Theses On Feuerbach

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 contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was developed abstractly by idealism -- which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such.

Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity. Hence, in The Essence of Christianity, he regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and fixed only in its dirty-judaical manifestation. Hence he does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary", of "practical-critical", activity.

II

The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth — i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.

III

The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society.

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.
Feuerbach starts out from the fact of religious self-alienation, of the duplication 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 detaches 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, in itself be both understood in its contradiction and revolutionized in practice. Thus, for instance, 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 contemplation; 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 consequently compelled:

To abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment as something by itself and to presuppose an abstract - isolated - human individual.

Essence, therefore, can be comprehended only as "genus", as an internal, dumb generality which naturally unites the many individuals.

VII

Feuerbach, consequently, does not see that the "religious sentiment" is itself a social product, and that the abstract individual whom he analyses belongs to a particular form of society.
All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.

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.

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

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

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Theses on Feuerbach
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The "Theses on Feuerbach" are eleven short philosophical notes written by Karl Marx as a basic outline for the first chapter of the book The German Ideology in 1845. Like the book for which they were written, the theses were never published in Marx's lifetime, seeing print for the first time in 1888 as an appendix to a pamphlet by his co-thinker Frederick Engels. The document is best remembered for the epigrammatic 11th thesis and final line: "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."

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History

Background

In February 1845 Karl Marx was deported from France at the behest of minister of foreign affairs François Guizot.[1] Marx found sanctuary in Brussels, where he was joined for a number of months by his political compatriot Frederick Engels beginning in April of that same year.[1] It was in Brussels that Marx first began to shape the concept of historical materialism[1] — the idea that underlying fundamental changes in political history was a corresponding economic struggle between ruling and oppressed classes which was at root of these structural transformations.

Marx began work upon a book detailing his new philosophy of history, entitled The German Ideology.[2] In connection with this project, Marx wrote a terse 11-point set of observations and epigrams regarding the ideas of Ludwig Feuerbach, a fellow Young Hegelian philosopher regarded by him as the most modern exponent of materialism, albeit one whom Marx believed had failed to draw fully satisfactory political conclusions from his philosophical insights. These "theses" were initially written as a raw outline for the first chapter of The German Ideology, and most of these were developed at greater length in that work.[2]
Marx sharply criticized the contemplative materialism of the Young Hegelians, viewing "the essence of man" in isolation and abstraction, instead arguing that the nature of man could only be understood in the context of his economic and social relations. Marx argued that understanding the origins of religious belief were not enough in moving towards its elimination; instead declaring that it was the underlying social and economic structure which gave rise to religious belief and that it was a transformation of this which was a necessary precondition to the elimination of religion.

The "Theses" identify political action as the only truth of philosophy, famously concluding: "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." While the text wishes to retain the critical stance of German critical idealism, it transposes that criticism into practical, material, political terms.

**Publication history**

Despite their best efforts to find a publisher, *The German Ideology* was not published during the lifetime of either Karl Marx or Frederick Engels. The polemical work was finally published in full only in 1932 by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party in Moscow.

Nor did Marx publish the "Theses on Feuerbach" during his lifetime. This material was instead later edited by Friedrich Engels and published in February 1888 as a supplement to his pamphlet *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. Marx's original unedited text was published only in 1924 in German and Russian translation as part of *Marx-Engels Archives, Book I*, by the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow.

**Uses of the text**

The Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach — "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" — was used by Sergey Prokofiev in his *Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution*, Op. 74.

The Eleventh Thesis is engraved in the entryway of Humboldt University on Unter den Linden in Berlin. The Socialist Unity Party of Germany ordered this in 1953 as part of reconstruction following World War II.

The Eleventh Thesis is also Marx's epitaph, engraved on his tombstone in Highgate Cemetery in London, along with the final line of the *Communist Manifesto*, "Workers of All Lands, Unite.

**See also**

- Young Marx
- Marxism
- Marxist philosophy
- Young Hegelians
- German Idealism
- Materialism
Footnotes


5. In German: "Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden interpretiert; es kommt aber darauf an, sie zu verändern."


External links

- German Wikisource has original text related to this article: Thesen über Feuerbach
- Theses on Feuerbach from the Marx-Engels Internet Archive (http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/index.htm)
- Free audio recording of Eleven Theses on Feuerbach (http://librivox.org/eleven-theses-on-feuerbach-by-karl-marx/), from Librivox


Categories: 1888 books | Communist books | Books by Karl Marx | Books about historiography
MR READING TOOLS
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<td>The materialist doctrine that men are the products of circumstances and upbringing, and that therefore changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated. Hence this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, of which one is superior to society (in Robert Owen, for example). The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionizing practice. - Karl Marx, Third Thesis on Feuerbach</td>
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