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# **Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: The Philosophical Cradle of Marxism**

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## **Abstract:**

This paper is part of a larger study on '*Poverty of Communism: The Game of Filling in the Marxian Blanks*'. As Lenin (1913) remarked, the philosophy of Marxism is *materialism*. To be more specific, Marxism is both a world view in general and a view of the society and its progress in particular; that world view is dialectical materialism (a term devised by Plekhanov, the Russian Marxist, and first used by him in an article published in 1891) and its application to the study of social history is the materialist conception of history or historical materialism, as called by Engels. Thus, as Stalin wrote in 1938, dialectical materialism is the world outlook of the Marxist-Leninist party; it is called dialectical materialism because its approach to the phenomena of nature, its method of studying and apprehending them, is *dialectical*, while its interpretation of the phenomena of nature, its conception of these phenomena, its theory, is *materialistic*. The present chapter seeks to discuss the development of philosophy in general that served as the cradle of Marxism. In this we follow the argument of Engels that the philosophical question whether there are only material entities or only mental entities divided philosophy into two opposite camps: materialism and idealism, and trace out the dialectical development of philosophy through the conflict between the two.

# **Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: The Philosophical Cradle of Marxism**

**Vijayamohanan Pillai N.**

“Marxism is the system of Marx’s views and teachings. Marx was the genius who continued and consummated the three main ideological currents of the 19th century, as represented by the three most advanced countries of mankind: classical German philosophy, classical English political economy, and French socialism combined with French revolutionary doctrines in general. Acknowledged even by his opponents, .... Marx’s views, .... constitutes modern materialism and modern scientific socialism, as the theory and programme of the working-class movement in all the civilized countries of the world...” (Lenin 1914 [1975]).

So wrote Lenin in his brief biographical sketch of Karl Marx. Of these three sources/component parts of Marxism, we mainly take up the philosophical aspects of Marxism. “The philosophy of Marxism is *materialism*.” (Lenin 1913 [1975]). To be more specific, Marxism is both a world view in general and a view of the society and its progress in particular; that world view is dialectical materialism (a term devised by Georgi Valentinovich Plekhanov (1857 – 1918), the Russian Marxist, and first used by him in an article published in 1891) and its application to the study of social history is the materialist conception of history or historical materialism, as called by Engels. Thus

“Dialectical materialism is the world outlook of the Marxist-Leninist party. It is called dialectical materialism because its approach to the phenomena of nature, its method of studying and apprehending them, is *dialectical*, while its interpretation of the phenomena of nature, its conception of these phenomena, its theory, is *materialistic*.” (Stalin 1938).

So, what is materialistic theory? What is dialectical materialism? And what is historical materialism?

The present paper seeks to answer the first question and discusses the development of philosophy in general.

### **Philosophy: Materialism and Idealism**

“The great basic question of all philosophy, especially of more recent philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being. From the very early times when men, still completely ignorant of the structure of their own bodies, under the stimulus of dream apparitions came to believe that their thinking and sensation were not activities of their bodies, but of a distinct soul which inhabits the body and leaves it at death – from this time men have been driven to reflect about the relation between this soul and the outside world. If, upon death, it took leave of the body and lived on, there was no occasion to invent yet another distinct death for it. Thus arose the idea of immortality, which at that stage of development appeared not at all as a consolation but as a fate against which it was no use fighting, and often enough, as among the Greeks, as a positive misfortune. The quandary arising from the common universal ignorance of what to do with this soul, once its existence had been accepted, after the death of the body, and not religious desire for consolation, led in a general way to the tedious notion of personal immortality. In an exactly similar manner, the first gods arose through the personification of natural forces. And these gods in the further development of religions assumed more and more extramundane form, until finally by a process of abstraction, I might almost say of distillation, occurring naturally in the course of man’s intellectual development, out of the many more or less limited and mutually limiting gods there arose in the minds of men the idea of the one exclusive God of the monotheistic religions.

“Thus the question of the relation of thinking to being, the relation of the spirit to nature – the paramount question of the whole of philosophy – has, no less than all religion, its roots in the narrow-minded and ignorant notions of savagery. But this question could for the first time be put forward in its whole acuteness, could achieve its full significance, only after humanity in Europe had awakened from the long hibernation of

the Christian Middle Ages. The question of the position of thinking in relation to being, a question which, by the way, had played a great part also in the scholasticism of the Middle Ages, the question: which is primary, spirit or nature – that question, in relation to the church, was sharpened into this: Did God create the world or has the world been in existence eternally?

“The answers which the philosophers gave to this question split them into two great camps. Those who asserted the primacy of spirit to nature and, therefore, in the last instance, assumed world creation in some form or other – and among the philosophers, in Hegel, for example, this creation often becomes still more intricate and impossible than in Christianity – comprised the camp of idealism. The others, who regarded nature as primary, belong to the various schools of materialism.” (Engels 1886 [1969]).

Thus the philosophical question whether there are only material entities or only mental entities divided philosophy into two opposite camps: materialism and idealism. Such philosophical investigation of the nature, constitution, and structure of reality constitutes the field of metaphysics. Note that physics is the scientific investigation of the fundamental nature of physical reality, physical being; metaphysics, in the tradition of Aristotle’s eponymous treatise, is then understood in a more definite sense of philosophical investigation of being *qua* being, of the fundamental characteristics that can qualify anything as a being, an entity. The term ‘ontology’ is sometimes used in this sense; and metaphysics is characterized as seeking a complete, coherent ontology, embracing all that is necessary to capture the correct account of the reality. In its most general sense, metaphysics appears to coincide with philosophy as a whole, since everything philosophy studies is something of reality, for example, knowledge, values, reasoning and art. However, there are distinct branches of philosophy dealing with these specific problems such as epistemology (knowledge), ethics (values), logic (reasoning), and aesthetics (art).

In addition to the two definite camps of materialism and idealism, we can also think of a third camp of *dualism*, concerned with the question of the existence of both material and mental entities. But dualism mostly appears as an offshoot of idealism. It contrasts with monism, the theory that there is only one fundamental category of thing or principle; and also with pluralism, the view that there are many kinds or categories.

## Agnosticism

Another distinct camp is that of agnosticism:

“But the question of the relation of thinking and being had yet another side: in what relation do our thoughts about the world surrounding us stand to this world itself? Is our thinking capable of the cognition of the real world? Are we able in our ideas and notions of the real world to produce a correct reflection of reality? In philosophical language this question is called the question of identity of thinking and being, and the overwhelming majority of philosophers give an affirmative answer to this question. With Hegel, for example, its affirmation is self-evident; for what we cognize in the real world is precisely its thought-content – that which makes the world a gradual realization of the absolute idea, which absolute idea has existed somewhere from eternity, independent of the world and before the world. But it is manifest without further proof that thought can know a content which is from the outset a thought-content. It is equally manifest that what is to be proved here is already tacitly contained in the premises. But that in no way prevents Hegel from drawing the further conclusion from his proof of the identity of thinking and being that his philosophy, because it is correct for his thinking, is therefore the only correct one, and that the identity of thinking and being must prove its validity by mankind immediately translating his philosophy from theory into practice and transforming the whole world according to Hegelian principles. This is an illusion which he shares with well-nigh all philosophers.

“In addition, there is yet a set of different philosophers – those who question the possibility of any cognition, or at least of an exhaustive cognition, of the world. To them, among the more modern ones, belong Hume and Kant, and they played a very important role in philosophical development. What is decisive in the refutation of this view has already been said by Hegel, in so far as this was possible from an idealist standpoint. The materialistic additions made by Feuerbach are more ingenious than profound. The most telling refutation of this as of all other philosophical crotchetts is practice – namely, experiment and industry. If we are able to prove the correctness of our conception of a natural process by making it ourselves, bringing it into being out of its conditions and making it serve our own purposes into the bargain, then there is an end to the Kantian ungraspable “thing-in-itself”. The chemical substances produced in the bodies of plants and animals remained just such “things-in-themselves” until

organic chemistry began to produce them one after another, whereupon the “thing-in-itself” became a thing for us — as, for instance, alizarin, the coloring matter of the madder, which we no longer trouble to grow in the madder roots in the field, but produce much more cheaply and simply from coal tar. For 300 years, the Copernican solar system was a hypothesis with 100, 1,000, 10,000 to 1 chances in its favor, but still always a hypothesis. But then Leverrier, by means of the data provided by this system, not only deduced the necessity of the existence of an unknown planet, but also calculated the position in the heavens which this planet must necessarily occupy, and when [Johann] Galle really found this planet [Neptune, discovered in 1846 at Berlin Observatory], the Copernican system was proved. If, nevertheless, the neo-Kantians are attempting to resurrect the Kantian conception in Germany, and the agnostics that of Hume in England (where in fact it never became extinct), this is, in view of their theoretical and practical refutation accomplished long ago, scientifically a regression and practically merely a shamefaced way of surreptitiously accepting materialism, while denying it before the world.” (Engels 1886 [1969]).

This branch of philosophy of the limitations of knowledge that professes doubt of or disbelief in the power of knowing of the human mind is called ‘agnosticism’, which has its etymological roots in a Greek word meaning ‘unknowable’. It is a form of scepticism applied to metaphysics, especially theism, and is entirely different from atheism, the doctrine that no god exists. The term agnosticism was coined by Thomas Henry Huxley (1825 – 1895, the English Biologist, known as ‘Darwin’s Bulldog’) in a speech at a meeting of the Metaphysical Society in 1876 in reference to a description in the Bible of “an altar with this inscription: ‘to the unknown God’.” The idea was reiterated in his work *Agnosticism* in 1889. In an antithesis with the *gnosis* (knowledge) of the Church history, he thought it impossible to know about the ultimate origin and causes of the universe.

### **Materialism and Idealism**

It goes without saying that the primitive man’s thinking was materialistic. When he became able to think and started thinking, his thinking process might have been moved only by the things around him, what he saw, heard and experienced. His interaction with the incomprehensible, and often frightening, natural phenomena in due course led to the emergence of a mythological view. This development of mythology, its transformation into a kind of ‘artistic religion’, and the emergence of theogonic, cosmogonic and cosmological

ideas, which were subsequently naturalistically interpreted by the first philosophers of the ancient civilizations, reflected the basic stages of development of the primitive communal society. The advent of ancient philosophy coincides with the period of the formation of the private-property-based society when mythology still ruled the roost. Mythology was based on faith, and philosophical thought, though still in its infancy, was, on the contrary, based on knowledge. Philosophy, purely materialistic, emerged out of the conflict with the traditional mythological faith. It is reported that as early as about 1000 B.C., there were references in the *Upanisads* of India to teachings that did not acknowledge anything except matter (Stcherbatsky 1978). Both the *Cārvāka (Lokāyata)* school of materialism of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and the *Vaiśeṣika* school of atomism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. too followed this tradition. Mention should also be made of the strong naturalistic tendency in *Theravāda Buddhism* and some schools of philosophy in China that exalted ‘ether’ or ‘material force’ (*ch’i*) above mind.

Philosophy in this genre wrestled with the problem of explaining physical nature by identifying the one basic material out of which the world was made. Thales of Miletus (c. 580 B.C.), regarded as the first philosopher in the Western tradition, believed that water was the fundamental element; later thinkers added air, fire and earth. The world, representing many and made out of one basic material, marked a transformation, change: ‘one into many’. It was the relationship between this one and many that kindled the ancient philosophical quest. For ‘the weeping philosopher’, Heraclitus (c. 540 – 480/470 B.C.) of Ephesus, the precursor of the philosophy of becoming, the fundamental character of reality was the constancy of change: “You cannot swim twice in the same river.”

For Parmenides (c.515 – 449/440 B.C.) of Elea in southern Italy, on the contrary, *permanence* was the fundamental character of reality: reality is single and unchanging, since motion is impossible without empty space (void), and plurality is impossible without void to separate different unities. These two threads of thought were combined in the true materialism, atomism (discussed in their lost work, *Great Diakosmos*) of Leucippus and his pupil Democritus (fifth century B.C.) of Abdera. They agreed with Parmenides on the impossibility of qualitative change but disagreed with him on that of quantitative change. In order to reduce the observable qualitative differences to quantitative differences, they postulated the existence of invisible atoms, characterized only by quantitative properties of size, shape and motion. The great beauty of atomism was its doctrine that attributed the (Heraclitian) changes in things to changes in the configurations of (Parmenedian) unchanging

atoms. In order to make the motion of atoms possible, they accepted the existence of void as a real entity in which atoms could move and rearrange themselves. They thought that soul consists of particularly fine atoms, but is a composite and hence as perishable as the body and that perceptions consist of interactions of the soul atoms with the thin films of atoms being shed from the surface of the perceived things. This atomist materialism reached its classical perfection in Epicurus (341 – 270 B.C.) of Athens and in the long didactic poem *De Rerum Natura* of his ardent follower, Lucretius (c. 99 – 55 B.C.) of Rome. To explain the inter-impacts of atoms, Epicurus introduced an element of indeterminacy in materialism, by postulating that the atoms are subject to *chance* swerves – a doctrine of free will!

The philosophical problem of *freewill*, whether human beings are free in what they do, or whether their actions are determined by external events beyond their control, had already occupied certain minds. The ancient Greek Stoics, a (Heraclitian) materialistic school of Hellenistic philosophy founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium (c. 335 - 263 B.C.) and flourished as the major philosophy of the Roman Empire between the 3rd century B.C. and about the 3rd century A.D., believed in compatibilism that argues that freewill is compatible with determinism. Chrysippus of Soli (c. 280 – 207 B.C.), the third head of the school, believed that humans were responsible for their conduct, and he sought in several ways in logic to show that such a belief was not undermined by his rigorous deterministic view that nothing came about except in accordance with the ineluctable law of antecedent causes.

In the form of scepticism, agnosticism emerged as a formal philosophical position in ancient India (for instance, the Buddha, c.563 – c. 483 B.C.) and Greece (Protagoras of Abdera, c.490 – c.420 B.C., the first Sophist; Pyrrho of Elis, c. 365 – c. 270 B.C., the founder of Scepticism, and Carneades, c.213 – 129 B.C., an Academic sceptic). Socrates' epistemic modesty that “I know that I know nothing” exemplified Greek scepticism, although both Plato and Aristotle brilliantly suppressed it later on with their prolific theoretical virtuosity. However, the Academic sceptics developed the Socratic dictum and pitted themselves against the Stoics in a prolonged controversy to show that what we think we know by our senses and reasoning may be unreliable.

Along with materialism, idealism also flourished. Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (c. 500 B.C.) introduced a new factor Mind in the Classical list of basic elements, which was supposed to arrange all other things in their proper order, and control their motion. It is believed that Anaxagoras took Mind as a very special kind of material thing.

## **Plato**

Plato (427 – 347 B.C.), the Greek philosopher and founder of the objective idealist trend in ancient philosophy, was the first to defend the doctrine that mind was an entirely nonmaterial entity, separate and distinct from human body and able to exist apart from it. He was also the first to use the word ‘idea’ in his Theory of Ideas (Forms) in the dialogue *Phaedo*. He extended his criticism of materialism in general to pre-Socratic philosophers, who posited a basic material at the origin of all things, and remarked that materialism constituted the first form of atheism and represented its origin. For Plato, the argument that matter made up all and the only reality amounted to denying divinity: materialism, therefore, constituted the most radical negation of God and of the divine as spiritual realities. In order to avoid this materialistic trap, he proposed in *Phaedo* a ‘second navigation’ that opened up a suprasensible and intelligible world where Ideas, rather than matter, are the core of reality.

Plato’s metaphysics and epistemology show heavy influences from three predecessors: Heraclitus, Parmenides and Socrates (470 – 399 B.C.). Plato, inspired by the teachings of Heraclitus and Parmenides, distinguished between objects of perception and of intellect; whereas the objects of perception are concrete and particular, those of intellect are general, abstract and universal;

“whereas the objects of perception are changeable, in process, in Heraclitian flux, the objects of intellect are unchanging, in Parmenedian eternal immutability.” (Lavine 1984).

According to Plato, the Forms are the universal concepts (or ideas) which make all the phenomenal world intelligible. This doctrine may be taken as the prototype of all future manifestations of *substance dualism* in ontology, the view that mind and body are different kinds of substance. His idealist ideas can be found in, among other texts, Book VII of *The Republic*, which draws the famous ‘allegory of the cave’, and the description, through a metaphorical-mythical process, of the various levels of human knowledge that ascends from conjecture to reason (intellect). Only in this way, Plato claimed, could one hope to move from simple ‘opinion’ in the visible world to ‘knowledge’ in the intelligible world, which is a world apart, separate from the world of fickle phenomena revealed to the senses. Universal, or, in Plato’s terms, Form, is a technical notion in metaphysics: that which is predictable of many – a ‘one over many instances’, whiteness over the many white things, goodness over

the many good things, beauty over the many beautiful things. Thus, for Plato, Roundness, Goodness, Beauty are Forms or Ideas – *Beings* in the Parmenidian sense. The Platonic Forms were sanctified in medieval philosophy as the patterns used by God to conceive of objects in their creation. René Descartes (1596 – 1650), the French dualist philosopher, mathematician and physicist, and his followers also used the word *idea* in similar senses.

### Aristotle

Aristotle (383 – 322 B.C.) of Stagira, however, criticized his teacher's doctrine of Ideas and sought for a revision of the Platonic conception of wisdom as knowledge of the transcendental. He rehabilitated reality as that received by the senses and tried to explain the qualitative variety of the material world in terms of the Forms inherent in things which are also perceivable by the senses. Thus Aristotle was able to overcome Plato's substance dualism of the intelligible and the sensible worlds by viewing a thing as a unity of intelligible Form and sensible matter, the universal and the particular. The Scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages assimilated this Aristotelian conception and developed the doctrine of modern Realism. The universal notion for them exists *as unified* only in the intellect, though it is firmly rooted in the individual data of senses in multiplicity.

According to Aristotle, the Form of something is the nature or essence of that thing. Again, he defined matter (in *Physics*) as the principle of potentiality and Form as the principle of actuality in an attempt to account for developmental changes in substances. Four causes determine the nature of any individual thing in the universe, whether natural, an oak tree, or man-made, a house. A cause is similar to an explanatory factor. The *material cause* of a house, for instance, is the matter from which it is built; the *formal cause* is its Form to be actualized; the *efficient cause* is the work and the tools which produce the house as their effect; and the *final cause* is the purpose or end for which the house is built – provision of shelter; this constituted the Aristotelian notion of the hyle-morphic composition of matter and form. Admittedly, Aristotle recognized (in *Metaphysics*), besides sensually perceived Forms, the 'Form of Forms' or the 'prime mover', or the unmoved mover, the eternal first cause, which became significant in Judaic, Christian, and Islamic notion about God.

The mystical epistemology of idealism (that in man's most immediate experience, the intuitive self can attain a direct wisdom of ultimate reality, which reveals it to be spiritual), as held by Plato, was also powerfully prevalent in India, for example, in the 9<sup>th</sup> century monistic theology of Śāṅkara and in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century dualistic theism of Rāmānuja; in the extreme

subjectivism of the *Vijñānavāda* school of *Mahāyāna* sect of Aśvaghoṣa in the 1<sup>st</sup> and Asaṅga in the 4<sup>th</sup> century; in China in the philosophy of the *Ch'an* school and of the 7<sup>th</sup> century scholar Hui-neng, who authored its basic classic *The Platform Scripture*; and in Arabia in Islamic mysticism, especially that of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian mystic Jalāl ad-Dīn ar-Rūmī.

## The Renaissance

The materialist light was doused in the Dark Ages when the church and Aristotle dominated the European social consciousness. The 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the rebirth of the intellectual and creative aspects of human civilization as the spirit of free enquiry and the daring to exploit new ideas broke the religious fetters and developed rapidly throughout Europe. The Renaissance in arts and literature that began in Italy in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and spread to northern Europe, the Protestant Reformation, the religious revolution of Martin Luther and John Calvin that took place in the Western Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Enlightenment movement based on reason that claimed wide assent among the European intellectuals in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the exploration and colonization of newly discovered lands, and the Scientific Revolution as well as the emergence of capitalism to replace the moribund feudalism were all that made this period significant. The concept of rational explanation of physical phenomena that had found favour with the ancient thinkers now led to the effective methods of experiment and abstraction of Galileo, and in the methods of mathematical analysis of Newton. Newton's synthesis, in his *Principia* (1687), of the earlier work of Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo into one unifying theory of the solar system, and the analysis of the properties of physical matter by his method of subjecting a mechanical model to rigorous mathematical analysis had a profound influence on all branches of scientific thought. Just as Aristarchus' measurement of the relative sizes of the earth and the sun had led to his heliocentric model of the solar system, Newton's law of gravitation led to an understanding of the motion of comets, the discovery of new planets, and a determination of the mass of the sun, the earth, and the other planets. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century of Newton, science was based on only fact, not speculation, and scientists started to search for quantitative relationships. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the full impact of the Newtonian revolution was felt, and mechanical modes were so commonly used that science became strongly mechanistic. Heat, light, magnetism, and electricity were all considered forms of matter, and the physical world was thought to be an ingenious mechanical contrivance, operating like an unfailing clockwork. It was believed that everything could be understood if the proper mechanism

could be discovered. It was the mechanical model of the universe that led to theories of motion, of vibrations and waves, of the properties of matter, of a variety of thermal phenomena, as well as the conservation principles of energy and of momentum and the laws of thermodynamics.

The Renaissance prepared the ground for the revival of materialism through the works of the seventeenth-century philosophers, Pierre Gassendi (1592 – 1655) and Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679), who probably followed Bernardino Telesio (1509 – 1588) and Tommaso Campanella (1568 – 1639), Italian philosophers, who followed Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525), Cesare Cremonini (1550-1631) and Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), representing some forms of pantheism or, more precisely, of panpsychism. The ‘Renaissance of materialism’ started with the recovery by (Gian Francesco) Poggio Bracciolini (1380 –1459: an Italian humanist of the early Renaissance) at the beginning of the 15th century of *De rerum natura*, Lucretius’ poem, lost during the Middle Ages. The Italian Dominican friar, philosopher and astronomer Giordano Bruno reformulated Lucretius’ idea of plurality of worlds in his work (1584) where he posited, in the light of his Copernicanism, that every fixed star was a sun surrounded by planets. He believed in an ‘active’ conception of matter: that matter contained in itself the potential to produce and develop new forms, which was in opposition to the Aristotelian scheme where activity is linked to form and passivity to matter. He paid for it with his life, when the Roman Inquisition found him guilty of heresy and burnt him at the stake in 1600.

Telesio was a natural scientist and his emphasis on observation made him the ‘first of the moderns’ who eventually developed the scientific method. Gassendi, an astronomy teacher at the Royal College in Paris, rejected the official Aristotelian philosophy of his time in his first book (1624), and sought for the rehabilitation of Epicureanism (1649). Being a Catholic priest, he tried to combine the Epicurean system with the Christian doctrine by postulating that the atoms are not eternal but created. Thomas Hobbes, an English (political) philosopher, famous for his 1651 book *Leviathan*, held in metaphysics a strong materialist view, sometimes taking mental phenomena as epiphenomenal, and in epistemology a sophisticated empiricism with emphasis on the importance of language for knowledge. He also contributed (in his 1656 work *The Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance*) to the contemporary compatibilist view of the relationship between freewill and determinism.

## **Descartes**

It was Rene Descartes, regarded as the ‘Father of Modern Philosophy’, a rationalist philosopher, and one of the forerunners of the Enlightenment, who revived the tradition of dualism. His adoption of the mathematical and geometrical method as a universal method of reasoning in fact favoured the subsequent affirmation of a deterministic and mechanistic materialism. He saw in matter nothing but geometric and mechanical laws. Pantheism and hylozoism (the archaic idea that matter has a certain *life*) were overcome in his dualism. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes proceeded by applying his ‘method of doubt’ to previous beliefs and put up what is now called his ‘dream argument’: that he could doubt about his body (there is no guarantee that the present experience with the body is not a dream or an illusion devised by a demon), but not about his mind. This then meant a duality between mind and matter (body). He maintained that the essence of matter is extension in space, but mind is unextended and thus is distinct from the physical; it is an immaterial substance, a ‘thinking thing’. Thus came his famous dictum: ‘I think, therefore I exist’, which became a fundamental dictum of Western philosophy. The dictum simply means that if one doubts whether one exists or not, that is in- and of-itself a proof that one does exist. This also suggests that mind and body, though ontologically distinct substances, causally interact. He argued that there is a two-way psychophysical causal and mechanical interaction: from the mental to the physical (as in action) and from the physical to the mental (as in perception). *Cartesian interactionism* signifies Cartesian dualism coupled with this doctrine of two-way psychophysical causal interaction. Thus, his mechanistic materialism that saw instincts and the manifestations of sensible life as mechanical systems had important influence also in biology and anthropology. Human beings were, therefore, taken as the most perfect machine. He pointed out that a human corpse signified not only that the soul had left the body, but also that the corporeal machine had broken down and been destroyed. This understanding later on went into the basis of the 18<sup>th</sup> century medicine, which sought to relate all illnesses, both physical and mental, to changes and transformations in material elements, and dovetailed into psychological materialism and materialistic monism, which wholly reduces the mind to the body, and thought to the brain.

In line with Descartes’ mechanistic perspective of the human body, a number of French Enlightenment philosophers sought to develop mechanistic and materialistic perspectives in nature; notably, Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709-1751) in his work *Machine Man* he proposed the metaphor of the human being as machine; here the physical and psychological

life was reduced to pure physiological mechanisms. Denis Diderot (1713-1784), better known as the general editor of the *Encyclopédie* (1747 – 73), defined life in his work *On the Interpretation of Nature* (1745) as the result of the combination of material elements. The philosophical *magnum opus* of Claude-Adrien Helvétius (1715-1771), *On Mind* (1758), sparkled with atheistic, utilitarian and egalitarian doctrines sparked off a public outcry and was declared heretical and condemned by the Church and the State. Paul Heinrich Dietrich von Holbach (1723-1789) in *The System of Nature* (1770; followed by a more popular version, called *Common Sense, or Natural Ideas Opposed to Supernatural* (in 1772) also sent shockwave across the Church by denying the existence of a deity, and characterizing the universe as matter in motion, bound by inexorable natural laws of cause and effect. His philosophy is said to have marked “the culmination of French materialism and atheism” (Topazio 1956: 117). While in Paris, Marx studied both Helvétius and Baron d’Holbach and he

“called their teachings ‘real humanism’, as he had called Feuerbach’s philosophy, the difference being that the materialism of Helvétius and Holbach had become the ‘social basis of communism’” (Mehring 1936 [2003]).

The 18th century scholars called their age ‘the Enlightenment’, in hope of a return to the classical ideas of the Greeks and the Roman. But instead it paved the way towards the subsequent revolutions that shook Europe and America, by laying the intellectual foundations for both a scientific world view and a liberal democratic society. The period witnessed great strides in chemistry and biology. During the eight year period between 1766 and 1774, the chemical elements hydrogen, nitrogen, and oxygen were discovered; in 1789 the French scientist Antoine Lavoisier (1743 – 1794), the ‘father of modern chemistry’, formulated the law of conservation of mass (which states that the total mass in a chemical reaction remains constant). The ‘law of definite proportions’ (1799: if a compound is broken down into its constituent elements, then the masses of the constituents will always have the same proportions, regardless of the quantity or source of the original substance) first proven by the French chemist Joseph Louis Proust (1754 – 1826)), the ‘law of multiple proportions’ (if two elements can together form more than one compound, then the ratios of the masses of the second element which combine with a fixed mass of the first element will be ratios of small integers) of the English chemist and physicist John Dalton (1766 – 1844) and the Avogadro’s law (1811: equal volumes of any two gases, at equal temperature and pressure, contain equal numbers of molecules) due to the Italian scientist Lorenzo Romano Amedeo Carlo Bernadette

Avogadro di Quaregna e Cerreto (1776 – 1856), all contributed to the development of atomic theory of substances. The French naturalist, Jean-Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet, chevalier de la Marck (1744–1829), often known as ‘Lamarck’, who was an early proponent of the idea of evolution, published a major work on the classification of invertebrates, in 1801. The works of Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, baron de L’Aulne (1727–1781; the French economist and statesman and an early advocate of economic liberalism), and of Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, popularly known as ‘Montesquieu’ (1689 – 1755; French political philosopher), Giambattista Vico (1668– 1744; Italian political philosopher and jurist), and Adam Smith (1723–1790; Scottish moral philosopher and pioneer of political economics) marked the beginning of economics, politics, history, sociology, and jurisprudence. David Hume (1711 – 1776; Scottish philosopher and historian), Jeremy Bentham (1748 – 1832; English jurist and philosopher), and the other British theorists of ‘moral sense’ or ‘sentimentalism’ (according to which morality is grounded in moral sentiments or emotions) such as Anthony Ashley-Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713; English politician and philosopher) and Adam Smith turned ethics into a specialized field of philosophical inquiry. And the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Edmund Burke (1729–97; Irish statesman and political philosopher), Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–66; German critic), and Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–62; German philosopher) laid the foundations for a systematic aesthetics, the philosophical study of beauty art and taste.

### **Leibniz and others**

In philosophy, the modern age completely altered the idea of Form. While for Plato it was something real, for the Moderns it was some ‘mental representation’; the Form became closer to subjective than to ontological dimension. The Platonic idealism might thus be identified as an objective idealism, while the Modern one as a subjective idealism. Thus it can be argued that the specifics of idealism were explicitly set out only with the Modern Age. Note that the word *idealism* had not so far appeared in philosophy. The term was first used by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 – 1716), the German idealist who made seminal contributions in mathematics, physics, geology, jurisprudence, history and philosophy, and is known as the last ‘universal genius’. He was one of the three great 17th Century rationalists, the others being René Descartes and Baruch (Benedict de) Spinoza (1632 – 1677; Dutch philosopher of Portuguese Jewish origin). In his *Réponse aux réflexions de Bayle* (1702) Leibniz held that his philosophy contained all the good aspects of the greatest materialists and the greatest idealists. Thus he

“tried to combine the rationalism of Spinoza and the supernaturalism of the Church, determinism and a Providential Order, materialism and idealism. This desire to reconcile antagonistic forces and achieve unity is reflected in one of his most important theories – that of *Pre-established Harmony*.” (Lewis 1970)

His work anticipated modern logic and analytic philosophy, though he had a lifelong leaning on the scholastic tradition, in which conclusions are reached by applying reason to *a priori* principles rather than to empirical evidence.

Leibniz’s philosophy was a reaction to materialism and the Cartesian dualism. His argument against materialism centres on the relationship between matter and perception. His oft-repeated definition of perception as ‘the representation in the simple of the compound, or of that which is outside’ can be found for example in section 2 of his *Principles of Nature and Grace* (1714). In a letter to Antoine Arnauld, dated 9 October 1687, he wrote more explicitly that in natural perception and sensation, ‘what is divisible and material and dispersed into many entities’ get ‘expressed or represented in a single indivisible entity or in a substance which is endowed with genuine unity’. His most famous argument against materialism appeared in section 17 of the *Monadology* (1714). His argument was as follows: materialism holds that matter can give rise to perception. If perception is taken as representing a variety of content in a simple, indivisible, unity, in truly *one*, then it follows that whatever is not truly *one*, a true unity, cannot give rise to perception. We know that whatever is divisible is not truly *one* and that matter is infinitely divisible. That is, matter cannot be truly *one*, a true unity, and hence, it cannot give rise to perception. Thus it contradicts the materialist argument.

Leibniz also held a strong opposition to dualism concerning the relationship between mind and body, particularly the Cartesian substance dualism, according to which, the world fundamentally consists of two disparate substances: extended material substance (body) and unextended thinking substance (mind). But Leibniz argued that the universe is an aggregate of only one type of substance, the monads; ontologically, each monad is absolutely simple, *i.e.*, without parts, and ‘without windows’ (1714). Though he stood for a variant of monism that mind and body are ultimately composed of the same kind of substance, he also held that they (mind and body) are metaphysically distinct. But, there cannot be any interaction between them, as both are made up of ‘windowless’ monads. Against the Cartesian mind-body interactionism, Leibniz accounted for the mind-body relationship in terms of his famous

doctrine of the *pre-established harmony* – a version of *parallelism* that certain mental and physical phenomena run in parallel, the co-occurrence never involving any causal interaction. Here Leibniz used the analogy of two synchronized but unconnected clocks that strike at the same moment. The mind-body phenomena run in parallel, because God has so constructed (pre-programmed) the monads that go into their making. There is between them a pre-established harmony! What further finer evidence is required for the existence of God?

Leibniz believed that sense experience is not an independent source of knowledge, but reason is. Thus, he denied not only the substantial reality of matter but also the possibility of sense experience. It, however, ran counter to the empiricism of John Locke (1632 – 1704; English philosopher and physician, regarded as one of the most influential Enlightenment thinkers and known as the ‘Father of Liberalism’), George Berkeley (1685–1753; Irish philosopher and bishop in the Anglican Church of Ireland (Bishop of Cloyne)), and David Hume (1711 – 1776; Scottish philosopher, historian and economist).

Regarded as one of the first of the British empiricists following the tradition of Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626; Lord Chancellor of England under James I, philosopher, scientist and lawyer), and a true admirer of the science of his friends Isaac Newton (1642-1727) and Robert Boyle (1627 – 1691), Locke acknowledged the existence of truth outside of us (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1689: IV), and placed the foundation of knowledge in sensible experience derived from material objects. In contrast to the Cartesian philosophy, he postulated mind as a blank slate (*tabula rasa*); he maintained that man is born without any innate ideas, and that knowledge is instead gained by accumulating sensations and building up ideas on the basis of such experience.

Berkeley was alarmed at the apparently encouraging premises this philosophy contained, but he also found in it potential positions, which could, if developed, refute materialism and establish idealism. Berkeley devoted most of the Introduction of *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Part 1 (1710), to a refutation of the Lockean belief in abstract ideas, which he found in Book III of Locke’s *Essay*, on the ground that abstract ideas (such as Newton’s absolute time and space) are impossible and that such ideas are not needed for either language learning or language use. According to Berkeley, one can never have sensory experiences of material things; all that one can experience are sensory qualities. One perceives an apple only in terms of its qualities: ‘a certain colour, taste, smell, figure and consistence, all observed to go together to account for one distinct thing, signified by the

name *apple*' (*Principles of Human Knowledge*, Part 1); but one never perceives its substance itself. The existence of an apple is only in its being perceived. Thus the material world exists only in our perceptions! This Berkeleyan idealism became immortal in the *esse est percipi* principle: 'to be is to be perceived'. This typical formula formed the basis of modern idealism. It is significant that Berkeley used the term 'immaterialism' for the central thesis of his philosophy that there is no such thing as material substance. If there is no material substance, then matter cannot be the basis of materialism, which is the most effective and spectacular way of disproving materialism. Also note that Berkeley used epistemological arguments for immaterialism, whereas Leibniz, though he did not call himself an immaterialist, applied metaphysical arguments for his idealism.

## Kant

A significant turning point in idealism came with Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804, founder of German classical philosophy). He believed that his 'critical philosophy' based on his epistemology of Transcendental Idealism and on his moral philosophy of the autonomy of practical reason had created a 'Copernican revolution' in philosophy. A famous passage of his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781; second edition in 1787) is headed 'Refutation of Idealism', where he dismissed the problematic idealism (that the existence of objects in space outside us is doubtful), which he attributed to Descartes, and dogmatic idealism (that space is something impossible in itself and hence things in space are mere imaginations), which he attributed to Berkeley. The concept of transcendental idealism is a complex one, presented by Kant himself in a variety of ways. If we take 'transcendental' epistemically as 'preceding experience' or '*a priori*', and 'idealism' ontologically as 'dependent on subjectivity', then 'transcendental idealism' would mean *a priori* subjective knowledge of objects. It was so named because Kant thought that the human self, or 'transcendental ego', constructs knowledge out of sense impressions, upon which are imposed certain universal concepts he called categories. According to him, pure reason is a distinct, or distinguishable, faculty from understanding and the pure reason provides its Idea for a transcendental doctrine of the soul, for a transcendental science of the world, , and finally for a transcendental doctrine of God.

As the knowledge based on experience (*a posteriori*) is limited, there arises a distinction between 'appearances' or *phenomena* and the 'things-in-themselves' (*noumenon*). The concept of 'appearance' refers to the empirical objects (world), and thing-in-itself suggests something that transcends the empirical world. Kant took the subject only as a formal

condition of cognition (the subject's experience of empirical objects), and referred the material part outside the subject to the things-in-themselves. Hence, Kant's idealism may be taken as formal idealism: the idealistic element of the theory amounts only to the form of cognition given by the subject of cognition. Due to this separation of the material from the ideal/formal element in cognition, one cannot have knowledge of the things-in-themselves. As knowledge comes only through the transcendental forms of cognition, one can have knowledge only of appearances. It is through the transcendental forms of cognition that one gives objects those properties and determinations, which help one have cognition and knowledge in the first place. The mere presence of the material part of cognition in the subject's mind in fact offers nothing.

According to Kant, when one intuits objects through impressions, one can cognize not only those objects, but also two necessary 'pure forms of intuition': space and time; space structures all outer cognition of objects, or representations, and time, all inner representations. These space and time are peculiar in that they are only forms of intuition by which one perceives objects, not real things-in-themselves. They are nothing other than the subjective forms of human sensible intuition, yet necessary, preconditions of any given object to be intuited. Humans necessarily perceive objects as something both spatial and temporal.

### **Fichte and Schelling**

The development of the German classical philosophy from Kant's transcendental idealism to Hegel's absolute idealism was facilitated by the idealism of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775–1854). Kant's Copernican revolution was a great step forward, and for Fichte, the only way forward was to complete Kant's work. This in turn meant dispensing with the unknowable character of the Kantian 'thing-in-itself'. If everything knowable is set out by the subject, the human mind (spirit), so must be the 'thing-in-itself' also, such that we can know of its existence. This then suggested moving the intervention of the subject further from the *phenomenon* to the *noumenon* and finally the union between the two: *phenomenon* and *noumenon*, theoretical and practical, subject and object. Note that for Kant the 'ego', the subject, created the knowing, whereas for the subsequent German idealism the subject created the very being.

Thus, the critical idealism had to be transformed into a consistent metaphysical idealism by reducing all reality to product of mind. And this is what Fichte accomplished in his science of science, which is both a phenomenology of consciousness and an idealist metaphysics, based

upon the bare concept of subjectivity, or, the ‘pure I’ or ‘ego’. He argued that consciousness is the sole ground for the explanation of experience, and he was concerned with deriving consciousness in general from the ego. This was then coupled with Kant’s conception of the moral life as an infinite pursuit of an unattainable goal, so that all existence becomes the insatiable striving of the ego, which posits the external world as an obstacle to its own completion. Fichte’s idealism, as set out in his 1794 work (*Basis of the Entire theory of Science*) is called ‘subjective idealism’, since the ego is the fundamental principle of all knowledge, and ‘moral idealism’, since the first activity of the ego imposes on everyone the fulfilment of an obligation, that is, conquering one’s own freedom. This dynamic, dialectical, idealism, conjoined with the elevation of self consciousness, represented an early transition from the Kantian transcendental idealism to absolute idealism and thus laid the groundwork for Hegel.

Schelling, the principal philosopher of German Romanticism, started with Fichtean idealism in his (1800), but soon spurned Fichte’s starting point in the human ego. He later described his view as ‘absolute idealism’, explaining that things are always conditioned by other things, whereas mind is undetermined and absolute. Against the Fichtean conception of the world as the construction of the ego, he argued that the world of nature is as real and important as the world of the ego. Hence he grounded his metaphysics in objective nature, which he reconciled with mind through the aesthetic creativity that they both share – an ‘aesthetic idealism’. He was thus instrumental in constructing a systematic philosophy of nature. For him, the Absolute is the ‘pure identity’ of subjectivity and objectivity, and this identity is reflected in the mutual interpenetration of Nature and Nature’s knowledge of itself in and through the human mind, that is, of the real Nature as a system of particular things and the ideal Nature (for which Schelling used Spinoza’s term), the former being the symbol or appearance of the latter. This contained the framework of dialectics that Hegel was to use soon.

It should be noted that the direct influence of Kant was naturally felt more strongly by Fichte than by Schelling or Hegel. Fichte appears as a subjective idealist inasmuch as he exalted the subject, the ego, above the object, whereas Schelling crowns him as an objective idealist. Schelling’s philosophy, however, presupposed the earlier stages of Fichte’s thought, and Hegel’s absolute idealism presupposed the earlier phases of the philosophies of both Fichte and Schelling. But the fact that the movement of German idealism as a whole presupposed the Kantian critical idealism remains unchallenged.

## Hegel

German idealism culminated in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), the most comprehensive and the most influential of the Absolute idealists. He is credited with having perfected the notion of dialectics in idealism that he applied in delineating the progress of not only the human mind in attaining truth but also the social history; with him thus started the modern philosophy of history. Though he followed Kant, he soon surpassed the Kantian scepticism. Kant had argued that the mind constitutes the known universe because one can only know things within a framework of one's own creation, namely the categories of time, space, and substance. For him, perception without conception was blind and conception without perception, empty. But Hegel along with Fichte went beyond that and inquired whether there could be any perception at all without a concept, and any concept without presupposing a precept, and, if this was impossible, whether the distinction between a known world of appearance and an unknowable world of things-in-themselves was not illusory. He agreed with Fichte to drop the Kantian surd, the unknowable thing-in-itself, and to hold mind as the absolute reality. Then he went beyond Fichte to agree with Schelling that the Absolute is not just mind or ego, but matter also. But he did not stop there; rather he went beyond Schelling, whose neutral Absolute resembled ‘the night in which all cows appear black’. For Hegel, if the Absolute must explain everything, it must not be just a pure identity, but a unity-in-difference, signifying the complete realization of the finite in the infinite, “unity of the Subjective and Objective Idea” (Russell 1945). Unlike in Kant's transcendental idealism and Berkeley's subjective idealism, both of which are pluralistic, Hegel's absolute idealism in this sense is in the ancient and medieval monistic tradition.

He undertook a genuinely novel approach to the problem of knowledge, of Mind (or Spirit) coming to know itself as ultimate reality, in the *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807) that Marx characterized as “the birthplace of the Hegelian philosophy” (Marx 1844 [1977]). There he gave an account of how the finite minds of human beings ascend the point of truth that the world beyond them is not alien to them, but a part of themselves, because Mind, the Absolute, alone is all that is real, and each finite mind is a part of that Mind. He wrote in the ‘Preface’ to the *Phenomenology*:

“The mind's immediate existence, conscious life, has two aspects – cognition and objectivity which is opposed to or negative of the subjective function of knowing. Since it is in the medium of consciousness that mind is developed and brings out its various

moments, this opposition between the factors of conscious life is found at each stage in the evolution of mind, and all the various moments appear as modes or forms (*Gestalten*) of consciousness. The scientific statement of the course of this development is a science of the experience through which consciousness passes; the substance and its process are considered as the object of consciousness. Consciousness knows and comprehends nothing but what falls within its experience; for what is found in experience is merely spiritual substance, and, moreover, object of its self. Mind, however, becomes object, for it consists in the process of becoming an other to itself, i.e. an object for its own self, and in transcending this otherness. And experience is called this very process by which the element that is immediate, unexperienced, i.e. abstract – whether it be in the form of sense or of a bare thought – externalises itself, and then comes back to itself from this state of estrangement, and by so doing is at length set forth in its concrete nature and real truth, and becomes too a possession of consciousness.

“The dissimilarity which obtains in consciousness between the ego and the substance constituting its object, is their inner distinction, the factor of negativity in general. We may regard it as the defect of both opposites, but it is their very soul, their moving spirit. It was on this account that certain thinkers long ago took the void to be the principle of movement, when they conceived the moving principle to be the negative element, though they had not as yet thought of it as self. While this negative factor appears in the first instance as a dissimilarity, as an inequality, between ego and object, it is just as much the inequality of the substance with itself. What seems to take place outside it, to be an activity directed against it, is its own doing, its own activity; and substance shows that it is in reality subject. When it has brought out this completely, mind has made its existence adequate to and one with its essential nature. Mind is object to itself just as it *is*, and the abstract element of immediacy, of the separation between knowing and the truth, is overcome. Being is entirely mediated; it is a substantial content, that is likewise directly in the possession of the ego, has the character of self, is notion. With the attainment of this the *Phenomenology of Mind* concludes. What mind prepares for itself in the course of its phenomenology is the element of true knowledge. In this element the moments of mind are now set out in the form of thought pure and simple, which knows its object to be itself. They no longer involve the opposition between being and knowing; they remain within the undivided

simplicity of the knowing function; they are the truth in the form of truth, and their diversity is merely diversity of the content of truth. The process by which they are developed into an organically connected whole is Logic or Speculative Philosophy.” (Hegel, 1807).

Thus progress of the finite mind assumes different historical conceptions of knowledge, from ‘sense certainty’ through ‘perception’, ‘force’, ‘consciousness’, ‘self-consciousness’, ‘reason’, ‘spirit’, to finally ‘absolute knowing’, where ‘otherness’ gets eliminated, and unconditional truth (Idea) is attained. No longer limited, as with Kant, to knowledge of appearances, the finite human mind, for Hegel, is thus able to obtain ultimate genuine truth. While the *Phenomenology* discussed this process as a logical necessity in the historical development of human consciousness, the *Science of Logic* (1812, 1816) presented it as a pure dialectical necessity in more abstract terms and claimed to show ‘God as he is in his eternal essence’ before he created nature and finite mind.

It should be noted here that Hegel left a hazy philosophy; Bertrand Russell remarked in his historical account of the Western philosophy:

“Hegel’s philosophy is very difficult – he is, I should say, the hardest to understand of all the great philosophers.” (Russell 1945).

He was the scare of every historian of philosophy:

“Hegel was often extremely obscure and his system is not only complex but often incomprehensible to the ordinary mind. When the English philosopher Hutchinson Stirling tried to expound him in his book *The Secret of Hegel*, one of his critics remarked that the secret had been well kept!

“It would be unwise to attempt to throw light on Hegel by summarising already largely unintelligible summaries....” (Lewis 1970).

And this has no doubt left many a blank for the visionary followers to fill up in varying colours. Thus, according to an interpretation by Hermann Glockner, one of the major Hegel commentators in the first half of the twentieth century, in his two-volume work *Hegel* (1929, 1940), Hegel believed that all entities are really the thoughts, expressions, or modes of a single underlying Mind or Spirit, and that this Mind develops and posits itself with some sort of conceptual necessity. This led to characterizing Hegelian philosophy as *panlogism*, a

coinage due to Hermann Glockner. Ontology and logic are taken as the same in this doctrine. The passage that is said to contain this doctrine appears in the ‘Preface’ to the *Phenomenology*:

“In general, in virtue of the principle, as we expressed it before, that substance is implicitly and in itself subject, all content makes its reflection into itself in its own special way. The subsistence or substance of anything that exists is its self-identity; for its want of identity, or oneness with itself, would be its dissolution. But self-identity is pure abstraction; and this is just thinking. When I say Quality, I state simple determinateness; by means of its quality one existence is distinguished from another or is an “existence”; it is for itself, something on its own account, or subsists with itself because of this simple characteristic. But by doing so it is essentially Thought. Here we find contained the principle that Being is Thought: here is exercised that insight which usually tends to deviate from the ordinary non-conceptual way of speaking of the identity of thought and being. In virtue, further, of the fact that subsistence on the part of what exists is self-identity or pure abstraction, it is the abstraction of itself from itself, in other words, is itself its own want of identity with itself and dissolution – its own proper inwardness and retraction into self – its process of becoming.” (Hegel, 1807).

Glockner stated that it is in this passage that “Hegel accomplishes the decisive, and as I see it extraordinarily problematic, *turn to Panlogism*”, and found it very flawed logically (quoted in Eisenberg 1990). However, there are others who “argue that Hegel’s remarks, properly interpreted, make quite good sense, but that they do not commit him to panlogism” (*ibid.*). In fact the core of the passage may be construed in a favourable light. The statement “that substance is implicitly and in itself subject” suggests not only the identity of matter and Mind but also his philosophical ambition of fusing the classical and modern philosophy. For Hegel, Greek philosophy had attained an adequate wisdom of substance, but for historical reasons without a comprehensive concept of subjectivity, whereas modern philosophy, starting with Descartes, appreciated the value of this concept as a philosophical starting point but without an adequate notion of objective truth. Hegel believed that the empiricists and Kant had prematurely abandoned ontology (metaphysics) as impossible, thus subjecting their philosophies to ‘subjectivism’. This defect was evident in Kant’s conclusion that phenomena are the only possible objects of knowledge. Hence Hegel’s ambition to combine the two,

classical and modern, approaches by linking ontology (the study of existence, substance) and epistemology (the study of knowledge, subject).

To sum up, let us quote Engels who wrote in his 1859 ‘Review’ of Marx’s *The Critique of Political Economy*:

“The Hegelian method, on the other hand, was in its existing form quite inapplicable. It was essentially idealist and the main point in this case was the elaboration of a world outlook that was more materialist than any previous one. Hegel’s method took as its point of departure pure thought, whereas here the starting point was to be inexorable facts. A method which, according to its own avowal, “came from nothing through nothing to nothing” was in this shape by no means suitable. It was, nevertheless, the only element in the entire available logical material which could at least serve as a point of origin. It had not been subjected to criticism, not been overthrown; none of the opponents of the great dialectician had been able to make a breach in the proud edifice. It had been forgotten because the Hegelian school did not know how to apply it. Hence, it was first of all essential to carry through a thorough critique of the Hegelian method.

“It was the exceptional historical sense underlying Hegel’s manner of reasoning which distinguished it from that of all other philosophers. However abstract and idealist the form employed, yet his evolution of ideas runs always parallel with the evolution of universal history, and the latter was indeed supposed to be only the proof of the former. Although this reversed the actual relation and stood it on its head, yet the real content was invariably incorporated in his philosophy, especially since Hegel — unlike his followers — did not rely on ignorance, but was one of the most erudite thinkers of all time. He was the first to try to demonstrate that there is an evolution, an intrinsic coherence in history, and however strange some things in his philosophy of history may seem to us now, the grandeur of the basic conception is still admirable today, compared both with his predecessors and with those who following him ventured to advance general historical observations. This monumental conception of history pervades the *Phänomenologies*, *Asthetik* and *Geschichte der Philosophie*, and the material is everywhere set forth historically, in a definite historical context, even if in an abstract distorted manner.

“This epoch-making conception of history was a direct theoretical pre-condition of the new materialist outlook, and already this constituted a connecting link with the logical method as well. Since, even from the standpoint of “pure reasoning,” this forgotten dialectics had led to such results, and had moreover with the greatest ease coped with the whole of the former logic and metaphysics, it must at all events comprise more than sophistry and hairsplitting. But the critique of this method, which the entire official philosophy had evaded and still evades, was no small matter.

“Marx was and is the only one who could undertake the work of extracting from the Hegelian logic the nucleus containing Hegel’s real discoveries in this field, and of establishing the dialectical method, divested of its idealist wrappings, in the simple form in which it becomes the only correct mode of conceptual evolution. The working out of the method which underlies Marx’s critique of political economy is, we think, a result hardly less significant than the basic materialist conception.” (Engels 1859)

Hegel lived on through the ‘Hegelians’, a group of German (Prussian) philosophers formed after his death in 1831. The group was divided into ‘left’, ‘centre’, and ‘right’ Hegelians, depending on the political attitude (critical or conservative), or the humanistic or theistic view of Hegelian Spirit. Engels characterized the divide as follows:

“... the doctrine of Hegel, taken as a whole, left plenty of room for giving shelter to the most diverse practical party views. And in the theoretical Germany of that time, two things above all were practical: religion and politics. Whoever placed the chief emphasis on the Hegelian *system* could be fairly conservative in both spheres; whoever regarded the dialectical *method* as the main thing could belong to the most extreme opposition, both in politics and religion.” (Engels 1886 [1969]).

## **Feuerbach**

The ‘Right (or Old) Hegelians’, such as Karl Friedrich Göschel (1784–1862), Johann Philipp Gabler (1753 – 1826) and Johann Eduard Erdmann (1805 – 1892), found Hegel as a supporter of clerical orthodoxy and of political restorationism, the attempt from 1815 to restore the old order undermined by the French Revolution. On the other hand, ‘Left (or Young) Hegelians’ such as David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74), Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach (1804–72), Bruno Bauer (1809–82), and Arnold Ruge (1803–80) critically emphasized the humanistic and historical dimensions of Hegel’s account of religion and were

political radicals. The ‘Centre Hegelians’ were the moderate reformists, such as Johann Karl Friedrich Rosenkranz (1805–79) and Karl Ludwig Michelet (1801 – 1893). Karl Marx was the most famous young Hegelian, especially during his days in 1844 in Paris as co-editor, with Arnold Ruge (1802 – 1880: German philosopher and political writer), of the *German–French Annals*). He along with Frederick Engels wrote in *The German Ideology*:

“The Old Hegelians had *understood* everything as soon as it was reduced to a Hegelian logical category. The Young Hegelians *criticised* everything by attributing to it religious conceptions or by pronouncing it a theological matter. The Young Hegelians are in agreement with the Old Hegelians in their belief in the rule of religion, of concepts, of a universal principle in the existing world. Only, the one party attacks this dominion as usurpation, while the other extols it as legitimate.

“Since the Young Hegelians consider conceptions, thoughts, ideas, in fact all the products of consciousness, to which they attribute an independent existence, as the real chains of men (just as the Old Hegelians declared them the true bonds of human society) it is evident that the Young Hegelians have to fight only against these illusions of consciousness. Since, according to their fantasy, the relationships of men, all their doings, their chains and their limitations are products of their consciousness, the Young Hegelians logically put to men the moral postulate of exchanging their present consciousness for human, critical or egoistic consciousness, and thus of removing their limitations. This demand to change consciousness amounts to a demand to interpret reality in another way, *i.e.* to recognise it by means of another interpretation. The Young-Hegelian ideologists, in spite of their allegedly ‘world-shattering’ statements, are the staunchest conservatives. The most recent of them have found the correct expression for their activity when they declare they are only fighting against ‘phrases’. They forget, however, that to these phrases they themselves are only opposing other phrases, and that they are in no way combating the real existing world when they are merely combating the phrases of this world. The only results which this philosophic criticism could achieve were a few (and at that thoroughly one-sided) elucidations of Christianity from the point of view of religious history; all the rest of their assertions are only further embellishments of their claim to have furnished, in these unimportant elucidations, discoveries of universal importance.

“It has not occurred to any one of these philosophers to inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the relation of their criticism to their own material surroundings.” (Marx and Engels 1846 [1976]).

The Young Hegelians’ initial focus was religion, but with the main objective of social transformation. Feuerbach’s 1830 (anonymous) work on *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* that attacked personal immortality and the existence and transcendence of God established him as a leading member of the group.

“Then came Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity*. With one blow, it pulverized the contradiction, in that without circumlocutions it placed materialism on the throne again. Nature exists independently of all philosophy. It is the foundation upon which we human beings, ourselves products of nature, have grown up. Nothing exists outside nature and man, and the higher beings our religious fantasies have created are only the fantastic reflection of our own essence. The spell was broken; the “system” was exploded and cast aside, and the contradiction, shown to exist only in our imagination, was dissolved. One must himself have experienced the liberating effect of this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was general; we all became at once Feuerbachians. How enthusiastically Marx greeted the new conception and how much – in spite of all critical reservations – he was influenced by it, one may read in the *The Holy Family*.” (Engels 1886 [1970]).

Feuerbach’s most celebrated intellectual bombshell *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) sought for the true or anthropological essence of religion. He was concerned with saving the essence of religion from the untenable ‘dogmatic’ beliefs. He maintained, in a way Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939), the founder of psychoanalytic school of psychiatry, would echo later on, that the essence of religion, Christianity, is projective; a projection upon God of ego’s (man’s) own ideals of knowledge, will and love, all elevated to infinite power. The essence of God is thus nothing but the projected essence of ego (man), the true God; and Hegel’s Absolute is the Christian concept of God in such a disguised form, a projection, mirror image, of the historical achievement of man. Knowledge of this fact stands to reveal how humankind has ‘alienated’ its own best attributes by projecting them onto an external source. Thus,

“The Hegelian philosophy is *inverted*, that is, *theological*, idealism, just as the *Spinozist* philosophy is *theological materialism*. It posited the *essence* of the ego *outside* the ego, that is, in separation from it, and it objectified the ego as substance, as God. But in so doing, it expressed – *indirectly* and in a *reverse order* – *the divinity of the ego*, thus making it, as Spinoza makes matter, into an attribute or form of the divine substance, meaning that *man's consciousness of God* is God's own self-consciousness. That means that the being belongs to God and knowing to man. But the being of God, according to Hegel, is actually nothing other than the being of thought, or thought *abstracted from the ego, that is, the thinker*. The Hegelian philosophy has turned thought, that is, the *subjective* being – this, however, conceived without subject, that is, conceived as a being *different* from it – into the *Divine and Absolute Being*.” (Feuerbach 1843)

And this truth can be grasped through an inversion of Hegel, through a transformation of Hegelian Absolute theory into a profound philosophy of man. Philosophy is valuable not for the wisdom it gives us about the Absolute, but for what this image shows us about man. Hence we require a philosophy of man, real material man in a real material world. This constitutes the Feuerbachian ‘transformatory criticism’ of Hegel, which suggested that ‘Hegel be stood on his feet’ by ‘inverting’ the subject and predicate in his philosophy.

In the background of the “clamour excited” by his work, he declared in the ‘Preface’ to the second edition of *The Essence of Christianity*:

“I am nothing but a *natural philosopher in the domain of mind*; and the natural philosopher can do nothing without instruments, without material means. In this character I have written the present work, which consequently contains nothing else than the principle of a new philosophy verified practically, i.e., *in concreto*, in application to a special object, but an object which has a universal significance: namely, to religion, in which this principle is exhibited, developed, and thoroughly carried out. This philosophy is essentially distinguished from the systems hitherto prevalent, in that it corresponds to the real, complete nature of man; but for that very reason it is antagonistic to minds perverted and crippled by a superhuman, i.e., anti-human, anti-natural religion and speculation. It does not, as I have already said elsewhere, regard the pen as the only fit organ for the revelation of truth, but the eye and ear, the hand and foot; it does not identify the idea of the fact with the fact itself, so as to reduce real existence to an existence on paper, but it separates the two, and precisely by this

separation attains to *the fact itself*; it recognises as the true thing, not the thing as it is an object of the abstract reason, but as it is an object of the real, complete man, and hence as it is itself a real, complete thing. This philosophy does not rest on an Understanding *per se*, on an absolute, nameless understanding, belonging one knows not to whom, but on the understanding of man – though not, I grant, on that of man enervated by speculation and dogma – and it speaks the language of men, not an empty, unknown tongue. Yes, both in substance and in speech, it places philosophy in *the negation of philosophy*, i.e., it declares *that* alone to be the true philosophy which is converted *in succum et sanguinem*, which is incarnate in Man; and hence it finds its highest triumph in the fact that to all dull and pedantic minds, which place the *essence* of philosophy in the *show* of philosophy, it appears to be no philosophy at all.

“This philosophy has for its principle, not the Substance of Spinoza, not the *ego* of Kant and Fichte, not the Absolute Identity of Schelling, not the Absolute Mind of Hegel, in short, no abstract, merely conceptional being, but a real being, the true *Ens realissimum* – man; its principle, therefore, is in the highest degree positive and real. It generates thought from the *opposite* of thought, from Matter, from existence, from the senses; it has relation to its object first through the senses, i.e., passively, before defining it in thought. Hence my work, as a specimen of this philosophy, so far from being, a production to be placed in the category of Speculation – although in another point of view it is the true, the incarnate result of prior philosophical systems, is the direct opposite of speculation, nay, puts an end to it by explaining it. Speculation makes religion say only what it has *itself* thought, and expressed far better than religion; it assigns a meaning to religion without any reference to the actual meaning of religion; it does not look beyond itself. I, on the contrary, let religion itself speak; I constitute myself only its listener and interpreter, not its prompter. Not to invent, but to discover, “to unveil existence”, has been my sole object; to *see* correctly, my sole endeavour. It is not I, but religion that worships man, although religion, or rather theology, denies this; it is not I, an insignificant individual, but religion itself that says: God is man, man is God; it is not I, but religion that denies the God who is *not* man, but only an *ens rationis* – since it makes God become man, and then constitutes this God, not distinguished from man, having a human form, human feelings, and human thoughts, the object of its worship and veneration. I have only 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. If therefore my 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. Or let it be *proved* that the historical as well as the rational arguments of my work are false; let them be refuted – not, however, I entreat, by judicial denunciations, or theological jeremiads, by the trite phrases of speculation, or other pitiful expedients for which I have no name, but by *reasons*, and such reasons as I have not already thoroughly answered.

“Certainly, my work is negative, destructive; but, be it observed, only in relation to the unhuman, not to the human elements of religion. It is therefore divided into two parts, of which the first is, as to its main idea, *positive*, the second, including the Appendix, not wholly, but in the main, negative; in both, however, the same positions are proved, only in a different or rather opposite manner. The first exhibits religion in its *essence*, its *truth*, the second exhibits it in its *contradictions*; the first is development, the second polemic; thus the one is, according to the nature of the case, calmer, the other more vehement. Development advances gently contest impetuously, for development is self-contented at every stage, contest only at the last blow. Development is deliberate, but contest resolute. Development is *light*, contest *fire*. Hence results a difference between the two parts even as to their form. Thus in the first part I show that the true sense of Theology is Anthropology, that there is no distinction between the *predicates* of the divine and human nature, and, consequently, no distinction between the divine and human *subject*: I say consequently, for wherever, as is especially the case in theology, the predicates are not accidents, but express the essence of the subject, there is no distinction between subject and predicate, the one can be put in the place of the other; on which point I refer the reader to the Analytics of Aristotle, or even merely to the Introduction of Porphyry. In the second part, on the other hand, I show that the distinction which is made, or rather supposed to be made, between the theological and anthropological predicates resolves itself into an absurdity. Here is a striking example. In the first part I prove that the Son of God is in *religion* a real son, the son of God in the same sense in which man is the son of man, and I find therein the *truth*, *the essence* of religion, that it conceives and affirms a profoundly human relation as a divine

relation; on the other hand, in the second part I show that the Son of God – not indeed in religion, but in theology, which is the reflection of religion upon itself – is not a son in the natural, human sense, but in an entirely different manner, contradictory to Nature and reason, and therefore absurd, and I find in this negation of human sense and the human understanding the negation of religion. Accordingly the first part is the *direct*, the second the *indirect* proof, that theology is anthropology: hence the second part necessarily has reference to the first; it has no independent significance; its only aim is to show that the sense in which religion is interpreted in the previous part of the work must be the true one, because the contrary is absurd. In brief, in the first part I am chiefly concerned with *religion*, in the second with *theology*: I say *chiefly*, for it was impossible to exclude theology from the first part, or religion from the second. A mere glance will show that my investigation includes speculative theology or philosophy, and not, as has been here and there erroneously supposed, common theology only, a kind of trash from which I rather keep as clear as possible, (though, for the rest, I am sufficiently well acquainted with it), confining myself always to the most essential, strict and necessary definition of the object, and hence to that definition which gives to an object the most general interest, and raises it above the sphere of theology. But it is with theology that I have to do, not with theologians; for I can only undertake to characterise what is *primary* – the *original*, not the copy, *principles*, not persons, *species*, not individuals, *objects of history*, not objects of the *chronique scandaleuse*.” (Feuerbach 1843).

His was essentially a philosophy *of man* and *for man*; according to him, the task of the modern era was the realisation and humanisation of God – the transformation and dissolution of theology into anthropology. He observed in his *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*:

“§ 54: The new philosophy makes *man, together with nature* as the basis of man, the *exclusive, universal, and highest* object of philosophy; it makes *anthropology*, together with *physiology*, the universal science.

“§ 55: *Art, religion, philosophy, and science* are only expressions or manifestations of the *true being of man*. A man is truly and perfectly man only when he possesses an *aesthetic or artistic, religious or moral, philosophical or scientific* sense. And only he who *excludes from himself* nothing that is *essentially human* is, strictly speaking, man.

*Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto* – this sentence, taken in its *universal and highest meaning*, is the *motto* of the *new philosophy*.

“§ 64: The old philosophy possesses a *double truth*; first, its *own truth* – philosophy – which is not concerned with man, and second, the truth *for man* – *religion*. The new philosophy as the philosophy of man, on the other hand, is also essentially the *philosophy for man*; it has, without in the least compromising the dignity and autonomy of theory – indeed it is in perfect harmony with it – essentially a *practical* tendency, and is practical in the highest sense. The new philosophy takes the place of religion; it has within itself the *essence* of religion; in truth, it is *itself religion*.” (Feuerbach 1843).

As Engels admitted, Marx enthusiastically greeted the new conception and made use of the method of transformative criticism. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Marx wrote:

“*Feuerbach* is 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. The extent of his achievement, and the unpretentious simplicity with which he, *Feuerbach*, gives it to the world, stand in striking contrast to the opposite attitude [of the others].

“*Feuerbach*’s great achievement is:

“(1) 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;

“(2) The establishment of *true materialism* and of *real science*, by making the social relationship of “man to man” the basic principle of the theory;

“(3) His opposing to the negation of the negation, which claims to be the absolute positive, the self-supporting positive, positively based on itself.” (Marx 1844 [1977])

In the spring of 1845 Marx wrote eleven *Theses on Feuerbach* that appeared as an appendix to Engels’ *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* in 1888. These are:

“I. The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the thing (*Gegenstand*), reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object* (*Objekt*) or of *contemplation* (*Anschauung*), but not as *human sensuous 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* (*gegenständliche*) 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 (*gegenständliche*) 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 (*Diesseitigkeit*) 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 (in Robert Owen, for example).

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

“IV. 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. He overlooks the fact that after completing this work, the chief thing still remains to be done. For the fact that the secular basis detaches itself from itself and establishes itself as an independent realm in the clouds can only be explained by the self-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*, appeals to *sensuous 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:

“1. To abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment (*Gemüt*) as something by itself and to presuppose an abstract – *isolated* – human individual.

“2. 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.

“VIII. 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.

“IX. 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.

“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.” (Marx 1845 [1969])

And in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels summed up their critique of Feuerbach as follows:

“In reality and for the practical materialist, i.e. the communist, it is a question of revolutionising the existing world, of practically attacking and changing existing things. When occasionally we find such views with Feuerbach, they are never more than

isolated surmises and have much too little influence on his general outlook to be considered here as anything else than embryos capable of development. Feuerbach's conception of the sensuous world is confined on the one hand to mere contemplation of it, and on the other to mere feeling; he says "Man" instead of "real historical man." "Man" is really "the German." In the first case, the contemplation of the sensuous world, he necessarily lights on things which contradict his consciousness and feeling, which disturb the harmony he presupposes, the harmony of all parts of the sensuous world and especially of man and nature. To remove this disturbance, he must take refuge in a double perception, a profane one which only perceives the "flatly obvious" and a higher, philosophical, one which perceives the "true essence" of things. He does not see how the sensuous world around him is, not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society; and, indeed, in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one, developing its industry and its intercourse, modifying its social system according to the changed needs. Even the objects of the simplest "sensuous certainty" are only given him through social development, industry and commercial intercourse. The cherry-tree, like almost all fruit-trees, was, as is well known, only a few centuries ago transplanted by commerce into our zone, and therefore only by this action of a definite society in a definite age it has become "sensuous certainty" for Feuerbach.

"Incidentally, when we conceive things thus, as they really are and happened, every profound philosophical problem is resolved, as will be seen even more clearly later, quite simply into an empirical fact. For instance, the important question of the relation of man to nature (Bruno [Bauer] goes so far as to speak of "the antitheses in nature and history" (p. 110), as though these were two separate "things" and man did not always have before him an historical nature and a natural history) out of which all the "unfathomably lofty works" on "substance" and "self-consciousness" were born, crumbles of itself when we understand that the celebrated "unity of man with nature" has always existed in industry and has existed in varying forms in every epoch according to the lesser or greater development of industry, just like the "struggle" of man with nature, right up to the development of his productive powers on a corresponding basis. Industry and commerce, production and the exchange of the necessities of life, themselves determine distribution, the structure of the different social

classes and are, in turn, determined by it as to the mode in which they are carried on; and so it happens that in Manchester, for instance, Feuerbach sees only factories and machines, where a hundred years ago only spinning-wheels and weaving-rooms were to be seen, or in the Campagna of Rome he finds only pasture lands and swamps, where in the time of Augustus he would have found nothing but the vineyards and villas of Roman capitalists. Feuerbach speaks in particular of the perception of natural science; he mentions secrets which are disclosed only to the eye of the physicist and chemist; but where would natural science be without industry and commerce? Even this pure natural science is provided with an aim, as with its material, only through trade and industry, through the sensuous activity of men. So much is this activity, this unceasing sensuous labour and creation, this production, the basis of the whole sensuous world as it now exists, that, were it interrupted only for a year, Feuerbach would not only find an enormous change in the natural world, but would very soon find that the whole world of men and his own perceptive faculty, nay his own existence, were missing. Of course, in all this the priority of external nature remains unassailed, and all this has no application to the original men produced by *generatio aequivoca* [spontaneous generation]; but this differentiation has meaning only insofar as man is considered to be distinct from nature. For that matter, nature, the nature that preceded human history, is not by any means the nature in which Feuerbach lives, it is nature which today no longer exists anywhere (except perhaps on a few Australian coral-islands of recent origin) and which, therefore, does not exist for Feuerbach.

“Certainly Feuerbach has a great advantage over the “pure” materialists in that he realises how man too is an “object of the senses.” But apart from the fact that he only conceives him as an “object of the senses, not as sensuous activity,” because he still remains in the realm of theory and conceives of men not in their given social connection, not under their existing conditions of life, which have made them *what* they are, he never arrives at the really existing active men, but stops at the abstraction “man,” and gets no further than recognising “the true, individual, corporeal man,” emotionally, i.e. he knows no other “human relationships” “of man to man” than love and friendship, and even then idealised. He gives no criticism of the present conditions of life. Thus he never manages to conceive the sensuous world as the total living sensuous *activity* of the individuals composing it; and therefore when, for example, he sees instead of healthy men a crowd of scrofulous, overworked and consumptive

starvelings, he is compelled to take refuge in the “higher perception” and in the ideal “compensation in the species,” and thus to relapse into idealism at the very point where the communist materialist sees the necessity, and at the same time the condition, of a transformation both of industry and of the social structure.

“As far as Feuerbach is a materialist he does not deal with history, and as far as he considers history he is not a materialist. With him materialism and history diverge completely, a fact which incidentally is already obvious from what has been said.” (Marx and Engels 1846 [1976]).

However, it must be admitted that the German classical idealism ended with the ‘materialism’ of Feuerbach, which in turn subsequently paved the way for Marxian dialectical materialism. The progress of philosophy into its logical culmination got a fillip from some of the scientific developments of this period that appeared in the *Origin of Species* (1859) and *Descent of Man* (1871) of Charles Robert Darwin (1809 – 1882; English naturalist and originator of the theory of evolution) and *Man’s Place in Nature* (1863) of Thomas Henry Huxley (1825 – 1895; English biologist, known as ‘Darwin’s Bulldog’). These works provided a plausible, empirically grounded case for two of the main planks of materialism, the claim that the organization of living things into forms admirably adapted for survival and reproduction can be explained without appeal to immanent or transcendent purposes, and the claim that humans are a part and product of the natural world. In the new light, Frederick Engels subjected the Feuerbachian ‘materialism’ to a harsher critique in his *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*:

“The course of evolution of Feuerbach is that of a Hegelian – a never quite orthodox Hegelian, it is true – into a materialist; an evolution which at a definite stage necessitates a complete rupture with the idealist system of his predecessor. With irresistible force, Feuerbach is finally driven to the realization that the Hegelian premundane existence of the “absolute idea”, the “pre-existence of the logical categories” before the world existed, is nothing more than the fantastic survival of the belief in the existence of an extra-mundane creator; that the material, sensuously perceptible world to which we ourselves belong is the only reality; and that our consciousness and thinking, however supra-sensuous they may seem, are the product of a material, bodily organ, the brain. Matter is not a product of mind, but mind itself is merely the highest product of matter. This is, of course, pure materialism. But, having

got so far, Feuerbach stops short. He cannot overcome the customary philosophical prejudice, prejudice not against the thing but against the name materialism. He says:

“To me materialism is the foundation of the edifice of human essence and knowledge; but to me it is not what it is to the physiologist, to the natural scientists in the narrower sense, for example, to Moleschott, and necessarily is from their standpoint and profession, namely, the edifice itself. Backwards I fully agree with the materialists; but not forwards.”

“Here, Feuerbach lumps together the materialism that is a general world outlook resting upon a definite conception of the relation between matter and mind, and the special form in which this world outlook was expressed at a definite historical stage – namely, in the 18th century. More than that, he lumps it with the shallow, vulgarized form in which the materialism of the 18th century continues to exist today in the heads of naturalists and physicians, the form which was preached on their tours in the fifties by Buchner, Vogt, and Moleschott. But just as idealism underwent a series of stages of development, so also did materialism. With each epoch-making discovery even in the sphere of natural science, it has to change its form; and after history was also subjected to materialistic treatment, a new avenue of development has opened here, too.

“The materialism of the last century was predominantly mechanical, because at that time, of all natural sciences, only mechanics, and indeed only the mechanics of solid bodies – celestial and terrestrial – in short, the mechanics of gravity, had come to any definite close. Chemistry at that time existed only in its infantile, phlogistic form. Biology still lay in swaddling clothes; vegetable and animal organisms had been only roughly examined and were explained by purely mechanical causes. What the animal was to Descartes, man was to the materialists of the 18th century – a machine. This exclusive application of the standards of mechanics to processes of a chemical and organic nature – in which processes the laws of mechanics are, indeed, also valid, but are pushed into the backgrounds by other, higher laws – constitutes the first specific but at that time inevitable limitations of classical French materialism.

“The second specific limitation of this materialism lay in its inability to comprehend the universe as a process, as matter undergoing uninterrupted historical development. This was in accordance with the level of the natural science of that time, and with the metaphysical, that is, anti-dialectical manner of philosophizing connected with it.

Nature, so much was known, was in eternal motion. But according to the ideas of that time, this motion turned, also eternally, in a circle and therefore never moved from the spot; it produced the same results over and over again. This conception was at that time inevitable. The Kantian theory of the origin of the Solar System [that the Sun and planets originated from incandescent rotating nebulous masses] had been put forward but recently and was still regarded merely as a curiosity. The history of the development of the Earth, geology, was still totally unknown, and the conception that the animate natural beings of today are the result of a long sequence of development from the simple to the complex could not at that time scientifically be put forward at all. The unhistorical view of nature was therefore inevitable. We have the less reason to reproach the philosophers of the 18th century on this account since the same thing is found in Hegel. According to him, nature, as a mere “alienation” of the idea, is incapable of development in time – capable only of extending its manifoldness in space, so that it displays simultaneously and alongside of one another all the stages of development comprised in it, and is condemned to an eternal repetition of the same processes. This absurdity of a development in space, but outside of time – the fundamental condition of all development – Hegel imposes upon nature just at the very time when geology, embryology, the physiology of plants and animals, and organic chemistry were being built up, and when everywhere on the basis of these new sciences brilliant foreshadowings of the later theory of evolution were appearing (for instance, Goethe and Lamarck). But the system demanded it; hence the method, for the sake of the system, had to become untrue to itself.

“This same unhistorical conception prevailed also in the domain of history. Here the struggle against the remnants of the Middle Ages blurred the view. The Middle Ages were regarded as a mere interruption of history by a thousand years of universal barbarism. The great progress made in the Middle Ages – the extension of the area of European culture, the viable great nations taking form there next to each other, and finally the enormous technical progress of the 14th and 15th centuries – all this was not seen. Thus a rational insight into the great historical interconnectedness was made impossible, and history served at best as a collection of examples and illustrations for the use of philosophers.

“The vulgarizing pedlars, who in Germany in the fifties dabbled in materialism, by no means overcame this limitation of their teachers. All the advances of natural science

which had been made in the meantime served them only as new proofs against the existence of a creator of the world; and, indeed, they did not in the least make it their business to develop the theory any further. Though idealism was at the end of its tether and was dealt a death-blow by the Revolution of 1848, it had the satisfaction of seeing that materialism had for the moment fallen lower still. Feuerbach was unquestionably right when he refused to take responsibility for this materialism; only he should not have confounded the doctrines of these itinerant preachers with materialism in general.

“Here, however, there are two things to be pointed out. First, even during Feuerbach’s lifetime, natural science was still in that process of violent fermentation which only during the last 15 years had reached a clarifying, relative conclusion. New scientific data were acquired to a hitherto unheard-of extent, but the establishing of interrelations, and thereby the bringing of order into this chaos of discoveries following closely upon each other’s heels, has only quite recently become possible. It is true that Feuerbach had lived to see all three of the decisive discoveries – that of the cell, the transformation of energy, and the theory of evolution named after Darwin. But how could the lonely philosopher, living in rural solitude, be able sufficiently to follow scientific developments in order to appreciate at their full value discoveries which natural scientists themselves at that time either still contested or did not know how to make adequate use of? The blame for this falls solely upon the wretched conditions in Germany, in consequence of which cobweb-spinning eclectic flea-crackers had taken possession of the chairs of philosophy, while Feuerbach, who towered above them all, had to rusticate and grow sour in a little village. It is therefore not Feuerbach’s fault that this historical conception of nature, which had now become possible and which removed all the one-sidedness of French materialism, remained inaccessible to him.

“Secondly, Feuerbach is quite correct in asserting that exclusively natural-scientific materialism is indeed “the foundation of the edifice of human knowledge, but not the edifice itself”. For we live not only in nature but also in human society, and this also no less than nature has its history of development and its science. It was therefore a question of bringing the science of society, that is, the sum total of the so-called historical and philosophical sciences, into harmony with the materialist foundation, and of reconstructing it thereupon. But it did not fall to Feuerbach’s lot to do this. In spite of the “foundation”, he remained here bound by the traditional idealist fetters, a fact which

he recognizes in these words: “Backwards I agree with the materialists, but not forwards!”” (Engels 1886 [1970]).

Engels maintained that it was Feuerbach himself who did not go “forwards”, especially in the social domain and that this was again “chiefly due to this reclusion which compelled him to produce thoughts out of his solitary head instead of in amicable and hostile encounters with other men of his calibre”. This in turn kept him an idealist in this sphere:

“The real idealism of Feuerbach becomes evident as soon as we come to his philosophy of religion and ethics. He by no means wishes to abolish religion; he wants to perfect it. Philosophy itself must be absorbed in religion.....

“Feuerbach’s idealism consists here in this: he does not simply accept mutual relations based on reciprocal inclination between human beings, such as sex love, friendship, compassion, self-sacrifice, etc., as what they are in themselves — without associating them with any particular religion which to him, too, belongs to the past; but instead he asserts that they will attain their full value only when consecrated by the name of religion. The chief thing for him is not that these purely human relations exist, but that they shall be conceived of as the new, true, religion. They are to have full value only after they have been marked with a religious stamp. Religion is derived from *religare* [‘to bind’] and meant, originally, a bond. Therefore, every bond between two people is a religion. Such etymological tricks are the last resort of idealist philosophy. Not what the word means according to the historical development of its actual use, but what it ought to mean according to its derivation is what counts. And so sex love, and the intercourse between the sexes, is apotheosized to a *religion*, merely in order that the word religion, which is so dear to idealistic memories, may not disappear from the language. The Parisian reformers of the Louis Blanc trend used to speak in precisely the same way in the forties. They, likewise, could conceive of a man without religion only as a monster, and used to say to us: “*Donc, l’atheisme c’est votre religion!*” [“Well, then atheism is your religion!”] If Feuerbach wishes to establish a true religion upon the basis of an essentially materialist conception of nature, that is the same as regarding modern chemistry as true alchemy. If religion can exist without its god, alchemy can exist without its philosopher’s stone. By the way, there exists a very close connection between alchemy and religion. The philosopher’s stone has many godlike properties and the Egyptian-Greek alchemists of the first two centuries of our era had a hand in the

development of Christian doctrines, as the data given by Kopp and Bertholet have proved.....

“In short, the Feuerbachian theory of morals fares like all its predecessors. It is designed to suit all periods, all peoples and all conditions, and precisely for that reason it is never and nowhere applicable. It remains, as regards the real world, as powerless as Kant’s categorical imperative. In reality every class, even every profession, has its own morality, and even this it violates whenever it can do so with impunity. And love, which is to unite all, manifests itself in wars, altercations, lawsuits, domestic broils, divorces, and every possible exploitation of one by another.

“Now how was it possible that the powerful impetus given by Feuerbach turned out to be so unfruitful for himself? For the simple reason that Feuerbach himself never contrives to escape from the realm of abstraction — for which he has a deadly hatred — into that of living reality. He clings fiercely to nature and man; but nature and man remain mere words with him. He is incapable of telling us anything definite either about real nature or real men. But from the abstract man of Feuerbach, one arrives at real living men only when one considers them as participants in history. And that is what Feuerbach resisted, and therefore the year 1848, which he did not understand, meant to him merely the final break with the real world, retirement into solitude. The blame for this again falls chiefly on the conditions them obtaining in Germany, which condemned him to rot away miserably.

“But the step which Feuerbach did not take nevertheless had to be taken. The cult of abstract man, which formed the kernel of Feuerbach’s new religion, had to be replaced by the science of real men and of their historical development. This further development of Feuerbach’s standpoint beyond Feuerbach was inaugurated by Marx in 1845 in *The Holy Family*.” (Engels 1886 [1970]).

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