

On the Eve of the Birth of Marx's New Worldview—An Interpretation Based on Theses on Feuerbach

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Abstract: With the establishment and development of the philosophical process, the new philosophical ideas expounded by Marx in Theses on Feuerbach (hereinafter referred to as Theses) replaced the old philosophical ideas of the past, striving to establish a new world through practical sensuous activity; this work also serves as the foundational text for the emergence and development of Marx's new worldview. An analysis of the Theses reveals the dialogue and critique between Marx and old philosophy and the old worldview. To explore the intellectual trajectory leading up to the emergence of Marx's "new worldview," one must begin with Feuerbach; however, there remains a gap between Feuerbach and Marx. According to academic research, this gap is actually filled by the influence of Stirner, which enabled Marx to break free from the shackles of Feuerbach's anthropocentrism and embark on the path toward a new philosophy and a new worldview. Consequently, to refine the logical structure of the philosophical trajectory from "generic essence" to "the One" and then to "the real individual," this paper is dedicated to discussing the crucial roles played by Feuerbach and Stirner on the eve of the birth of Marx's new worldview.

Keywords: Marx; new worldview; Stirner; Theses

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1 The Arrival of Feuerbach and His Thought

1.1 The Development from Heaven to Earth: Generic Essence

When it comes to Feuerbach, we have to mention how he broke up with Hegel and how he turned from religious theology to natural science. Feuerbach was once a loyal member of the Hegel School, but after two years of study, he decided to part ways with Hegel. He wants to take the opposite path to the philosophy of reasoning, and no longer turn in the quagmire of idealism. As Marx wrote in the Outline: "Feuerbach was not satisfied with abstract thinking and resorted to intuition; but he regarded sensibility as not practical and human sensibility." (Marx, 1845) Feuerbach was unwilling to paint a vague void in heaven, so he was not satisfied with abstract thinking; but in this way, he turned to intuitive, sensitive and human emotional object activities.

Feuerbach's work is to "attribute the religious world to its secular foundation". Marx also mentioned Feuerbach's contribution in Article 4 of the Outline of Feuerbach: "Feuerbach started from the fact that the world was dualized into the religious world and the secular world. His job is to attribute the religious world to its secular foundation." (Marx, 1845) Feuerbach projected religious mythological figures such as Jesus into the real world, found out their illusion prototypes, derived the secular basis of religious theology, and found that the kingdom of heaven originally came from the world. This is an important discovery that the shield of past philosophy has been lifted, which also strengthens Marx's insistence on his materialist position. However, it is not enough to attribute religion to its secular foundation. Marx felt that if it only stayed in theoretical discussion and did not play a role at the practical level, it would still stay within the scope of the philosophy of the Academy. Marx tried to go beyond the old way of defining concepts with concepts; the discussion of old philosophy can only narrow the scope of definition, but it cannot solve the paradox: the revolutionary weapon that can really eliminate the secular foundation cannot be found.

1.2 Intuitive Sensory Objectivity

Many scholars believe that Feuerbach is "Marx's last mirror before he becomes his true form". In the Outline, Marx gave up his previous highly positive attitude towards Feuerbach. The first article directly points out the problem of Feuerbach's thought: "His understanding of the object is limited to the intuitive form, and he does not understand the subject as an object; nor does he understand human activities from the subjective aspect, but regards it as an objectual activity." (Marx, 1845) Feuerbach emphasized that sensibility is the starting point of understanding, and it is also a direct means for people to contact, understand and explain the world. He believes that philosophy should return to emotional things themselves - that is, to study those concrete and perceptible natural phenomena - instead of indulging in abstract conceptual games or reasoning logic. This intuitive materialism strengthens Marx's philosophical position and highlights the importance of scientific methods, especially the key role of natural science in revealing the true face of the world.

But Feuerbach ignored human subjectivity and did not notice that the whole world was in motion and change; Marx did not approve of this kind of mechanical and intuitive way. He keenly found that whether it was describing objects, objectual activities, or the interaction between them, Feuerbach presented a static picture of the objective world - this objective world existed independently of the subject, and he understood the emotional world as an isolated and ready-made thing. This view is the opposite of the active, practical and dialectical philosophy developed by Marx's thought. The limitation of Feuerbach's theory is that he puts the essence of truth on the direct grasp of real things, where "real things" specifically refer to those specific existences that play a role as emotional objects. But Stirner didn't think so. He felt that Feuerbach's understanding of sensibility was still at a transcendent and theological abstract level. In Steiner's view, sensibility is a concrete and realistic force or ability, which varies from person to person and is subject to each individual's sensory conditions (such as seeing and listening). Therefore, the world that a person actually perceives is shaped by his sensory ability. The sensibility discussed by Feuerbach is an idealized and universal concept, which transcends the sensory differences between specific individuals and becomes a hypothetical

possibility.

2 The Emergence of Stirner and Its Impact

2.1 Solipsism and Egoism

Feuerbach talked about the transcendent and universal emotional world, while Steiner was more concerned about how "I" dominated things than how things were perceived. He does not delve into the reasons behind the incident, nor does he think about the impact of these events on personal psychology or social structure. He grasped a core idea - "self" and "the only one" - and then said that the previously highly praised "sacred cause" and "common human cause" were just pure manifestations of selfishness. Stirner's philosophical thought has inspired some people and attracted a lot of criticism and condemnation. He emphasizes that "self" is absolute and supreme. He advocates that "self" is the center and purpose of the world, and all external forces and collective concepts must serve the needs and will of oneself. Feuerbach valued the nature of things themselves and the world itself. Marx preferred "humanized nature" - that is, the result of human practice and the transformation of the emotional world. In this way, Marx is more likely to accept Stirner's view of self-existence. In addition, Stirner's selfishness is actually building a new ontology.

Stirner believes that "I" is the origin and creator of the world, and all existence comes from my will and actions. An object can only become my property through my insight, intervention and influence. He emphasized the supreme position of the self and said that every individual should pursue his own interests completely freely and not be bound by any external forces or collective ideas. He opposes the oppression of individuals by the state, religion and social institutions, and advocates that individuals should transcend these external structures and act according to their own will and needs.

In *The Only One and His Possessions*, Stirner proposed the concept of "the only one", which is a completely independent individual who is not bound by social and moral norms. He believes that any form of collectivism will limit personal freedom. He wants to break the shackles of collectivism and altruism in traditional ethics and emphasize the main position of individuals in moral judgment and behavioral choice. Stirner believes that only individuals can truly understand their own needs and will, and only individuals can be the masters of their own destiny. He emphasized individual freedom and criticized traditional concepts. Later, Marx paid attention to the role of the individual in social history, which had something to do with this. Stirner believes that "self-consistent egoists" is the ultimate development goal of the past history. Marx criticized this view of absolutizing selfishness, feeling that it ignored the complex relationship between individuals and society, personal interests and universal interests. Stirner's selfishness can be regarded as an idealized great selfishness, emphasizing the highest level of "goodness" in the spiritual field. However, from the perspective of the real society, this kind of selfishness that transcends the world, relies only on spiritual strength to achieve all goals, takes "nothing" as the philosophical foundation, and also promotes "truth, freedom, humanity and justice" does not exist at all in a class-sect society, but is just a utopian concept. Stirner pursues "nothing" to "self", and in the end, he can only go to nothingness.

2.2 The Impact of the Unique One on the Essence of the Species

Feuerbach's understanding of "people" is still a little sacred and abstract, which is different from concrete and flesh-and-blood people in real life, and is also detached from history. He just replaced the "Essence of God" with "the essence of man", and regarded the essence of religion as the essence of adulthood as the result of the sanctification of emotions and sexual relationships. This understanding is still abstract and non-historical. Feuerbach left people's social practices and social connections to look at people, and abstractly understood people as isolated individuals. In his letter to Marx, Engels said that Feuerbach's "man" was derived from God and walked from God to "man", but that "man" still wore the theological aura of abstract concepts. This letter shocked Marx, who had just finished writing *The Holy Family*. At that time, Marx was still using Feuerbach's "real humanitarianism" to criticize Powell's spiritualistic fantasy, and also affirmed Feuerbach's contribution to subverting traditional philosophical metaphysics.

However, in the *Outline*, Marx's attitude towards Feuerbach changed from positive to negative. Look at the reason behind it, there is Stirner's influence. After the publication of *The Only One and His Possessions*, it influenced many scholars and became the focus of debate in the academic community at that time. Many young Hegelists joined the discussion, and many people directly drew a clear line with Feuerbach. For example, Feuerbach anonymously published an article in the *Vygang Quarterly* in response to Stirner, and the articles in those two issues revolved around Stirner's criticism of Feuerbach. Hess wrote *The Late and Recent Philosophers* to make a comprehensive explanation of Stirner. Stirner regards Feuerbach as the successor of Platonism, because Feuerbach focuses on the essence of the human class and talks about man in the universality of the class. Stirner felt that this understanding of people had something in common with Platonism, which was to understand people from a certain pre-initial and noble essence. Feuerbach distinguished the existence of man from the essence, which is in the footsteps of Hegel, because Hegel also emphasized the separation of essence and existence and wanted to reveal this process through dialectics.

Stirner's criticism and reflection are only carried out in the mind. He said himself, "I attribute everything to me." He is the "only one", and the "only one" is him; he is everything, and everything belongs to him. This view ignores the existence and limitations of objective reality, as well as the complex relationship between people and society and history. He wants to rely on the "only one" to construct various histories, such as the history of human life and the history of spiritual development, but this foundation is illusory and unreliable. Marx commented in the *Outline* that idealists saw the dynamism of the emotional subject, but only developed abstractly, beyond the limits of reality, and thought too much about what people could do.

3 Conclusion

Feuerbach's "species" philosophy simplistically assumed that the sum of the species and the individual constituted the definition of humanity. Feuerbach's concept of species-essence and Hegel's philosophy of the species—which shifted the subject from God to humanity—differed in name only and were, in essence, virtually identical. Stirner rejected Feuerbach's "generic essence" with the concept of the "Unique One," asserting that every individual exists as a "Unique One" in isolation, no longer dependent on any transcendent definitions or attributes. However, this extreme "Unique One" doctrine stripped the individual of universal determinacy; humanity lost any common, essential qualities, thereby reducing the definition of humanity to "nothingness."

Influenced by these two thinkers and other philosophers, Marx, adopting a historical perspective, put forward the important view that "the essence of man is not an abstract entity inherent in the individual; in its reality, it is the sum total of all social relations." Marx believed that the transition from "species-being" to the human being as an "individual" is achieved by real human beings through postnatal learning and social practice; the "real individual" exists not only as a "sensuous being" but also as a "sensuous activity." Real human beings are the starting point of history, and their productive activity is the driving force of historical development. "The standpoint of old materialism is civil society." Marx accepted the assertion that Stirner had delivered a profound critique of Feuerbach's humanism, yet he simultaneously returned this accusation to Stirner. Marx went on to emphasize that "the standpoint of new materialism, however, is human society or socialized humanity." For Marx, the entire issue lies in revolutionizing the existing world—practically opposing and transforming existing conditions—and the historical mission of new materialism is no longer confined to the realm of interpreting the world, but is dedicated to changing it.

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