.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

²⁷² As he specified years later: "Let me point out once and for all that by classical political economy I mean all the economists who, since the time of W. Petty, have investigated the real internal framework of bourgeois relations of production, as opposed to the vulgar economists who only flounder around within the apparent framework of those relations, ceaselessly ruminate on the materials long since provided by scientific political economy, and seek there plausible explanations of the crudest phenomena for the domestic purposes of the bourgeoisie." See, Marx, *Capital*, 174-175.

²⁷³ Marx, "Critical Marginal Notes," 197.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 197.

mightier the state, and the *more political* therefore a country, the less is it inclined to grasp the *general* principle of *social* maladies and to seek their basis in the *principle of the state*, hence in the *present structure of society*, the active, conscious and official expression of which is the state.²⁷⁵

The real basis of the state, the source of its organising principle, was the actual structure of society. As it expressed and served it, the state could do nothing but ultimately reinforce its own basis. While the state grew out of civil society, this took the form of a contradiction and, again the “state is based on the contradiction between *public* and *private life*, on the contradiction between *general interests* and *private interests*.”²⁷⁶ The state was constitutionally incapable of resolving this contradiction, and so “the *administration* has to confine itself to a *formal* and *negative* activity, for where civil life and its labour begin, there the power of the administration ends.”²⁷⁷ That is, while the state may possibly intercede within civil society, it could not and would not fundamentally alter the latter.²⁷⁸ Here Marx provided the analysis which proved the necessity of smashing the state decades before he explicitly proclaimed it.

As to the question of the proletariat, Marx celebrated the revolt and he even argued that “*not one* of the French and English workers’ uprisings had such a *theoretical* and *conscious* character as the uprising of the Silesian weavers.”²⁷⁹ More specifically, this “uprising *begins* precisely with what the French and English workers’ uprisings *end*, with consciousness of the nature of the proletariat.”²⁸⁰ This advanced aspect was seen in the fact that the weavers did not simply wreck machines, but they also destroyed the “*ledgers*, the titles to property.”²⁸¹ It was this greater level of class consciousness that marked their action as having a “*superior* character” *vis-à-vis* other proletarian revolts.²⁸² Thus Marx made the brilliant metaphorical comparison where “the German proletariat is the *theoretician* of the European proletariat, just as the English proletariat is its *economist*, and the French proletariat its *politician*.”²⁸³ Where the French workers had shown an understanding of needing to attack the state, where the English had pioneered the trade union movement, here the Germans had shown clear class consciousness.

Marx, of course, rooted the weavers’ uprising in their conditions and it is here where we see the influence of Feuerbach in the former’s terminology. Ruge argued that the workers had revolted against their isolation from the political community, but Marx disagreed. He argued, rather, that the actual “community from which the worker is isolated by *his own labour* is *life* itself, physical and mental life, human morality, human activity, human enjoyment, *human*

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 199.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 198.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 198.

²⁷⁸ “If the modern state wanted to abolish the *impotence* of its administration, it would have to abolish the *private life* of today. But if it wanted to abolish private life, it would have to abolish itself, for it exists *only* in the contradiction to private life.” Ibid., 198.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 201.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 201.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 201.

²⁸² Ibid., 201.

²⁸³ Ibid., 202.

nature.”²⁸⁴ Further, it was the “disastrous isolation from this essential nature” which was “incomparably more universal, more intolerable, more dreadful, and more contradictory, than isolation from the political community.”²⁸⁵ Therefore, “the *abolition* of this isolation... is just as much more infinite as *man* is more infinite than the *citizen*, and *human* life more infinite than *political* life.”²⁸⁶ While we see here Feuerbach’s influence, Marx’s meaning was far broader and also not incorrect. The daily *economic* oppression felt by workers *as workers*, was and is far more universal, transcending both time and place, than that felt *politically*.

Hence, just as a simple political view was restricted in scope, so a purely *political* revolution was likewise *partial*. As opposed to this, “a *social* revolution is found to have the point of view of the *whole*.”²⁸⁷ This was because “it represents man’s protest against a dehumanised life... because the *community*, against the separation of which from himself the individual reacts, is man’s *true* community, *human* nature.”²⁸⁸ When Marx wrote “man” or “men” not only did he take the term from Feuerbach, but he always meant it, in the terminology of the day, as a *synonym* for *human* or person. He did not mean only and strictly men as a sex or gender. This is why as his research developed, his scientific understanding increased, and his language became more precise; thus he increasingly ceased to write man and instead wrote human or proletarian.

Yet this is not to suggest that Marx was anti-political, or denied the political nature of revolution. Indeed, he went on to point out, as against Ruge’s absurd idea of a “social revolution with a political soul,” that every “revolution dissolves the *old society* and to that extent it is *social*. Every revolution overthrows the *old power* and to that extent it is *political*.”²⁸⁹ All revolutions inherently combined both aspects, and so revolution “in general – the *overthrow* of the existing power and *dissolution* of the old relationships – is a *political act*.”²⁹⁰ Logically, then, “*socialism* cannot be realised without *revolution*.”²⁹¹ However, although it “needs this *political* act insofar as it needs *destruction* and *dissolution*... where its *organising activity* begins, where its *proper object*, its *soul*, comes to the fore – there socialism throws off the *political cloak*.”²⁹² The goal of socialism was not, ultimately, a political change, but a revolution in the basic conditions of life i.e. in the economy. As this was the very basis of the state, the state as such, and with it political power, would cease to exist.²⁹³

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 204.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 205.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 205.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 205.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 205.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 205.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 206.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 206.

²⁹² Ibid., 206.

²⁹³ As Marx wrote three years later: “Does this mean that after the fall of the old society there will be a new class domination culminating in a new political power? No...The working class, in the course of its development, will substitute for the old civil society an association which will exclude classes and their antagonism, and there will be no more political power properly so-called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society.” See, Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy: Answer to the “Philosophy of Poverty” by M. Proudhon* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), 160-161.

Marx's *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* was the last work of his middle Feuerbachian period, and it also expressed the height of his enthusiastic Feuerbachianism. Here we will see Marx's praise Feuerbach in a way he never repeated, and see the influence of the latter on the former's developing conception of communism. This too would end here. Marx's enthusiasm was radically tempered following this work. It is also important to keep in mind that the manuscripts were never finished for publication, that parts of them are missing, are fragmentary, and so they are no way in a condition that Marx would have thought acceptable. Thus, at best, they give us a snapshot in time, an idea of his intimate thoughts for a brief period, and not his final position.

In February 1845 Marx signed a contract with the publisher Carl Leske to publish his work *Kritik der Politik und Nationalökonomie (Critique of Politics and Political Economy)*.²⁹⁴ The contract was cancelled by the publishers because of censorship concerns, but there is no doubt that the 1844 manuscripts were an initial rough draft of this intended work. Thus, aside from documenting Marx's intellectual development in general, the manuscripts were clearly Marx's first attempt to systematically apply the dialectical method to political economy and, as such, were his first tentative steps towards writing *Capital*. This work, then, expresses simultaneously, the *intense closeness* and *widening gulf* between Marx and Feuerbach.

Marx's preface opened with a declaration that while he had intended to publish his "critique of jurisprudence and political science in the form of a critique of the *Hegelian* philosophy of law," he now found that work untenable.²⁹⁵ The criticism of Hegel and other subjects had become too disorderly and would be difficult for the reader. So he decided that he would henceforth "publish the critique of law, ethics, politics, etc., in a series of distinct, independent pamphlets," and only after this would he "try in a special work to present them again as a connected whole showing the interrelationship of the separate parts, and lastly attempt a critique of the speculative elaboration of that material."²⁹⁶ The present work was therefore primarily concerned with political economy. Moreover, Marx already knew how the various parts of human life were connected in general. The problem he was discussing concerned his inability, *at that point*, to not just analyse the matter dialectically, but to present the results likewise. Marx's critique had not yet taken "science to the point at which it admits of a dialectical presentation."²⁹⁷ Finally, the whole enterprise was to be capped with a critique of Hegel's system, an aspect of his work which he actually attempted in the 1844 manuscripts.

Marx also crucially noted that his "results have been attained by means of a wholly empirical analysis based on a conscientious critical study of political economy."²⁹⁸ This, of course, is the dividing line between science and philosophy and thus between Marx and

²⁹⁴ Karl Marx and Carl Leske, "Contract Between Marx and the Leske Publishers in Darmstadt on the Publication of *Kritik der Politik und Nationalökonomie*. February 1, 1845," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 4: 1844-45* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 675.

²⁹⁵ Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 3: 1843-44* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 231.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 231.

²⁹⁷ Karl Marx, "Marx to Engels. 1 February," in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Collected Works, Volume 40: Letters 1856-59* (New York: International Publishers, 1983), 261.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 231.

Feuerbach. We should therefore not be surprised that right after writing this Marx argued that an “empirical analysis,” was something that Bruno Bauer was wholly unable to do.²⁹⁹ It would be a charge that Marx and Engels would eventually make against the former Young Hegelians, in both the *Holy Family* and the manuscripts of the *German Ideology*. As they would hilariously write, in order to achieve an understanding of the empirical world, one must “‘leave philosophy aside’...one has to leap out of it and devote oneself like an ordinary man to the study of actuality...Philosophy and the study of the actual world have the same relation to one another as onanism and sexual love.”³⁰⁰ Marx’s intellectual break from Feuerbach, and hence Young Hegelianism, revolved ultimately on the replacement of philosophy with social science.

Empirical study did not mean only analysing facts, data, statistics, etc. It also included a critical analysis of their reflection in the work of other authors; in this case, of those writing on political economy. Marx studied French and English political economists *and* socialists, for the latter provided a critical, alternate approach to mainstream bourgeois political economy. In regards to German socialists he referred to the works of Wilhelm Weitling, his fellow former Young Hegelian and the first German communist, Moses Hess, and finally Engels. Marx also stated that his essays in *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, gave “the basic elements” of his current work “in a very general way.”³⁰¹ Collectively these were the “only *original* German works of substance in this science,” i.e. of political economy.³⁰²

Even more important was what Marx wrote after the above. He argued that, aside from the above writers, “positive criticism as a whole – and therefore also German positive criticism of political economy – owes its true foundation to the discoveries of *Feuerbach*,” and especially his “*Philosophie der Zukunft* and *Thesen zur Reform der Philosophie* in the *Anekdoten*.”³⁰³ Marx then went on to make the even more incredible claim that it was “only with *Feuerbach* that *positive*, humanistic and naturalistic criticism begins,” and his writings were the “only writings since Hegel’s *Phänomenologie* and *Logik* to contain a real theoretical revolution.”³⁰⁴ It cannot be emphasised enough that while Marx undoubtedly believed this to be true when he wrote that, it actually was not true and he quickly came to realise this. Not even considering all the substantiation I have already put forth, one need only ask oneself: If Feuerbach brought about a theoretical revolution and laid the “true foundation” of the critique of political economy, why is it that Marx referred to Hegel in all of his most important economic works, viz., the *Grundrisse*, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and, above all, *Capital* itself, but mentioned Feuerbach *not even once*? Marx was famously quite scrupulous in citing his sources. Therefore, there can only be two options: either he did Feuerbach a great injustice, or he realised that what he wrote above was actually wrong and thus he never repeated it. Clearly it was the latter.

Before directly discussing the question of what exactly, in Marx’s view, Feuerbach’s so-called “revolution” actually consisted, it is important to consider a few more points that he made

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 231-232.

³⁰⁰ Marx and Engel, *The German Ideology*, 253-254.

³⁰¹ Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts,” 232.

³⁰² Ibid., 232.

³⁰³ Ibid., 232.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 232.

in his preface. He regarded “the concluding chapter of this work – a critical discussion of *Hegelian dialectic* and philosophy as a whole – to be absolutely necessary, a task not yet performed.”³⁰⁵ According to Marx this was something which the Young Hegelian movement had been unable to fulfill. Despite not expressly stating it here, Marx implicitly included Feuerbach in this. This is seen in the comment he made at the very end of his preface: “*Feuerbach’s* discoveries about the nature of philosophy still, for their *proof* at least,” require “a critical discussion of philosophical dialectic.”³⁰⁶ Marx, then, was of the view that, although Feuerbach had not yet carried out a critical analysis of the dialectic, he was certain that it would not disprove Feuerbach. The opposite, however, will turn out to be the case.

It is easy to see Marx’s enthusiasm with Feuerbach, and hence his illusions in the latter, when considering two points. These are in regard to the nature of communism and of science. The definition Marx gave of communism in the manuscripts was coloured with Feuerbachian terminology. For him, communism should be considered

the *positive* transcendence of *private property* as *human self-estrangement*, and therefore as the real *appropriation* of the *human* essence by and for man...therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i. e., human) being – a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of previous development.³⁰⁷

First, when Marx referred to regaining the human essence, he based it on the need to overcome private property. This, as we have seen, was a socio-political act. Private property was the basis of human estrangement or alienation because it was based on the alienation of labour. Here labour was “the subjective essence of private property as exclusion of property, and capital, objective labour as exclusion of labour, constitute private property.”³⁰⁸ Thus as Marx had started with the criticism of philosophy and religion and then moved to a critique of politics and later to political economy, so similarly he moved from a critique of exchange to a critique of labour under capital. These deepening levels of Marx’s analysis give the true measure of his distance from Feuerbach. Further, although human essence was only abstract (which is why he ceased using it), he still defined it socially not biologically and, moreover, *historically*. For this return included not rejecting, but integrating the achievement of past human society. This lack of history would become one of his biggest complaints against Feuerbach.

Finally, Marx provided an even pithier definition of communism than above. He wrote that “communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism.”³⁰⁹ Humanism was a phrase used by Feuerbach, in passing, in his *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*.³¹⁰ Yet, not only did Marx quickly drop this term, along with naturalism, he and Engels would expressly repudiate it later. In 1852, in the course of an

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 232.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 234.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 296.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 294.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 296.

³¹⁰ “The divinization of the real, of that which exists materially – materialism, empiricism, realism, and humanism – and the negation of theology are, however, the essence of the modern era.” Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 22.

attack on Ruge, they wrote that an expression of Ruge's theoretical confusion was that he had rushed to embrace "*humanism*, the catch-phrase with which all confusionists in Germany, from Reuchlin to Herder, have covered up their embarrassment."³¹¹ Marx's essential conception of communism was not humanism and the Feuerbachian terminology was clearly, at this point, only a temporary vehicle of expression.

Marx's temporary lack of clarity concerning the real import of Feuerbach was also seen in his comments concerning science. In Marx's words,

Sense-perception (see Feuerbach) must be the basis of all science. Only when it proceeds from sense-perception in the twofold form of *sensuous* consciousness and *sensuous* need – that is, only when science proceeds from nature – is it *true science*.³¹²

This viewpoint is one that Marx would discard and it was also *contradicted* by other passages in the manuscripts. A few pages before he wrote the above, Marx argued that "*just as* society itself produces *man as man*, so is society *produced* by him."³¹³ Thus, humans create themselves socially and to be human is to be social. However, he added that social "activity and social enjoyment exist by no means *only* in the form of some *directly* communal activity."³¹⁴ He then provided the example that when he is "active *scientifically*, etc. – an activity which I can seldom perform in direct community with others – then my activity is *social*, because I perform it as a *man*," i.e. as an *already socially produced being*.³¹⁵ Even more specifically, not

only is the material of my activity given to me as a social product (as is even the language in which the thinker is active): my *own* existence is social activity, and therefore that which I make of myself, I make of myself for society and with the consciousness of myself as a social being.³¹⁶

Thus the scientist, their language, thoughts, tools, material, and product, i.e. science itself, are *all products* of human, i.e. *social activity*. Therefore, and Marx had clearly not yet realised this implication of his reasoning, the actual basis of all science is human activity and so all true science proceeds not from nature but from humanity and *its* collective labour. Science is thus, not *natural*, but *social*. This is precisely why it has a history. Hence it can be seen why Marx broke with Feuerbach's view of science. Marx's adherence to the latter was never static, but existed in dynamic tension with his own rapidly developing positions.

It is only in the final, incomplete section of the manuscripts that the reader at last learns in what exactly the so-called Feuerbachian revolution consisted. Marx first assailed his former Young Hegelian comrades, writing that the

³¹¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The Great Men of the Exile," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 11: 1851-53* (New York: International Publishers, 1980), 270.

³¹² Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 303.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 298.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 298.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 298.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 298.

lack of awareness about the relationship of modern criticism to the Hegelian philosophy as a whole and especially to the Hegelian dialectic has been so great that critics like *Strauss* and *Bruno Bauer* still remain within the confines of the Hegelian logic.³¹⁷

Marx specifically excluded Feuerbach from this charge, going on to write that “*Feuerbach* both in his ‘Thesen’ in the *Anekdoten* and, in detail, in the *Philosophie der Zukunft* has in principle overthrown the old dialectic and philosophy.”³¹⁸ Yet Marx had *contradicted* himself here as this flew in the face of what he had written right in the preface, viz., “a critical discussion of *Hegelian dialectic* and philosophy as a whole” is “absolutely necessary,” but it was “a task not yet performed.”³¹⁹ How was it possible for Feuerbach to have overthrown both the *dialectic* and *philosophy*, if a critical analysis of both had *not yet* been accomplished? For to overthrow is to negate, is to be critical towards that which one overthrows. Clearly, then, Feuerbach had not overthrown anything and Marx was simply *reading into* Feuerbach what was not there.

This seen even further in his discussion of what he felt Feuerbach achieved. First, Marx excluded Feuerbach from the dregs of Young Hegelianism. Then he argued that

after all these delightful antics of idealism (i. e., of Young Hegelianism)...it has not expressed the suspicion that the time was ripe for a critical settling of accounts with the mother of Young Hegelianism – the Hegelian dialectic – and even had nothing to say about its critical attitude towards the Feuerbachian dialectic.³²⁰

Clearly, then, as against these “uncritical” “idealists,” Feuerbach must be a materialist and, flowing from all the above, he was “the only one who has a *serious, critical* attitude to the Hegelian dialectic and who has made genuine discoveries in this field. He is in fact the true conqueror of the old philosophy.”³²¹ However, in light of the fact that Marx was about to embark on a critical discussion of Hegel’s dialectic and philosophy, and, as had been shown, the fact that elements of this were already contained in his critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, then clearly Feuerbach was *not the only person* who had a “a *serious, critical* attitude to the Hegelian dialectic” and philosophy. Thus Marx’s comment on Feuerbach’s *critical* attitude was quite *uncritical* itself, for it ignored his own work in this sphere. He was far too charitable and the only explanation can be that he was confused about what Feuerbach had actually done.

In Marx’s view “Feuerbach’s great achievement” consisted of three aspects. The first, was the “proof that philosophy is nothing else but religion rendered into thought and expounded by thought, i.e., another form and manner of existence of the estrangement of the essence of man; hence equally to be condemned.”³²² Marx was referring to Feuerbach’s contention that *Hegelian* philosophy was nothing but theology in philosophical dress. Feuerbach, as we have seen though, never extended his critique to *all* philosophy, and, instead, called for a *new philosophy*. Thus Marx drew a conclusion from Feuerbach’s work that Feuerbach himself did

³¹⁷ Ibid., 327.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 327.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 232.

³²⁰ Ibid., 328.

³²¹ Ibid., 328.

³²² Ibid., 328.

not. Is this another case of Marx reading into Feuerbach? Not exactly, because, as I have argued, while Marx would change his mind concerning his general assessment of Feuerbach, on this point he would not. It is, then, abundantly clear from this that Marxism is not and has no philosophy, and that Marx was not a philosopher. He was an atheist and thus an opponent of religious illusions, and here he equated it with philosophy and expressly stated that both were “to be condemned.” Marx never reversed himself on this judgement and that is why there is not a single thing he published after 1844 which, instead of condemning philosophy, praised it.

As to the other two aspects, things stand quite differently. The second feature of Feuerbach’s accomplishment was the “establishment of *true materialism* and of *real science*, by making the social relationship of ‘man to man’ the basic principle of the theory.”³²³ This, as I have already shown above, was contradicted by the logic of Marx’s *own* argumentation, viz., the basic principle of his scientific materialism was the self-creation of humans via their collective activity, their social labour. Marx would quickly realise that Feuerbach had not in fact established either materialism or science. This is why, a year later, he would reverse his view on this question in his theses on Feuerbach. While he certainly inspired Marx, it is actually the latter who must be recognised for the “establishment of *true materialism* and of *real science*.”

The third and final aspect, according to Marx, was that Feuerbach opposed “to the negation of the negation, which claims to be the absolute positive, the self-supporting positive, positively based on itself.”³²⁴ This is what Marx was referring to in claiming that Feuerbach overthrew Hegel’s dialectic. It will be recalled that Feuerbach had opposed and discarded Hegel’s dialectical logic because of his narrow interpretation of the negation of the negation. As Marx noted, Feuerbach “conceives the negation of the negation *only* as a contradiction of philosophy with itself – as the philosophy which affirms theology (the transcendent, etc.) after having denied it, and which it therefore affirms in opposition to itself.”³²⁵ Marx further pointed out that Feuerbach defined “the negation of the negation, the definite concept, as thinking surpassing itself in thinking and as thinking wanting to be directly awareness, nature, reality.”³²⁶ Thus it appeared that Marx agreed with Feuerbach on the question of the dialectic method. Yet, in this case as well, what he claimed here was *contradicted* by what he wrote elsewhere in the manuscripts. For example, he argued that it was possible to

characterise *communism* itself because of its character as negation of the negation, as the appropriation of the human essence through the intermediary of the negation of private property – as being not yet the *true*, self-originating position but rather a position originating from private property.³²⁷

The human essence was lost with the rise of private property. The latter negated the former. Communism, in turn, negates private property and brings about the regaining of the human essence. Thus it is the negation of the negation. But, because this is communism as it has just

³²³ Ibid., 328.

³²⁴ Ibid., 328.

³²⁵ Ibid., 329.

³²⁶ Ibid., 329.

³²⁷ Ibid., 313.

arisen from private property, it has not yet started to develop on its own basis and powers, is not yet true communism.³²⁸ Here Marx coherently applied the dialectical concept of the negation of the negation to a social phenomenon. This implied it that it did *not only* concern theology-philosophy, but had a wider use and could be conceived materialistically. This is what Marx would do in subsequent years, most famously in *Capital*.³²⁹

Finally, Marx also contradicted his ostensible acceptance of Feuerbach's criticism in his critical analysis of Hegel. Marx argued that

because Hegel has conceived the negation of the negation, from the point of view of the positive relation inherent in it, as the true and only positive, and from the point of view of the negative relation inherent in it as the only true act and spontaneous activity of all being, he has only found the *abstract, logical, speculative* expression for the movement of history.³³⁰

This was certainly not an attack on the negation of the negation, but *only* on how Hegel understood and applied it. Thus it could be conceived and used in a non-speculative way. This is especially shown when Marx explained what he thought was Hegel's greatest accomplishment:

The outstanding achievement of Hegel's *Phänomenologie* and of its final outcome, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and generating principle, is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, conceives objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of this alienation; that he thus grasps the essence of *labour* and comprehends objective man – true, because real man – as the outcome of man's *own labour*.³³¹

³²⁸ Marx repeated this analysis decades later: "What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has *developed* on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges... In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and with it also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!" See, Karl Marx, *Critique of The Gotha Programme* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1972), 15, 17.

³²⁹ "The capitalist mode of appropriation, which springs from the capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labour of its proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation. This is the negation of the negation. It does not re-establish private property, but it does indeed establish individual property on the basis of the achievements of the capitalist era." Marx, *Capital*, 929; "The *market value* is always different, is always below or above this average value of a commodity. Market value equates itself with real value by means of its constant oscillations, never by means of an equation with real value as if the latter were a third party, but rather by means of constant non-equation of itself (as Hegel would say, not by way of abstract identity, but by constant negation of the negation, i.e. of itself as negation of real value)." Marx, *Grundrisse*, 137; "The whole difficulty in understanding the differential operation (as in the *negation of the negation* generally) lies precisely in seeing *how* it differs from such a simple procedure and therefore leads to real results." Karl Marx, *Mathematical Manuscripts of Karl Marx* (London: New Park Publications, 1983), 3.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 329.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 332-333.

This “dialectic of negativity” precisely includes the negation of the negation! Hegel, in his shorter logic, wrote that “the dialectic is the genuine nature that properly belongs to the determinations of the understanding, to things, and to the finite in general.”³³² All things, then, follow the dialectic, which “is the *immanent* transcending, in which the one-sidedness and restrictedness of the determinations of the understanding displays itself as what it is, i.e., as their negation.”³³³ Everything eventually turns into its opposite, is negated; but then that opposite must itself turn into its opposite, the negation must be negated. One cannot keep the dialectic and junk the negation of the negation. If Marx truly thought that Hegel’s dialectic method had produced such a momentous result as the above, despite its limitations, then clearly he accepted that method. This is why there is *no evidence* that he ever disavowed the dialectic method. Therefore, while Marx accepted Feuerbach’s critique of how Hegel had used the negation of the negation in constructing his speculative system, he did not accept Feuerbach’s discarding of dialectics. Marx, therefore, was not clear at this moment regarding Feuerbach’s real relation to Hegel’s logic.

The last work of Marx’s Feuerbachian period and the one which takes place in the late period was *The Holy Family*, his first work co-written with Engels. Although published in 1845, this work was actually written between September and November 1844, and was a further contribution to the fight against their former friends, i.e. Bruno Bauer and others. Since this is an essay on *Marx’s relation* to Feuerbach, I will not be considering those sections of the book written by Engels. This is especially so since the most positive comments on Feuerbach were made not by Marx, but by Engels.³³⁴ Marx’s statements on Feuerbach, while positive, in no way expressed the same level of enthusiasm as the 1844 manuscripts. Further, the use of Feuerbachian categories is almost absent and, instead of “species” and “human essence,” we see proletariat and labour.

The estimation of Feuerbach that Marx provided was actually quite brief and made in a few different sections. For example, in chapter four, in the course of critically reviewing what Edgar Bauer wrote about Proudhon, Marx highlighted Bauer’s statement that “philosophy is the abstract expression of the existing state of things.”³³⁵ Marx noted that this idea did not “belong originally to Herr Edgar,” but actually it belonged “to *Feuerbach*, who was the first to describe philosophy as speculative and mystical empiricism and to prove it.”³³⁶ Marx did not qualify “philosophy,” here or elsewhere in this chapter. That is, he did not say *German* philosophy, or *idealist* philosophy, or *materialist philosophy*, etc. No, he only referred to philosophy in general and, moreover, he argued that Feuerbach had proven that it was “speculative and mystical.” This was the same argument that he made in the 1844 manuscripts, only now there was no reference to the dialectic.

³³² G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1991), 128.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 128.

³³⁴ David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 110-111.

³³⁵ Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 50.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

In chapter six Marx compared the development of French philosophy in the 18th century to recent German intellectual history. According to Marx “*French materialism*, was not only a struggle against the existing political institutions and the existing religion and theology; it was just as much an *open, clearly expressed* struggle... against all *metaphysics*.”³³⁷ At that time, then, philosophy “was counterposed to *metaphysics*, just as *Feuerbach*, in his first resolute attack on *Hegel*, counterposed *sober philosophy* to *wild speculation*.”³³⁸ Hegel, however, had restored the defeated metaphysics and so “the attack on theology again corresponded, as in the eighteenth century, to an attack on *speculative metaphysics* and *metaphysics in general*.”³³⁹ Thus, “*Feuerbach* is the representative of *materialism* coinciding with *humanism* in the *theoretical* domain.”³⁴⁰ For Marx, then, Feuerbach had represented the rational, progressive trend in German theory. He had started out *within* philosophy, but the logic of his work led *beyond* it.

Finally, in his last substantive statement on Feuerbach, Marx specified what he felt was the former’s real achievement. Marx argued that both Strauss and Bauer went “*beyond* Hegel in their criticism, but both also remain *within* his speculation and each represents only *one* side of his system.”³⁴¹ That is, Strauss, Bauer, and the other former Young Hegelians were trapped in Hegel’s system and thus remained essentially Hegelian. As to Feuerbach though, it was he “who completed and criticised *Hegel from Hegel’s point of view* by resolving the metaphysical *Absolute Spirit* into ‘*real man on the basis of nature*’,” and, as a result, he “was the first to complete the *criticism of religion* by sketching in a grand and masterly manner the *basic features* of the *criticism of Hegel’s speculation* and hence of *all metaphysics*.”³⁴² Again, there was no mention of the dialectic. Instead, it was simply that Feuerbach had put forth the basic elements of the critique of metaphysics, i.e. of speculative construction. Marx had written this just a month or two after the 1844 manuscripts, and so it is clear that his judgement of Feuerbach’s importance had changed and his enthusiasm was rapidly cooling.

I will not engage here in an extended discussion on Marx’s theses on Feuerbach as I have discussed them elsewhere.³⁴³ However, I do want to point out two things. First, the theses were written in early 1845, about four months after the *Holy Family*. Hence they show how quickly Marx’s break with Feurbachianism developed. Second, this break was definitive, viz., it did not concern this or that aspect of Feuerbach’s work, but its basic approach. Marx argued that “Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from conceptual objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* activity,” and therefore did not and could not “grasp the significance of ‘revolutionary’, of ‘practical-critical’, activity.”³⁴⁴ Here Marx referred to

³³⁷ Ibid., 154-155.

³³⁸ Ibid., 155.

³³⁹ Ibid., 155.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 155.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 173.

³⁴² Ibid., 173.

³⁴³ Devine, “On Lenin’s Materialism and Empirio-Criticism,” accessed 4 August 2024, <https://links.org.au/lenins-materialism-and-empirio-criticism-critical-comments-confused-philosophy>.

³⁴⁴ Marx, “[Theses On Feuerbach],” 615.

Feuerbach's Kantian dualism and his inability to grasp the identity of subject and object via humans' practical activity.³⁴⁵

Since Feuerbach did not understand the role of activity, of social labour, his critique of religion, despite its correctness, was still marred by abstraction. That is, although he had resolved "the religious essence into the essence of *man*," the fact is that "the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations."³⁴⁶ Social relations are the relations that people form in the course of their activity. Since these change as people's activity changes, therefore there is no eternal human essence, it is an ahistorical abstraction. This is why Marx would write in 1847 that "all history is nothing but a continuous transformation of human nature."³⁴⁷ Being unable to "enter upon a criticism of this real essence," Feuerbach was "consequently compelled" to both "abstract from the historical process and...to presuppose an abstract – *isolated* – human individual."³⁴⁸ Lacking an understanding of human labour Feuerbach could not understand the profound historical nature of humanity and the results of his analysis were therefore abstract. This is precisely why the "highest point reached by contemplative materialism, that is, materialism which does not comprehend sensuousness as practical activity, is contemplation of single individuals and of civil society."³⁴⁹ If the best that previous materialism could achieve was still stuck in Kantian dualism, then it is clear that Feuerbach had not founded "*true materialism*." Marx had undoubtedly realised this shortly after he had originally made that claim.

In later years Marx's judgement regarding Feuerbach did not change, although as already noted, he rarely referred to him publicly or privately. Marx's core criticism was that Feuerbach had failed to critique Hegel's dialectical method. Between late 1845 and mid-1846 Marx wrote a critical review of a book by the True Socialist, Karl Grün. It was published in the *Westphälische Dampfboot* in 1847, but apparently it was intended as a chapter in the *German Ideology*.³⁵⁰ Marx wrote in his review, in an early criticism of Proudhon, that the

most important thing in Proudhon's book *De la création de l'ordre dans l'humanité* is his *dialectique sérielle*, the attempt to establish a method of thought in which the *process* of thinking is substituted for independent thoughts. Proudhon is looking, from the French standpoint, for a dialectic method such as Hegel has indeed given us.³⁵¹

Marx argued that while Hegel had provided the dialectic method, Proudhon had not mastered it as he was still striving to achieve it. He then went on to argue that it "would have been an easy matter to offer a criticism of Proudhon's dialectics if the criticism of Hegel's had been mastered," however it "was hardly to be expected of the true socialists, since the philosopher

³⁴⁵ "Feuerbach, not satisfied with *abstract thinking*, wants *contemplation*; but he does not conceive sensuousness as *practical*, human-sensuous activity." Ibid., 616.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 616.

³⁴⁷ Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 135.

³⁴⁸ Marx, "[Theses On Feuerbach]," 616.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 617.

³⁵⁰ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 511.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 558.

Feuerbach himself, to whom they lay claim, did not manage to produce one.”³⁵² In Marx’s view, then, Feuerbach had not properly criticised and thus had not grasped Hegel’s dialectics. He was really no better, or worse, than Proudhon.

Almost twenty years later Marx again gave an estimation of Feuerbach’s role in connection with a judgement on Proudhon. Specifically, in 1865, the leader of the Lassalleans and editor of the newspaper *Der Social-Demokrat*, J. B. Schweitzer, had asked Marx for “a detailed judgment” concerning Proudhon. Marx wrote a letter in response and it was subsequently published.³⁵³ He argued that Proudhon’s book, *What is Property?*, was “his best,” and that it was “epoch-making.”³⁵⁴ However, he also argued that with this work,

Proudhon stands in approximately the same relation to Saint-Simon and Fourier as Feuerbach stands to Hegel. Compared with Hegel, Feuerbach is certainly poor. Nevertheless he was epoch making *after* Hegel because he laid stress on certain points which were disagreeable to the Christian consciousness but important for the progress of criticism, points which Hegel had left in mystic *clair-obscur*.³⁵⁵

Marx’s dialectical view of Feuerbach’s role concerned two points. In relation to Hegel Feuerbach utterly paled because he did not understand the dialectic, could not properly criticise it as Marx had, and had actually repudiated it. He was important after Hegel because of his critique of religion and speculative construction. The truth of this was shown in a letter that Marx wrote to Engels three years later. Marx reported to Engels that the “gentlemen in Germany (with the exception of theological reactionaries) believe Hegel’s dialectic to be a ‘dead dog’. Feuerbach has much on his conscience in this respect.”³⁵⁶ For Marx, the then-current poor reception and treatment of Hegel’s method was, to a large extent, Feuerbach’s fault because he had legitimated and promoted the turn away from dialectics. In light of all this, is there any wonder why Marx consistently cited Hegel in his works after 1845, but never Feuerbach?

A Comment on E.V. Ilyenkov’s Treatment of Feuerbach

E.V. Ilyenkov, in his 1964 essay “The Question of the Identity of Thought and Being in Pre-Marxist Philosophy,” argued correctly that “there is not, nor has there ever been, anything specifically Hegelian in the thesis of the identity of thought and being.”³⁵⁷ However he also claimed that “Feuerbach accepted this thesis.”³⁵⁸ I have shown however, that this was simply not true. Feuerbach explicitly wrote that the “identity of thought and being that is the central point of the philosophy of identity is the necessary consequence and elaboration of the notion of God.”³⁵⁹

³⁵² Ibid., 558.

³⁵³ Karl Marx, “K. Marx. On Proudhon [Letter to J. B. Schweitzer],” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 20: 1864-68* (New York: International Publishers, 1985), 26.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 26.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 26.

³⁵⁶ Karl Marx, “Marx to Engels. 11 January,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 42: 1864-68* (New York: International Publishers, 1987), 520.

³⁵⁷ E.V. Ilyenkov, “The Question of the Identity of Thought and Being in Pre-Marxist Philosophy,” *Russian Studies in Philosophy*, 36, no. 1 (Summer 1997): 6.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 6.

³⁵⁹ Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 38.

Further, the “identity of thought and being is therefore only an expression for the divinity of reason.”³⁶⁰ Feuerbach also argued in his *Lectures on the Essence of Religion* that the “secret of religion is ‘the identity of the subjective and objective,’ that is, the unity of man and nature, but this unity is arrived at in disregard of their true character.”³⁶¹ Ilyenkov also argued that “Feuerbach struggled against the dualistic opposition of thought and being as the basic principle of philosophy.”³⁶² Yet, as I have repeatedly shown above, Feuerbach remained mired in Kantian dualism precisely because of his anti-dialectical, mechanical materialism.

Ilyenkov further claimed, with no citation, that “Feuerbach shows that even the traditional way of formulating this question is invalid. It is impossible to ask how ‘thought in general’ relates to ‘being in general’.”³⁶³ However, again, this is not true. Feuerbach quite literally wrote the traditional, classic formulation of the question in his “Provisional Theses”: “Thinking comes from being but being does not come from thinking.”³⁶⁴ One could not write on this question in a more general manner than this. To Feuerbach they cannot and could not be the same, for being is *primary* and thought is *secondary*, is *its product*. Otherwise thought, if not a product, would come from itself and that is exactly *God*, or the *Absolute Idea*.

Ilyenkov re-wrote the section on Feuerbach from the above essay and included it as the sixth essay in his 1974 work *Dialectical Logic*. The English translation of this book, unlike the essay, cites the German works of Feuerbach. Two of the eight citations given by Ilyenkov to prove his arguments come from the essay “Wider den Dualismus von Leib und Seele, Fleisch und Geist.”³⁶⁵ However, this work was published in 1846, *the year after* Marx broke with Feuerbach.³⁶⁶ Another four of the citations come from Feuerbach’s essay “Über Spiritualismus und Materialismus.”³⁶⁷ However, this essay was written at some point between 1858 and 1866!³⁶⁸ That is, it was written, at a minimum, over a decade after Marx had broken with Feuerbach. Thus, these two writings played no impact on the formation of Marx’s thought and it is wholly anachronistic, and hence ahistorical to cite them in a discussion of *pre-Marxist* philosophy. They are simply illegitimate sources. It was only by citing these works, not giving their dates of composition, and ignoring the actual works that *Marx read* and *referred to*, that Ilyenkov was able to make his argument *seem* reasonable.

This is not the only problem of sources in Ilyenkov’s writings on Feuerbach. In his 1964 essay he claimed that “the identity of thought and being must, according to Feuerbach, be the

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 38.

³⁶¹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), 317.

³⁶² Ilyenkov, “The Question of the Identity of Thought and Being,” 16.

³⁶³ Ibid., 17.

³⁶⁴ Feuerbach, “Provisional Theses,” 167.

³⁶⁵ E.V. Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic: Essays on Its History and Theory* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 216, 218.

³⁶⁶ Ursula Reitemeyer, “Der entleibte Mensch. Ludwig Feuerbachs Kritik der identitätslosen Moderne,” in *Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872): Identität und Pluralismus in der globalen Gesellschaft*, eds. Ursula Reitemeyer, Takayuki Shibata, Francesco Tomasoni (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2006), 164.

³⁶⁷ Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic*, 219.

³⁶⁸ Peter C. Caldwell, *Love, Death, and Revolution in Central Europe: Ludwig Feuerbach, Moses Hess, Louise Dittmar, Richard Wagner* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 196.

‘axiom of true philosophy,’ that is, the fact requiring no scholastic demonstrations and mediations.”³⁶⁹ Ilyenkov provided no citation as to where exactly Feuerbach had written that the identity of thought and being must be the “axiom of true philosophy.” When he re-wrote this line in 1974 it appeared thus: “The ‘identity’ of thought and being, so understood, must also (according to Feuerbach) constitute an axiom of true philosophy.”³⁷⁰ Not only was there, again, no citation given, but this time the quotation marks around “axiom of true philosophy,” have disappeared! This is because it was not an actual quote. Ilyenkov simply attributed to Feuerbach something that he never wrote.

Finally, it is ironic that Ilyenkov, in both writings, cited Marx’s first theses on Feuerbach.³⁷¹ That was, of course, the precise place where Marx pilloried Feuerbach for standing on the old Kantian distinction of denying the objectivity of the human ideas, of the *ideal*. Feuerbach had argued that the “Hegelian philosophy did not overcome the contradiction of thought and being.”³⁷² This was expressed at “beginning of the *Phenomenology*” as “the contradiction between the word, which is general, and the object, which is always particular.”³⁷³ It is precisely because “the particular belongs to being, but the general to thought,” that “the word is not the object,” and “the being that is spoken or ideated not real being.”³⁷⁴ Here we see, again, not only the Kantian dualism of thought and being, but also Feuerbach’s denial of the unity of opposites. General and particular may stand side-by-side, but never do they touch, interact, or even turn into one another.

This view is precisely that of nominalism, viz., the denial that universals, ideas, the general exist, but, instead are mere names of particular objects. Marx, though, had pointed out in the *Holy Family* that Duns Scotus, a priest and theologian of the Middle Ages, “was a *nominalist*,” and that nominalism was “the *first form* of materialism.”³⁷⁵ Feuerbach’s materialism here was, therefore, a clear retrogression past Kant and back to the simplest, undeveloped materialism of medieval Europe. Why did Feuerbach deny the identity between the general and the particular? Because he denied the unity of opposites and so the identity of thought and being. Therefore, if he did not deny any of this, then he would not have emphasised the Kantian distinction between thought objects and sensuous objects, and, hence, Marx’s very first theses criticising Feuerbach would be utterly inexplicable. To hold that Feuerbach agreed with the identity of thought and being is to disregard the *logic of Marx’s theses*. This only underlines the ironic nature of quoting Marx. For Ilyenkov, in the last essay of his *Dialectical Logic*, “The Problem of the General in Dialectics,” quite correctly wrote that

It is therefore quite absurd to press the accusation that is constantly advanced against materialism by its opponents, the accusation of a disguised Platonism that is immanently linked, as it were, with the thesis of the *objective reality* of the universal. If, of course,

³⁶⁹ Ilyenkov, “The Question of the Identity of Thought and Being,” 18.

³⁷⁰ Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic*, 216-217.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 224-225; Ilyenkov, “The Question of the Identity of Thought and Being,” 22.

³⁷² Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, 42.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁷⁵ Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 158.

one takes the view from the very beginning (but why – we do not know) that the universal is the idea, and only the idea, then not only do Marx and Spinoza turn out to be ‘cryptoplatonists’ but also Thales and Democritus.³⁷⁶

Ilyenkov was referring to the fact that it was Plato who first raised the problem of the “the nature of the world of ‘ideas’, the *ideal world*.”³⁷⁷ Of course, Plato solved this problem in an idealist manner with his theory of forms, postulating that ideas ultimately come from some supernatural realm. If a person lacked dialectics, it would be easy to see why they would take the view that only the idea is universal or general, for that was exactly the case with Feuerbach. And that is why Ilyenkov contradicted his presentation of the latter when he wrote that the

radical, materialist rethinking of the achievements of his [Hegel’s] logic (dialectics) carried through by Marx, Engels, and Lenin, was linked with affirmation of the *objective reality of the universal*, not at all in the spirit of Plato or Hegel.³⁷⁸

Feuerbach had not, of course, reworked dialectics, but junked them. But it is only a materialist dialectics that enables one to grasp the objectivity of the ideal, the identity of thought and being. If Feuerbach had understood that identity, then Ilyenkov would have included him in the above list for affirming the “objective reality of the universal.” Since Marx understood this even before he became a Feuerbachian, we can see why he left Feuerbach behind so quickly.

It is quite clear that Feuerbach did not support the idea of an identity between thought and being. Ilyenkov could only hoist that on to Feuerbach by disfiguring his actual positions and using highly selective quotes. Ilyenkov was too intelligent and well-read to be ignorant of what he was doing, and so it is hard to believe that he could have misunderstood Feuerbach so poorly. It is either that, or he consciously misrepresented Feuerbach’s views in order to lend his own correct, critical pro-Hegelian, pro-dialectical views a legitimacy he felt he needed. Considering the criticisms and attacks he had to suffer throughout his career, it is all too understandable.

Conclusion

Through the course of this essay I have elucidated the actual historical influence of Ludwig Feuerbach on Karl Marx. Instead of taking a well-worn myth for granted, instead of resting on an illogical appeals to authority, I have systematically analysed those works of Feuerbach that were impactful on Marx, and how they were received by the latter. The evidence shows that Marx’s Feurbachianism took place over a short span of time and that it followed a natural rhythm according to the logic of Marx’s own development. He had accepted Hegel’s dialectic before he studied Feuerbach, and although the latter gave him insight into the idealist weaknesses of the Hegelian system, it was only Marx who developed a materialist critique of Hegel’s dialectic. This was the basic factor in Marx’s rising and then descending enthusiasm for Feuerbach.

³⁷⁶ Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic*, 352.

³⁷⁷ E.V. Ilyenkov, “Dialectics of the Ideal,” *Historical Materialism* 20, no. 2 (2012): 153.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 354.

While Marx utilised a number of Feuerbach's terms, he filled them with a new meaning which was grounded in a socio-historical outlook. However, he ultimately discarded the latter's terminology and developed new terms and categories as he deepened his study of history and political economy, viz., as he shifted from philosophy to social science. This transition is the point of origin for Marx's method. Marx always argued that Feuerbach played an important role in critiquing religion and putting forth the basic principles for critiquing Hegel's speculative construction. Yet, and this is the most crucial point, Feuerbach had failed to extend that work to Hegel's dialectical method and only Marx was able to critically take over this logic by inverting it. Feuerbach's materialism at first began to dazzle Marx, but the latter realised how weak and retrogressive it actually was, thanks to his grasp of the dialectic.

Most of Marx's early works, i.e. those writings where he was wrestling with both Feuerbach and Hegel, were not available until the late 1920s and early 1930s. For more than one generation of those who considered themselves Marxists, their only source for a study of this period were the reminiscences written by Engels in his essay on Feuerbach. This was, however, written for a popular audience and in honour of Feuerbach; it was not an extended critical study. Engels' memory was clouded by time and, moreover, the form of that work prevented correction by references to multiple sources. Thus, on more than a few crucial points, what Engels wrote was actually wrong. No matter how much we respect and esteem Engels as one of the founders of scientific socialism, it cannot stop us from critically reviewing what he wrote and not taking it as Holy Writ; doing so would dishonour both his and Marx's legacy of fighting for the truth.