

The Young Marx's Materialism and the Self-Formative Nature of Humankind

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Introduction

It is commonly recognized that Marx established his own materialist position in the “Theses on Feuerbach” (1845). A large number of Marxist scholars in Japan prefer the term “practical materialism” to historical materialism (e.g. Tairako 2002), the former of which comes from Marx's own wording in the Theses, while he had never used the latter despite its orthodoxy. I agree with the view that the former term is more appropriate, but simultaneously feel that it needs further investigation of what the term *praktisch* or practical represents about the Marx's brand of materialism.

In this presentation, I'd like to show how Marx's concept of materialism formed these ideas through the history traced back to his earliest study of philosophy Marx. The First Thesis draws a contrast between the concepts of “things, reality, sensuousness” in the form of “object” or “contemplation” and those in the form of “activity” or subjective “practice.” We can see from the Third Thesis that Marx's materialism is characterized by the maxim that “the educator must himself be educated” in the task of humankind to change their own circumstances (MECW 5: 3-4; MEGA IV/3: 19-20). My argument is

The way how the young Marx elaborated his own materialism will be shown in the history of his studies of ancient natural philosophy, Hegel's dialectics, and French materialism. This brief but somewhat complex history starts from the attempt to adapt Hegelianism to Marx's philosophical project, developing into the full-blown critique of Hegel's dialectics, and then of Feuerbach's humanist materialism. This theoretical development is characterized by the break from both Hegelian idealism and what can be called sensualist materialism. In criticizing them, Marx established his position on the self-formative nature of humankind.

[1] The chief defect of all previous materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that things [Gegenstand], reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the object, or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was set forth abstractly by idealism — which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from conceptual objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity. ...

[3] The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that the educator must himself be educated. This doctrine

must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. / The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice. (MECW 5: 3-4; MEGA IV/3: 19-20)

1. The Self-Formative Matter and the Consciousness

1a. Marx on the Hegelian History of Philosophy

The genealogy of Marx's practical materialism should be begun with his earliest attempt to discover how it is possible to make a philosophical turn towards the grasp of real-phenomenal world itself. At the beginning of the Fifth Notebook on Epicurean Philosophy (c.1839), Marx presented an outline of the history of ancient Greek philosophy. He described the development of νοῦς (*nous*, understanding or intelligence) from Anaxagoras to the Sophists, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle as its movement towards the "true conceptual individuality (wirkliche begriffliche Einzelheit)" (MEGA IV/1: 99; MECW 1: 490).

This outline resembles the plot of Hegel's history of philosophy. According to Hegel, *nous* is an act or a practice in a strong sense. When you know, for example, that dogs are an animal, this knowleg is inherent in the nature of dogs, while an idea of wooden desk is external to wood itself. In the former case, the idea of dog is the "universality" which determines real beings "in and from itself (in und aus sich selbst)" (Hegel 1971: I.369). Although this principle of *nous* was at first grasped by Anaxagoras, it was Plato who elevated *nous* to the "essence of the universe" (Hegel 1971: II. 10), and Aristotle then gave the ultimate definition of *nous*, the unity of thinking and objective beings (II.161-162). However, Hegel continues, in the post-Aristotelian philosophies, the Stoic and Epicurean, this ultimate form of *nous* as self-reflexive intelligence was replaced with the dogmatism of self-consciousness (II.246-247, 250).

Marx's history of philosophy is different from Hegel's in two respects: in the evaluations of Epicurus and Aristotle. As is commonly known, Marx, in his doctoral dissertation, appreciated Epicurean philosophy as a philosophy of the freedom of self-consciousness. This is not the sole deviations of Marx's history of philosophy from Hegel's, but the other is about Aristotle. While Hegel sees that the ancient philosophy reached a climax with Aristotle, Marx emphasizes a historical turn made by him. See a passage in the Fifth Notebook on Epicurean Philosophy.

... the practical motion [of *nous*] in Socrates becomes a general and ideal one in Plato, and the νοῦς expands itself into a realm of ideas. In Aristotle this process is apprehended again in individuality, but this is now true conceptual individuality.

As in the history of philosophy there are nodal points which raise philosophy in itself to concretion, apprehend abstract principles in a totality, and thus break off the rectilinear process, so also there are moments when philosophy turns its eyes to the external world, and no longer apprehends it, but, as a practical person ... as Prometheus, having stolen fire from heaven, begins to build houses and to settle upon the earth, so philosophy, expanded to be the whole world, turns itself against the world

of appearance [wendet ... sich gegen die erscheinende Welt]. The same now with the philosophy of Hegel. (MECW 1: 490-491; MEGA IV/1: 99)¹

According to Marx, Aristotle's recapturing of "true conceptual individuality" draws a contrast to the Platonic *nous* which "expands itself into a realm of ideas," and corresponds to the "moments" in the history of philosophy when "philosophy turns its eyes to the external world." In this moment, the philosophical consciousness, which has in the Platonic manner "expanded to be the whole world," turns itself in the Aristotelean manner, confronting to the "world of appearance." Marx adds that the same shall happen to Hegelian philosophy. This reveals that, in his inclination to the philosophical confrontation to phenomenal world, Marx the student was inspired by what he considered Aristotote's achievement in the history of ancient philosophy.

The excerpts from Aristotle's *De anima* (On the Soul), which is included in Marx's Berlin Notebooks (c.1840), shows what of Aristotle's *nous* inspired Marx².

In this notebook, Marx rephrases Aristotle's formulation of *nous*, an "agent which actively knows something [der, der wirklich wissend ist]," briefly as "the conscious soul (die bewußte Seele)" (MEGA IV/1: 162; *De anima*, 429b). This renaming of Aristotle's active mind as "consciousness" is remarkably Hegelian. According to Hegel, what Aristotle means by *nous* is the soul "which possesses consciousness," but a conscious soul "never exists in reality before it thinks" (Hegel 1971: II. 212).

On the other hand, Marx notices that, in Chapter 6 of the Book 3 of *De anima*, Aristotle makes a distinction between the two modes of *nous* or consciousness. The one is the mode of thinking (Denken) that is "always true," while the other is the mode of thinking that can be true or false. Marx discusses that, according to Aristotle, the latter mode of thinking can make an error insofar as it is the combination of "two determinations (zwei Bestimmugen)," like existence and thought, universality and particularity, appearance and essence, and so on. In this mode, two determinations are external or mutually exclusive, while in the former mode of thinking, consciousness reaches the essential being, with the consequence that consciousness and beings are internal or identical. Marx calls this consciousness the "essential self-consciousness (wesentliches Selbstbewußtsein)" (MEGA IV/1: 164, 167; *De anima*, 430b).

It could not have been from Hegel's history of philosophy that Marx learned the distinction between fallible consciousness and "essential self-consciousness." This shows in what respect Marx the

¹ In MECW, this passage is included in the Sixth Notebook, while the editors of MEGA includes it in the Fifth (MEGA IV/1: 99 ff.).

² In consideration of the fact that Marx, in one of the Berlin Notebooks, translated Aristotle's *De anima* into a German text containing certain untranslated Greek and Latin terms, the presenter translated the passages of *De anima* from Marx's German translation. According to the MEGA editors (MEGA IV/1: 733), Marx seemingly referred to a copy printed based on Casaubon's edition (Aristoteles 1605) in which the Greek text is printed along with the Latin translation.

student was not pleased with Hegel's formulation of the "self-conscious *nous* (selbstbewußte *nous*).” What interested Marx was not the active role of mind itself, but rather the way how an active mind can grasp the phenomenal world itself. He discovered a suitable formulation of such a way of thinking in Aristotle's *De anima*, an act of mind in which consciousness becomes identical to beings.

1b. Doctoral Dissertation

It was this active way of thinking that Marx believed to bring out from the Epicurean philosophy. In the doctoral dissertation (c. 1841), he put the Epicurean way of thinking in contrast to the Democritean philosophy. The "empiricist" Democritus reduces "sensuous world" to "subjective semblance," despite that he considers nature "from the point of view of necessity" and supposes the "real existence of thing." In his view, necessity only relates semblance to real existence only as two mutually external determinations. To the contrary, Marx argues that the "dogmatist" Epicurus, who "scorns empiricism" and "sees everywhere only chance," actually considers "the phenomenal world to be real." In his view, real existence is semblance itself. This contrast reminds us of the distinction between fallible consciousness and essential self-consciousness which Marx discussed in his notebook on Aristotle.

... The one is a sceptic, the other a dogmatist; the one considers the sensuous world as subjective semblance, the other as objective appearance. He who considers the sensuous world as subjective semblance applies himself to empirical natural science and to positive knowledge, and represents the unrest of observation, experimenting, learning everywhere, ranging over the wide, wide world. The other, who considers the phenomenal world to be real, scorns empiricism; embodied in him are the serenity of thought satisfied in itself, the self-sufficiency that draws its knowledge *ex principio interno*. But the contradiction goes still farther. The sceptic and empiricist, who holds sensuous nature to be subjective semblance, considers it from the point of view of necessity and endeavours to explain and to understand the real existence of things. The philosopher and dogmatist, on the other hand, who considers appearance to be real, sees everywhere only chance, and his method of explanation tends rather to negate all objective reality of nature. ... (MECW 1: 45; MEGA I/1: 31-32)

What does Marx mean by considering the phenomenal world to be real? According to him, Epicurus demonstrates this way of thinking in his theory of the atom which focuses on the movement of the atom as the *self-forming process of the material*, the process in which *hylē* (matter) and *morphē* (form) are integrated.

The Epicurian theory of the atom is notorious for the idea that the atom sometimes and slightly deviates from the fall in a straight line. Marx argues that this idea fall reflects the dual nature of the atom in an abstract level. The atoms fall in a straight line in accordance with its *material* essence, while they decline in accordance with its *formal* essence, because the atoms "meet" or collide with

one another “only by virtue of their declination from the straight line,” and this collision or repulsion creates the phenomenal world. In this sense, declination is the “form-determination (Formbestimmung)” in which the atom’s matter and form are “united synthetically.”

The concept of the atom is therefore realised in repulsion, inasmuch as it is abstract form, but no less also the opposite, inasmuch as it is abstract matter In the repulsion of the atoms, ... their materiality, which was posited in the fall in a straight line, and the form-determination, which was established in the declination, are united synthetically. (MECW 1: 52; MEGA I/1: 39)

Marx further discusses what Epicurus thought about the movement of the atom in a real - phenomenal level, in other words, in the dimension of time in which all things are finite and change their forms. Even though the atom is imperceptible in objective things themselves, the process of their transformation makes the existence of the atom evident in the phenomenal world. In this sense, Marx argues that time, the process of transformation, is the “active form of appearance,” while space is the “passive” one.

Composition [of objective things] is the merely passive form of concrete nature, time its active form. If I consider composition in terms of its being, then the atom exists beyond it, in the void, in the imagination. If I consider the atom in terms of its concept, then composition either does not exist at all or exists only in the subjective imagination. ... Time, in contrast, is in the world of appearance what the concept of the atom is in the world of essence, namely, the abstraction, destruction and reduction of all determined being into being-for-itself. / ... Epicurus makes the contradiction between matter and form the characteristic of the nature of appearance, which thus becomes the counter-image of the nature of essence, the atom. This is done by time being opposed to space, the active form of appearance to the passive form. (MECW 1: 63-64; MEGA I/1: 49)

In the eyes of Epicurus, form and matter are ultimately reconciled with each other in the “eternity of the heavenly bodies,” in which “all antinomies between form and matter, between concept and existence, which constituted the development of the atom, are resolved.” Marx argues that Epicurus saw celestial bodies as the atoms becoming real, and this was the reason why he was opposed to the theory of meteors, because he was afraid that their eternity, their appearance as the existing universality, because he believed that the eternity of things would destroy the “ataraxy [tranquility] of individual self-consciousness,” in short, the “absoluteness and freedom” of mind.

The atom is matter in the form of independence, of individuality, as it were the representative of weight. But the heavenly bodies are the supreme realisation of weight. In them all antinomies between form and matter, between concept and existence, which constituted the development of the atom, are resolved; in them all required determinations are realised. The heavenly bodies are eternal

and unchangeable; they have their centre of gravity in, not outside, themselves. Their only action is motion, and, separated by empty space, they swerve from the straight line, and form a system of repulsion and attraction while at the same time preserving their own independence and also, finally, generating time out of themselves as the form of their appearance. The heavenly bodies are therefore the atoms become real. In them matter has received in itself individuality. Here Epicurus must therefore have glimpsed the highest existence of his principle, the peak and culminating point of his system. ... when he comes upon independent, indestructible matter in the heavenly bodies whose eternity and unchangeability were proved by the belief of the people, the judgment of philosophy, the evidence of the senses: then his one and only desire is to pull it down into earthly transience. He turns vehemently against those who worship an independent nature containing in itself the quality of individuality. This is his most glaring contradiction. (MECW 1: 70-71; MEGA I/1: 55-56)

In the theory of meteors therefore appears the soul of the Epicurean philosophy of nature. Nothing is eternal which destroys the ataraxy of individual self-consciousness. The heavenly bodies disturb its ataraxy, its equanimity with itself, because they are the existing universality, because in them nature has become independent. (MECW 1: 72; MEGA I/1: 57)

What Marx brought out from Epicurean philosophy was thus the way of thinking to grasp the things in the phenomenal world as the self-formation of the material. He characterized the Epicurean way of thinking as the one to conceive matter itself to be active, but never to serve as passive material to which a certain form is given from the outside. In this way of thinking, form as the object of *nous* (understanding or consciousness) never remains as abstraction which is applied to objective things externally, but is rather recognized as appearance which matter itself assumes through movement in the phenomenal world.

We can see here that, although following Hegelian terminology and dialectics, Marx's way of thinking already started to deviate from a distinct trend in Hegelianism, namely, the development of consciousness coincided with the development of idea in the real-historical world. In Hegel's own dialectics, the idea as form was considered to be dominant over matter. In his attempt to highlight the contradiction between matter and form apparently in the same manner as Hegel's, Marx the student unfolded this contradiction to show how matter, assuming its distinct form, becomes intelligible in the phenomenal world.

2. Materialism and the Self-Formative Nature of Humankind

After the end of student life, Marx sometimes employed the dialectics of form and matter to practical subjects in his journalistic works. After the ban of the *Rheinische Zeitung* in March 1843, he started to criticize Hegelianism including the latter's assumption of the predominance of form-idea over matter, particularly in the manuscript of the "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law" (1843). However, it is appropriate for us to skip them and go on to the "Critique of Hegel's

Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole,” a part of the momentuous “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts” of 1844 (MECW 3: 326-346; MEGA I/2: 399-418), because the connection between Marx’s concept of self-formation of matter and his commitment to materialism is more explicit in the latter philosophical manuscript than the former writings or manuscript on politics and other practical issues.

2a. Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts

In the writing of the “Critique of Hegel’s Dialectic and Philosophy,” Marx was largely inspired by Ludwig Feuerbach as the establisher of “true materialism and of real science.” He drew the contrast between Hegel’s abstraction and dialectics on the one hand, and Feuerbach’s humanism and materialism on the other, which is capable of being seen as the development of Marx’s methodology in natural philosophy, namely, *nous* as the act of mind to grasp the movements of the self-formative matter in the real-phenomenal world.

Marx was discontented with Hegel’s way to overcome the contradiction between self-consciousness and the phenomenal world. He characterized Hegel’s scheme of alienation or estrangement by the opposition between “object and subject” or “abstract thinking and sensuous reality,” in relation to which “[a]ll other oppositions and movements” are reduced to the mere “semblance.” In this scheme, objects are the alienation of “essential powers” of human beings, and the opposition is to be overcome through the attainment of self-consciousness, the consciousness of object as the objectification of subjectivity. However, the overcoming (or transcendence) of this opposition, through which human beings appropriate their own “essential powers,” occurs only in “consciousness,” in “abstraction,” or in the “movements of thought.”

... The estrangement [Entfremdung], which ... forms the real interest of the transcendence [Aufhebung] of this alienation [Entäußerung], is the opposition of in itself and for itself, of consciousness and self-consciousness, of object and subject – that is to say, it is the opposition between abstract thinking and sensuous reality or real sensuousness within thought itself. All other oppositions and movements of these oppositions are but the semblance, the cloak, the exoteric shape of these oppositions which alone matter, and which constitute the meaning of these other, profane oppositions. It is not the fact that the human being objectifies himself inhumanly, in opposition to himself, but the fact that he objectifies himself in distinction from and in opposition to abstract thinking, that constitutes the posited essence of the estrangement and the thing to be superseded [aufzuhebende].

The appropriation of man’s essential powers, which have become objects – indeed, alien objects – is thus in the first place only an appropriation occurring in consciousness, in pure thought, i.e., in abstraction: it is the appropriation of these objects as thoughts and as movements of thought. (MECW 3: 331; MEGA I/2: 403)

The greatest problem of Hegel's scheme of alienation is, according to Marx, to treat "sense, religion, state power, etc." as "spiritual entities," in accordance with Hegel's supposition that "only mind is the true essence of man, and the true form of mind is thinking mind, theological, speculative mind." This means that the "human character of nature" and history as the artificial nature are reduced to the "products of abstract mind" and therefore to the mere "phases of mind" or "thought-entities" (MECW 3: 332; MEGA I/2: 404).

Refusing this predominance of speculative mind over the objective world, Marx took a counter view of humankind as a "living, natural being," a subjectivity "equipped and endowed with objective (i.e., material) essential powers" (MECW 3: 335 MEGA I/2: 407). This self-conscious being knows that the objective world is the product or result of self-alienation. What mattered to Hegel was, however, the process of self-alienation itself. What Marx highlighted in contrast to Hegel's dialectics was the inseparability of the act of mind positing the natural-objective world and the underlying condition of humankind whose existence is posited by objects in the same world. This latter view, the discovery Marx obviously ascribed to Feuerbach, establishes the foundation of "consistent naturalism or humanism" which unifies "idealism and materialism."

Whenever real, corporeal man, man with his feet firmly on the solid ground, man exhaling and inhaling all the forces of nature, posits his real, objective essential powers as alien objects by his externalisation, it is not the act of positing which is the subject in this process: it is the subjectivity of objective essential powers, whose action, therefore, must also be something objective. An objective being acts objectively ... He only creates or posits objects, because he is posited by objects – because at bottom he is nature. ...

Here we see how consistent naturalism or humanism is distinct from both idealism and materialism, and constitutes at the same time the unifying truth of both. We see also how only naturalism is capable of comprehending the action of world history. (MECW 3: 336; MEGA I/2: 407-408)

We can see here how Marx developed his idea of active mind, presented in the doctoral dissertation, into this naturalist-humanist scheme of self-consciousness confronting the objective-phenomenal world. According to Marx the student, the act of mind can never attain true knowledge by associating semblance and real existence externally, but needs to grasp the movements in the phenomenal world. However, it was unclear in the doctoral dissertation *how* a self-consciousness can succeed in achieving the latter. Marx virtually answered to this question here: a self-consciousness can achieve this insofar as it is a subjectivity endowed with objective "essential powers." What Marx highlighted here was "human sensibility" distinguished from the immediate sensation of objective things. Sensibility in this sense plays an intermediative role between human subjectivity and the objective world. In other words, human sensibility is natural insofar as a consciousness perceives the objective world in which human subjectivity is already alienated. Thus, the "species-being [Gattungswesen]" of humankind is manifested "both in his being and in his

knowing.” Now, Marx’s earlier idea of active mind to grasp the world was complemented with the inseparability of knowing and being-in-the-world.

... man is not merely a natural being: he is a human natural being. That is to say, he is a being for himself. Therefore he is a species-being [Gattungswesen], and has to confirm and manifest himself as such both in his being and in his knowing. Therefore, human objects are not natural objects as they immediately present themselves, and neither is human sense as it immediately is – as it is objectively – human sensibility, human objectivity. (MECW 3: 337; MEGA I/2: 409)

What Marx saw as Hegel’s critical failure was a logical leap from self-consciousness to the “world of sense.” In his dialectics, the object turns out to be the self-alienation of consciousness, which implies that consciousness “pretends to be directly the other of itself,” namely, the real world. Thus, as Feuerbach wrote in §30 of the *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft* (1843), Hegel’s dialectics tempts thought to surpass itself in thought.

... The way in which consciousness is, and in which something is for it, is knowing. Knowing is its sole act. Something therefore comes to be for consciousness insofar as the latter knows this something. Knowing is its sole objective relation. It, consciousness, then, knows the nullity of the object (i.e., knows the non-existence of the distinction between the object and itself, the non-existence of the object for it) because it knows the object as its self-alienation ...

...

In this discussion all the illusions of speculation are brought together.

... consciousness, self-consciousness, is at home in its other-being as such [in seinem Anderssein als solchem bei sich] ...

This implies ... that consciousness (knowing as knowing, thinking as thinking) pretends to be directly the other of itself – to be the world of sense, the real world, life – thought surpassing itself in thought (Feuerbach). (MECW 3: 338-339; MEGA I/2: 410-411)

2b. *The Holy Family and ad Feuerbach*

What the young Marx highlighted in the appreciation of Feuerbach’s naturalist-humanist materialism was, as presented above, the role of sensibility to intermediate subjectivity and objectivity. Marx’s inclination to sensibility would, however, last for a very short period, namely, until the publishment of *The Holy Family* in February 1845, which was a few months before Marx’s writing of the “Theses on Feuerbach.”

The most noteworthy part of *The Holy Family* in respect to the purpose of this presentation is a section titled “Critical Battle against French Materialism” (Chapter VI.3.d, MEW 2: 131-141). In this section, Marx attempted to write a “profane” history of materialism for the purpose of positing it in contrast to Bruno Bauer’s history of materialism which is Hegelian, and Marx sarcastically

called “critical” history of materialism.

In a somewhat surprising manner, Marx drew two strands of the Eighteenth-century materialism, a “Cartesian” on the one hand and a “Lockean” or “sensualist” on the other, arguing that the latter strand flows into “socialism” and “communism” in his own age (MEW 2, 132, 136, 138). We see here the continuation of Marx’s inclination to sensibility as the mediation between subjectivity and objectivity, which is accountable by his polemical purpose in this book: to attack the idealism of Bruno Bauer and his followers, accompanied by political reactionary, and fundamentally inspired by Hegel. It is worth also noting here that Hegel expressed in one of his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* his disgust with what he called “the worst Lockism,” namely sensualism and empiricism (Hegel 1971: II.212). Marx as an ally to Feuerbach would see this as a good reason for tracing his philosophical position back to the Lockean or sensualist strand of materialism.

An equally suprising point is the sudden enter of the sensualist and materialist thinkers of England and France in the process of Marx’s theoretical development, as well as the sudden disappearance of the most of them in his latter writings. However, we need not wonder about that because Marx used a source for writing a “profane” history of materialism. As Olivier Bloch proved in the article of 1977 (reprinted in Bloch 1997: 384-441), Marx’s history of materialism was for the most part the adaptation, even the plagiarism, of the history of philosophy written by Charles Renouvier, who was a Saint-Simonist and Spiritualist philosopher at the time, and a later neo-Kantian.

There is no need to compare Marx’s text to Renouvier’s in this presentation, except the one passage in which Marx draws out the practical implication of French materialism in a way totally opposite to Renouvier. As a spilitualist, Renouvier had a keen perception of the conceptual affinity between sensualism and materialism. According to him, sensualism and materialism are necessarily accompanied by “fatalism,” and when the “study of human was submitted to sensation, we understand that humankind themselves give way to nature” (my translation).

... we must quickly follow the development of sensualism and its application to morality and politics. Since the study of human was submitted to sensation, we understand that humankind themselves give way to nature. Materialism and fatalism appear to be irresistible: [the subject matter of such a study is] no longer God, but a being which is material, multiple, endowed with various properties, indefinitely modified by movement, and whose changes are bound by the laws we can know from observation; ... morality as personal interest well-understood, namely, analyzed and compared to the general interest; ... society becoming a union of animals which necessity forces to unite, and interest forces to love each other; ... this is what we call a system of nature ... (Renouvier 1842: 341)

While it was for Renouvier a disaster to see that “humankind themselves give way to nature,” Marx’s attempt was to establish a philosophical position on the basis of humankind as nature and human sensibility. It is therefore natural that Marx presented the sensualist strand of materialism as

a doctrine for human flourishing, rather than an amoral and soulless doctrine. He argued that, from materialistic theories such as “original goodness and equal intellectual endowment of men, the omnipotence of experience, habit and education, and the influence of environment on man, the great significance of industry, the justification of enjoyment, etc.,” one necessarily draws an implication that the conscious transformation of their environment makes human beings truly human. If “man is shaped by environment, his environment must be made human,” and if “man is social by nature, he will develop his true nature only in society.”

There is no need for any great penetration to see from the teaching of materialism on the original goodness and equal intellectual endowment of men, the omnipotence of experience, habit and education, and the influence of environment on man, the great significance of industry, the justification of enjoyment, etc., how necessarily materialism is connected with communism and socialism. If man draws all his knowledge, sensation, etc., from the world of the senses and the experience gained in it, then what has to be done is to arrange the empirical world in such a way that man experiences and becomes accustomed to what is truly human in it and that he becomes aware of himself as man. If correctly understood interest is the principle of all morality, man’s private interest must be made to coincide with the interest of humanity. If man is unfree in the materialistic sense, i.e., is free not through the negative power to avoid this or that, but through the positive power to assert his true individuality, crime must not be punished in the individual, but the anti-social sources of crime must be destroyed, and each man must be given social scope for the vital manifestation of his being. If man is shaped by environment, his environment must be made human. If man is social by nature, he will develop his true nature only in society, and the power of his nature must be measured not by the power of the separate individual but by the power of society. These and similar propositions are to be found almost literally even in the oldest French materialists. (MECW 4: 130-131; MEW 2: 138)

However, according to Olivier Bloch, Marx soon became aware of the “defect” of French materialism in the eighteenth-century, as well as of the “defect” of Feuerbach’s materialism. The change of Marx’s view is reflected in the First Thesis on Feuerbach: “[t]he chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included ...” At the same time, Marx must have in mind the materialism of the eighteenth-century France. In accordance with that, the names of the thinkers appearing in *The Holy Family* as the representatives in the sensualist-materialist strand, namely, Helvesius, d’Holbach, and Bentham, were never mentioned positively since Marx wrote the Theses on Feuerbach (cf. Bloch 1997: 436).

What did Marx exactly mean by the “defect” of materialism from the eighteenth-century thinkers to Feuerbach? The answer can be no other than what Marx had considered its advantage just before, namely, sensualism.

In the Manuscripts of 1844, Marx appreciated Feuerbach’s naturalist-humanist doctrine which

makes it understandable that sensibility serves as the mediation between objectivity and subjectivity. This led Marx to the idea that sensualism provides the basis for the philosophical and practical position he wanted to defend, materialism and communism. Therefore, he could say in *The Holy Family* that, “[i]f man draws all his knowledge, sensation, etc., from the world of the senses and the experience gained in it, then what has to be done is to arrange the empirical world in such a way that man experiences and becomes accustomed to what is truly human in it.”

However, to know the world through sense-experience is the way of thinking Marx himself criticized in his doctoral dissertation. According to him, Democretian empiricism supposes that real essence is hidden before subjective semblance, and that only the latter is sensuous, but this way of thinking can never grasp the movement of the material world itself. When he welcomed Feuerbach’s naturalist-humanist doctrine as the antidote to Hegelianism, Marx was probably not aware that Feuerbach’s method is essentially the same as the ancient empiricism which he had already criticized. It was also likely that, as Bloch guesses, Marx noticed after writing the history of materialism in *The Holy Family* the “defect” of the materialism of Feuerbach and the eighteenth-century thinkers, or (what I think it is proper to call) sensualist materialism.

In the First Thesis on Feuerbach, Marx could successfully distinguish his own materialism from sensualist materialism. According to him, “Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from conceptual objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity.” Marx here distinguishes the consciousness of “human activity itself as objective activity” from the consciousness of “sensuous objects.” This distinction draws the contrast between the knowledge coming from sense-experience and the *act of mind* which grasp “human activity itself” as what constitutes the objective-phenomenal world. Here, the objective of active mind is practice itself, or the objective world inseparable with human subjectivity itself. In other words, the act of mind is considered here as the way to grasp the *self-formative nature of humankind*. Marx now recognized that not only the material world but also human practice is self-formative, when he said in the Third Thesis that “[t]he coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.”

The young Marx thus broke with both Hegel and Feuerbach, or with both idealism and sensualist materialism.

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