

THESES ON FEUERBACH

Karl Marx
(Spring 1845)

From McLellan: “Shortly after finishing *The Holy Family* [a tract against Bruno Bauer, written with Engels in 1845], Marx was compelled to leave Paris. He settled in Brussels for the next three years and continued his reading of economics. Although Marx had always been critical of Feuerbach to some extent, he now felt too closely identified with him and jotted down in his notebooks, probably in April 1845, the following eleven points in which he summarized his disagreements with Feuerbach. They show clearly how Marx’s materialism is differentiated from all forms of static or mechanical materialism, and thus throw light on the meaning of terms such as ‘objectivity’ or ‘science’ in connection with Marx.”

Marx’s text was first published as an Appendix to Engels’ *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1886). Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) was a German philosopher and theologian, and critic of Hegelian idealism. In his *Essence of Christianity* (1841) he argued that religion is a form of human alienation, whereby humans project their ideals into heaven, and that doing this (by reifying them) we make their realization here on earth all the more difficult. Human happiness and fulfillment thus required the abolition of religion. In the following, Marx criticizes the incompleteness of this analysis.

I

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism — that of Feuerbach included — is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of intuition*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*; not subjectively. Hence, in opposition to materialism, the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism — which naturally does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought-objects; but he does not grasp human activity itself as *objective* activity. Hence, in *The Essence of Christianity*, he regards only the theoretical behavior as the genuinely human behavior, while practice is conceived and fixed only in its dirty, Jewish form. Hence he does not understand the significance of “revolutionary,” of “practical-critical” activity.

II

The question whether objective truth confronts human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. It is in practice that humans must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thought. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thought isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question.

III

The materialist doctrine about the alteration of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are altered by humans, and the educator must himself be educated. This doctrine must, therefore, separate society into two parts, one of which is superior to society.

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-alteration can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*.

IV

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

world and a secular one. His work consists in resolving the religious world into its secular basis. But that the secular basis raises itself from itself and establishes itself as an independent realm in the clouds can only be explained by the cleavages and self-contradictions within this secular basis. The latter must, therefore, be understood both in itself and in its contradiction as becoming revolutionary in practice. Thus, for example, after the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be destroyed in theory and in practice.

V

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

VI

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

Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence, is therefore compelled:

(1) To abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious feeling as something by itself and to presuppose an abstract — isolated — human individual.

(2) Essence, therefore, can be conceived only as “genus”, as an inner, dumb generality that *naturally* unites the individuals.

VII

Feuerbach therefore does not see that the “religious feeling” is itself a social product, and that the abstract individual whom he analyses belongs to a particular form of society.

VIII

All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries that lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.

IX

The highest point reached by intuitive materialism, that is, materialism that does not comprehend sensuousness as practical activity, is the intuition of single individuals and of civil society.

X

The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society, or social humanity.

XI

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