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# **NEW ESSAYS**

*A Quarterly Devoted to the Study of Modern Society*

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# NEW ESSAYS

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## NOTES ON HISTORY

### THE AMBIGUITIES OF TOTALITARIAN IDEOLOGIES

"Things have not happened to me; on the contrary, it is I who have happened to the world." Though incongruous as a description of the impact of a politically insignificant writer on the world, this paradoxical assertion of G. B. Shaw's helps to explain a type of deviation from the traditional concepts of history which tends to arise in our time under the impact of the so-called totalitarian revolution. There is undoubtedly a sentiment in non-totalitarian countries today to the effect that "Adolf Hitler has happened to the world". On the other hand, this is also the mood in which a victorious totalitarian war-band might view its own relationship to the rest of the world.

Certain hints in this direction can be discovered in the very language of the present-day Nazi movement. "Space" or "living space" in this language connotes not just any territory in which people live, but more especially such territories outside the present domain of the Nazi rule as will belong to their empire when the time comes. Thus, there were a "Sudeten-Raum" and a "Donau-Raum", but there never was an "Elb-Raum" or a "Rhein-Raum" since those territories belonged to the German empire anyway. Even the "world" has no longer kept its traditional geographical connotation. It means to the true Hitlerite the world in which the Nazi empire lives and moves and which in due course will become in fact what it already is in essence — a part of Greater Germany, of the Nazi-dominated United States of Europe, or of whatever more extended area will ultimately suffice for the as yet undetermined "living space" of the German race.

Yet we must be careful not to overestimate this or any other feature in the ideology of present-day totalitarianism. In contrast to the belief held by many students of recent German history, the ideology of National Social-

ism offers no clues to its real aims. Unlike other ideologies, it does not even reveal the socio-political realities of a given historical situation or the genuine needs of a definite social class.

Whatever semblance of consistency can be discovered between the flagrantly meaningless and irrelevant phrases assembled in *Mein Kampf*, and the actual policies of the Nazi government is not of a logical order, nor does it result from any but the most arbitrary correlation between facts and ideas. The rapidly changing slogans of Nazism reflect nothing but the fleeting conditions of the immediate situation or the task at hand. They are not even pragmatic but outrightly opportunistic. Their very contradictions do not express, as other ideologies do, the real conflicts and struggles of a given society. They rather arise from a conscious attempt to conceal existing conflicts under the veil of newly invented and altogether fictitious conflicts

Nor would it help to describe Nazi ideology as a systematic negation and reevaluation of all traditional values in the sense of Nietzsche. It is true that one of the most striking features of Nazism during the last ten years has been its absolute irreverence towards the traditional doctrines of state, law and economics, and all other practical and theoretical taboos of the past which might in any way have obstructed its supreme goal of efficiency and conquest. Yet this destructive work has been a means rather than an end, and a matter of practice rather than an openly accepted part of the official Nazi ideology.

The main line of Nazi thought is neither traditionalistic nor modernistic, neither conservative nor nihilistic. Nazism is essentially a counter-revolutionary movement, and it partakes of all the uncertainties, the half-truths, and the mixed nature of the long sequence of counter-revolutionary movements which during the last one hundred and fifty years have disturbed the "normal" progress of European society as conceived by the several lines of inheritors of the historical philosophy of the French revolution.

We must not be misled by the occasional approaches to a genuine activist concept of history which occur in the speeches delivered for particular purposes by one or another of the leading Nazi ideologists. We must not, for example, fall for the pseudo-Nietzschean phrases with which at the first National Convention of the Historians of the New Germany in Erfurt, 1937, the president of the new-fangled "Imperial Institute for History" tried to raise his audience to the level of the historical occasion. "Like the singer Tyrtæus", said Dr. Frank, "the historian should strut in front of his marching people and testify to the eternity of the people as against the coming and going of the individuals."

### THE OLD AND THE NEW IMPERIALISM

Another and a much more important step towards a break with the traditional conception of history is contained in the work of Karl Haushofer.

It would be an oversimplification to regard the "geopolitical" theories of Haushofer and his school merely as a forceful continuation of the imperialistic tendencies of the preceding epoch which was represented, among others, by the German historian, Treitschke, and the British historian, Seely. These tendencies were still bound more or less closely to the traditional ideas of the epoch inaugurated by the French revolution. The main problem was still to create the conditions for an unrestricted exploitation of the world market; the inevitable result to draw all nations, even the most "barbaric" ones, into the orbit of Western civilization. "The bourgeoisie", said the Communist Manifesto of 1848, "compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production, to introduce what we call civilization into their midst, that is, to become bourgeois themselves. In a word, it creates a world in its own image."

As the writer has pointed out in another article,\*) that whole dream of a cosmopolitan extension of the bourgeois mode of production and of the ensuing domination of an entirely "civilized" world by the Western bourgeois class suffered several serious shocks before the advent of totalitarianism. Far from transforming the whole inhabited earth into one huge colony of the capitalist West, the world-wide expansion of Western techniques, science, political and economic institutions, nationalism, methods of warfare, merely created new weapons which the peoples of China, Japan, India and the Arabian world of Eastern Asia and North Africa could turn against the western aggressor. Thus, since the beginning of the 20th century, there has arisen that new type of imperialist expansion which found its hitherto most efficient application in the theory and practice of totalitarian aggression.

The new techniques of imperialism which were invented almost simultaneously in the East and the West are utterly different from the methods applied by that old-style imperialism of the 19th century which is somewhat nostalgically described by its eulogists as a "democratic" form of imperialist expansion. The difference does not consist, however, in an increase of violence; ruthless violence has been characteristic of every historical phase of capitalist colonization. The novelty of totalitarian politics in this respect is simply that the Nazis have extended to "civilized" European peoples the methods hitherto reserved for the "natives" or "savages" living outside so-called civilization.

The tremendous difference between the old and the new imperialism is expressed ideologically in the collapse of the "civilizing" mission which was formerly attached to the conquest of the so-called "undeveloped" parts of the inhabited earth either by the imperialists themselves or at least by those who half-heartedly opposed their realistic politics. Though this ideological claim of the liberal philanthropists, educators, historians, and other humanitarian ideologists was never fully justified, it was not entirely meaningless in regard to the objective outcome of the competitive race for colonies that was

\*) *The World Historians from Turgot to Toynbee*, Partisan Review, September, 1942.

characteristic of the foreign policies of the 19th century. There is a grain of truth even in the well-known assertion that the English "have conquered their empire in a fit of absent-mindedness". It was for markets, trade, privileges, and for the more efficient protection of economic positions already gained that the British state expanded the area of its political domination. It is also true that this old type of capitalist expansion did not lead to a very reliable form of permanent domination. As early as a quarter of a century before the Declaration of Independence, the French philosopher, Turgot, likened colonies to "fruits which cling to the tree only till they ripen". According to this idea, which after the loss of the American colonies was widely accepted among British politicians and historians, it was considered axiomatic that "every conquered empire is ephemeral". Even today an ideological trust in the educational mission of capitalist colonization is maintained in certain quarters of the radical intelligentsia in non-totalitarian countries. As Bertrand Russell says in his critical discussion of the most recent phase of English politics in India, the advantages of a higher level of civilization which at first are all on the side of the conqueror are bound to decrease with time. To be ruled, the conquered territory must be unified. Thus, sooner or later a movement of freedom will arise and will ultimately lead to the overthrow of the conqueror's rule which is based on "prestige and bluff" rather than on real force anyway.

Whatever limited application the theory just described may have had for the British and other types of 19th century colonization, it is certain that it no longer applies to the new imperialism of such totalitarian world-powers as Russia, Japan, or Germany. These powers do not even pretend to aim at a world-wide expansion of their particular brand of "civilization". They have learned to forestall the dangers which, according to the traditional theory, threaten the permanence of every capitalistic conquest and colonial expansion. They can be relied on not to unify but rather to further divide the European and extra-European spheres of their imperialist domination. Far from communicating their superior industrial and military skills to their colonial subjects, even to the modest degree in which this was done, or rather involuntarily allowed to happen, by previous rulers of empires, they do not shrink from attempting to de-industrialize even the fully developed industrial countries of Europe and other continents for the benefit of the conquering minority. There is no doubt that their policy is based on an altogether new conception of the historical process itself and of the part to be played in this process by their own wholly unfettered action.

#### **REVOLUTIONARY AND COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY ASPECTS OF TOTALITARIANISM**

It is not so certain today as it seemed to the uncritical admirers of totalitarian achievements a few years ago that the Nazis will be able to live up to the ruthlessness of their own original program. It was comparatively easy to apply the new methods of totalitarian conquest to countries which

had lagged behind in the development towards totalitarian forms — a general trend which can be traced more or less distinctly in the external and internal policies of all the great powers of the world, at least since the end of the first world war. It proved more difficult to achieve the same striking successes under more competitive conditions. The monopoly of the Nazis in totalitarian warfare and politics was broken when they tried to subdue Russia in June, 1941, and when a few months later the entrance of Japan into the war transformed a hitherto essentially European affair into a truly world-wide conflict. Since then a much less confident spirit has revealed itself on various occasions in the general tone of Nazi politics. It would seem that during the last phase even the conduct of the war itself has shown a certain tendency to relapse to the forms of the first world war.

Amidst an unprecedented collision of imperialistic forces, in which the weaker side endeavored to enlarge its conquering power by a simultaneous attack on the whole internal structure of present-day society, a fatal ambiguity appears within the aims of Nazism itself. After having gambled with the idea of a world-wide social revolution, the Nazis seem to shrink from the risks and consequences of their own original plan. Thereby they demonstrate the intrinsic limits of a counter-revolutionary movement in contrast to a genuine revolution.

#### **THE HISTORICAL PHILOSOPHY OF NAZISM**

The preceding analysis shows that the striking ambiguities which we observed in the ideological manifestations of Nazism are based on the equally ambiguous character of its historical action. In spite of appearances, totalitarianism in its present form had not yet freed itself from the traditional concepts of a bygone historical epoch. The Nazis have abandoned the ideas of the ascending phase of the capitalist age only to fall for the undynamic, fatalistic and pessimistic concept of history which in the last pre-totalitarian phase was expressed in Spengler's *Decline of the West*. Every student of Hitler's speeches during the past twenty years has been aware of the fatalistic despair which formed the persistent background of his pronouncements even in those moments when he tried to inspire his followers to their most daring and decisive actions.

This somber aspect of the historical philosophy of present-day totalitarianism is worked out at great length by the old and new ideological exponents of the Nazi myths and doctrines from Moeller van den Bruck and Rosenberg to Juenger and Steding; it is present as an unmistakable undertone even in the utterances of such extremely activist representatives of Nazism as Professor Haushofer.

National Socialism did not break with that long tradition of the historians by which, after the revolutionary inauguration of the present system of European society, the "making of history" was gradually transformed into an objective process in which history is no longer made but rather is

suffered and passively accepted by men. An important contribution to that transformation was made during the 19th century by the idealist philosophy of Hegel and, after him, by the materialist philosophy of Marx. When Marx and Engels finally broke with the "unscientific" dreams of the preceding generations of socialists and anarchists, they also abandoned that great activist concept of history which Marx in his youth had summed up in the famous statement: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is, to change it." In its further development the so-called scientific socialism of the Marxist parties was to lose even the last remnants of a revolutionary creed while, on the other hand, some of the allegedly unscientific and Utopian elements of earlier socialist thought proved themselves scientific and realistic enough when they were turned against their "scientific" detractors by the Nazi counter-revolution.

The final step in eliminating all activist elements from the historical philosophy of the 19th century was made by the ruling bourgeois class itself. Like all other "philosophy", even the philosophy of history was still too reminiscent of the revolutionary period of bourgeois thought and was therefore finally abandoned and replaced by a system of highly specialized and thus thoroughly de-revolutionized historical sciences.

The ultimate decay of the bourgeois conception of history was reached in the pan-historism of the present epoch which found its classical formulation in the work of Spengler.

## THE AGE OF PAN-HISTORISM

*When we dream that we are dreaming  
we are on the point of waking.*

*Novalis*

It seems that today we have arrived at a completely historical, and a completely detached, conception of history itself. We know that every approach to history, every term applied to it, and every result of historical research reveals something not only about the attitude of the writer but also about his time and about his particular position in the economic, political, and cultural struggles going on in his time. We can no longer be fooled by the flippant contention of an ultra-modern writer that the historian "should leave out as much as possible", or by the more intelligent pronouncement that it is more important for the historian to forget than to remember. We know that more than a century ago Hegel said that "thought is after all the most trenchant epitomist".

We can not be outsmarted by the equally paradoxical demand of a well-known Harvard professor that the historian "should start with an avowed bias towards the facts of history". Socialist criticism had convinced us long ago of the shaky character of the so-called "objectivity" of history and economics and all other historical sciences of the bourgeoisie. It was only under the impact of the totalitarian counter-revolution that the same critical

principle was adopted by a number of stalwart defenders of the unbiased nature of all true scientific thought, while at the same time and for the same reason some of the adherents of a strictly partisan philosophy and science became remarkably less enthusiastic about the inevitable and wholesome class and party divisions in the realms of theory and culture. We can even smile at the modern craving to introduce a sufficient amount of bias into the historical writing of a highly sophisticated time. We know that no amount of such consciously inculcated bias can rival the strength of the entirely unconscious bias contained in the economic and political theories which were universally adopted during the whole length of the bourgeois epoch. A good example is offered by the implicit faith of the political economists in the inevitability of the particular form of commodity production which prevailed during the early phases of the bourgeois epoch.

To make a long story short, there is nothing in the historical writing of yesterday, today, and tomorrow that can not itself be explained and understood as the outcome of a particular epoch by the completely historical spirit of the present generation. For us it depends entirely on the given conditions of a definite period whether "history" is treated as a providential history of Creation or as a profane history of Civilization, and in the latter case, whether its subject-matter is supposed to be Civilization (in the singular and with a capital C) or a number of coordinated civilizations; whether it is regarded statically as a recurrence of essentially the same processes or dynamically as a "development", and whether the development in question is conceived as an external movement of visible and tangible objects in space and time or as a so-called "internal" development in time; whether it is considered to move upward or downward or on the same level, in a straight line or in spirals or cycles; whether it proceeds from the simple to the complex or vice versa; and whether it is regarded as a harmonious cooperation of individuals and groups or as a struggle of every man against every man, of nations, races, or classes.

Furthermore, it depends on the historical facts of a given epoch whether history is dealt with optimistically as a progressive development or pessimistically as a decline of culture; as a continuous process or as a series of alternating advances and relapses, of organic and critical periods, of prosperity and crisis, peace and war. Again, the outcome of the historical process may be conceived as blind destiny or as a man-made event, as produced by the people as a whole, or as thrust upon a recalcitrant mass by a select minority of great men, of geniuses, dictators, or madmen; as an unconscious growth or a mechanical movement; as a meaningless chaos or the unfolding of a great cosmical order.

Equally dependent on prevailing conditions is the question of whether the historian approaches his subject-matter in a dogmatic or a critical mood, with a rational or a mystical method, and whether he regards his work as a passive reflection of the objective historical process in the mind of an

outside observer or as a by-product of his active participation in the historical movement itself.

Again, it is decided by the objective character of a given epoch what fields of human activity are included in the historical research and which of them are emphasized. History may be represented as a religious or a political, an economic or a cultural process; it may be treated as a history of technics and science, of human behavior, social institutions and ideas. It may be regarded as a cosmical process in which the development of human society in "historical time" is only a short and somewhat discreditable episode; or again, all development of nature and human society may be represented as an incarnation of the mind or "the idea" *per se* on its way towards ultimate self-fulfillment. Or, finally, this spiritual interpretation of history may again be reversed and history regarded as a never-resolved conflict between the productive forces of society and the successive forms of their actual application.

### TOWARDS A NEW FUNCTION OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE

This pan-historical view of the present age is not only the end-term of a protracted development of the past. It contains at the same time the basis for an entirely new approach which may be described alternatively as the final rejection of the fetishistic concept of history or as the ultimate historicization of all human activities and of all fields of social research.

While we are slowly getting used to regarding the historian and his work as being just as historical as history itself, history seems to lose in importance. It certainly loses all claim to an independent existence. There is no longer a history in general, just as there is no longer a state in general, economics, politics or law in general. There is only a definite, specific kind of history belonging to a particular epoch, to a particular structure of society, or a particular civilization. This does not mean that history is reduced to a mere ideology. It rather partakes of the mixed nature (half material, half ideological) of such "institutions" as the law, the church, and the state. As such it has been treated in Hegel's *Philosophy of Law* where "world-history" is discussed along with the family, civil society, and the state as one of the attributes of what the philosopher calls "*Die Sittlichkeit*" but what is, in fact, the particular structure of modern bourgeois civilization.

On the basis of this new approach the fetishistic concept that the development of the world happens in history is replaced by the relativistic statement that each particular form of history is part and parcel of a given structure of society and changes its form and contents along with the transformations that take place on the economic, political and other spheres of the society to which it belongs. And just as we can imagine a future structure of society in which not only the theory of the state, but even the state itself will have dropped out of existence without having been replaced by another state, we can imagine a time when there will be no history. Something

of this kind must have happened to the Egyptians and to other Eastern civilizations at the time when they passed from their dynamic period of genesis and growth to a less dynamic period during which they tried more or less successfully to protect their society against a threatening disintegration by establishing a universal state. A similar change is in store, according to the theories of Spengler and A. J. Toynbee, for every existing form of civilization, including our own proud civilization of the West.

The ultimate result of the new approach to history here considered is not a total loss but rather a different application of the theoretical knowledge that hitherto was acquired by historical studies. When every theoretical and practical form of dealing with social facts comes to be based, among other things, on a full regard for their particular time-conditioned aspects, an independent science (or philosophy) of history *per se* will be considered just as superfluous as a comprehensive science of "nature" *per se* has been regarded for a long time. Just as the physical sciences of today become more and more closely related to their practical application in technology and industry, so theoretical history will ultimately be fused with its practical application to the concrete tasks to be solved by associated individuals within the framework of a given form of society.

Karl Korsch

### MATERIALISM AND HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

The evolution of Marxism to its present stage can be understood only in connection with the social and political developments of the period in which it arose. With the coming of capitalism in Germany there developed simultaneously a growing opposition to the existing aristocratic absolutism. The ascending bourgeois class needed freedom of trade and commerce, favorable legislation, a government sympathetic to its interests, freedom of press and assembly in order to fight unhindered for its needs and desires. But the bourgeoisie found itself confronted instead with a hostile regime, an omnipotent police, and press censorship which suppressed every criticism of the reactionary government. The struggle between these forces, which led to the revolution of 1848, was first conducted on a theoretical level, as a struggle of ideas and a criticism of the prevailing ideology. The criticism of the young bourgeois intelligentsia was directed mainly against religion and Hegelian philosophy.

Hegelian philosophy in which the self-development of the *Absolute Idea* creates the world and then, as the developing world, enters the consciousness of men, was the philosophical guise suited to the Christianity of the Restoration after 1815. Religion, handed down by past generations, served

as always as the theoretical basis and justification for the perpetuation of old class relations. Since an open political struggle was still impossible, the fight against the feudal oligarchy had to be conducted in a veiled form, as an attack on religion. This was the task of the group of young intellectuals of 1840 among whom Marx grew up and rose to a leading position.

While still a student Marx submitted, although reluctantly, to the force of the Hegelian method of thought and made it his own. That he chose for his doctoral dissertation the comparison of two great materialist philosophies of ancient Greece, Democritus and Epicurus, seems to indicate, however, that in the deep recesses of his consciousness Marx inclined towards materialism. Shortly thereafter he was called upon to assume the editorship of a new paper founded by the oppositional Rheinisch bourgeoisie in Cologne. Here he was drawn into the practical problems of the political and social struggles. So well did he conduct the fight that after one year of publication the paper was banned by the state. It was during this period that Feuerbach made his final step towards materialism. Feuerbach brushed aside Hegel's fantastic system, turned to the simple experiences of every day life, and arrived at the conclusion that religion was a man-made product. Forty years later Engels still spoke fervently of the liberating effect that Feuerbach's work had on his contemporaries, and of the enthusiasm with which Marx embraced the new ideas despite some critical reservations. To Marx this meant a new turn in the social struggle: from attacking a heavenly image to coming to grips openly with earthly realities. Thus in 1843 in his essay "*A Criticism of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*" he wrote:

"As far as Germany is concerned the criticism of religion is practically completed, and the criticism of religion is the basis of all criticism . . . The struggle against religion is the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion. . . . Religion is the moan of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion, as the illusory happiness of the people, is the demand for their real happiness. The demand to abandon the illusions about their conditions is a demand to abandon a condition which requires illusions. The criticism of religion therefore contains potentially the criticism of the Vale of Tears whose aureole is religion. Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers which adorned the chain, not that man should wear his fetters denuded of fanciful embellishment, but that he should throw off the chain, and break the living flower . . . Thus the criticism of heaven transforms itself into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of right, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics."

The task confronting Marx was to inquire into the realities of social life. His study of the French Revolution and French socialism as well as English economy and the English working class movement, in collaboration with Engels during their stay in Paris and Brussels, led towards further elaboration of the doctrine known as *Historical Materialism*. As the doctrine of social development by way of class struggles we find the theory expounded in "*Poverty of Philosophy*" (in French 1846), the "*Communist Manifesto*"

(1847), and in the preface to "*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*" (1859).

Marx and Engels themselves refer to this system of thought as materialism in opposition to the idealism of Hegel and the neo-Hegelians. What do they understand by materialism? Engels, discussing the fundamental theoretical problems of historical materialism in his *Anti-Duehring* and in his booklet on Feuerbach, states in the latter publication:

"The great basic question of all philosophy, especially of modern philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being . . . Those who asserted the primacy of the spirit to nature and, therefore, in the last instance, assumed world creation in some form or other — comprised the camp of idealism. The others, who regarded nature as primary, belong to the various schools of materialism."

That not only the human mind is bound up with the brain, but also that man with his brain and mind is part and parcel of the rest of the animal kingdom and the unorganic world, was a self-evident truth to Marx and Engels. This conception is common to all "schools of materialism." What distinguishes Marxism materialism from other schools must be learned from its various polemical works dealing with practical questions of politics and society. To Marx materialistic thought was a working method. In his writing he does not deal with philosophy nor does he formulate materialism into a system of philosophy; he is utilizing it as a method for the study of the world and thus demonstrates its validity. In the essay quoted above, for example, Marx does not demolish the Hegelian philosophy of right by philosophical disputations, but through an annihilating criticism of the real conditions existing in Germany.

The materialist method replaces philosophical sophistry and disputations around abstract concepts with the study of the real material world. Feuerbach preceded Marx in this respect in so far as he was the first to point out that religious concepts and ideas are derived from material conditions. Let us take a few examples to elucidate this point. The statement "Man proposes, God disposes" the theologian interprets from the point of view of the omnipotence of God. The materialist on the other hand searches for the cause of the discrepancy between expectations and results and finds it in the social effects of commodity exchange and competition. The politician debates the desirability of freedom and socialism; the materialist asks: from what individuals or classes do these demands spring, what specific content do they have, and to what social need do they correspond? The philosopher, in abstract speculations about the essence of time, seeks to establish whether or not absolute time exists. The materialist compares the clocks to see whether it can be established unreservedly that two phenomena occur simultaneously, or follow one another.

Feuerbach, too, utilized the materialist method. He saw in living man the source of all religious ideas and concepts. "The validity of his materialism, however, depended on whether he was successful in presenting a clear

and comprehensive interpretation of religion. A materialism that leaves the problem obscure is insufficient and will lead back to idealism. Marx pointed out that the mere principle of taking living man as the starting point for investigation is not enough to lead to clarity. In his theses on Feuerbach in 1845 he formulated the essential difference between his materialist method and that of Feuerbach. We quote:

"Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations." (Thesis 6) "His work consists in the dissolution of 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 foundation lifts itself above itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm is only to be explained by the self-cleavage and self-contradictions of this secular basis. The latter must itself, therefore, first be understood in its contradiction and then, by the removal of the contradiction, revolutionised in practice." (Thesis 4)

Briefly, man can be understood only as a social being. From the individual one must proceed to society and dissolve the social contradictions out of which religion has evolved. The real world, that is the sensual and material world, where all ideology and consciousness have their origin, is human society — with nature in the background, of course, as the basis on which society rests and of which it is a part altered by man.

A presentation of these ideas is to be found in the book "*The German Ideology*", written in 1845-46. The part that deals with Feuerbach, however, was first published in 1925 by Rjazanoff, then head of the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow. The complete work was not published until 1932. Here the theses on Feuerbach are worked out in greater length. Although it is apparent that Marx wrote quite hurriedly, he nevertheless gave a brilliant presentation of all essential ideas concerning the evolution of society which, later, found further illumination in the propaganda pamphlet "*The Communist Manifesto*" and in the preface to "*The Critique of Political Economy*."

The *German Ideology* is directed first of all against the theoretical view which regarded creative consciousness and ideas developing from ideas as the only factors that determine human history. Marx has nothing but contempt for this point of view, "The phantoms formed in the human brain," he says on page 14, "are necessary sublimates of their material, empirically-verifiable life process bound to material premises". It was essential to put emphasis on the real world, the material and empirically-given world as the source of all ideology. But it was also necessary to criticise the materialist theories that culminated in Feuerbach. As a protest against ideology the return to biological man and his physical needs is correct, but taking the individual as an abstract being does not offer a solution to the question of how and why religious ideas originate. Human society in its historical evolution is the only reality controlling human life. Only out of society can the spiritual life of man be explained. Feuerbach, in attempt-

ing to find an explanation of religion by a return to the "real" man did not find the real man, because he searched for him in the individual, in the human being generally. From this approach the world of ideas cannot be explained. Thus he was forced to fall back on the ideology of universal human love. "Insofar as Feuerbach is a materialist," Marx said, "he does not deal with history, and insofar as he considers history, he is not a materialist." (*The German Ideology*, pp. 37-38).

What Feuerbach did not accomplish was accomplished by the historical materialism of Marx: an explanation of the development of man's ideas out of the material world. The historical development of society is brilliantly rendered in the following sentence: ". . . Men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking." (*German Ideology*, p. 14). We know reality only through experience which, as the external world, comes to us through the medium of our senses. A philosophical theory of knowledge will then be based on this principle: the material, empirically given world is the reality which determines thought.

The basic epistemological problem was always what truth can be attributed to thinking. The term "critique of knowledge," used by the professional philosophers for "theory of knowledge," already implies a view point of doubt. In his second and fifth theses on Feuerbach Marx refers to this problem and again points out that the practical activity of man is the essential content of his life.

"The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. In practice man must prove the truth, i. e., the reality and power, the "this-sidedness" of his thinking." (Thesis 2) . . . "Feuerbach, not satisfied with abstract thinking, appeals to sensuous contemplation, but he does not conceive sensuousness as a practical, human-sensuous activity." (Thesis 5).

Why practical? Because man in the first place must live. His biological organism, his faculties and his abilities and all his activity are adapted to this very end. With these he must adapt himself to and assert himself in the external world, i. e. nature, and as an individual in society, as well as with his faculty of thinking, the activity of the organ of thought, the brain, and with thought itself. Thinking is a bodily faculty. In every phase of life man uses his power of thought to draw conclusions from his experiences on which expectations and hopes are built and which regulate his mode of living and his actions. The correctness of his conclusions, a condition for his survival, is determined by the very fact of his being. Thinking is a purposeful adaptation to life, and therefore truth can be attributed to it though not truth in an absolute sense. But on the basis of his experiences, man derives generalizations and laws on which his expectations are based. They are generally correct as is witnessed by his survival. In particular instances, however, false conclusions may be derived and hence failure and destruction. Life is a continuous process of learning, adaptation, development. Practice alone is the unsparing test of the correctness of thinking.

Let us first consider this in relation to natural science. Here thought finds in practice its purest and most abstract form. This is why philosophers of nature accept this form as the subject for their observations and pay no attention to its similarity to the thought of every individual in his every day activity. Yet thinking in the study of nature is only a highly developed special field of the entire social labor process. This labor process demands an accurate knowledge of natural phenomena and its integration into laws, in order to be able to utilize them successfully in the field of technics. The determination of these laws through observation of special phenomena is the task of specialists. In the study of nature it is generally accepted that practice, in this instance experiment, is the test of truth. Here, too, it is accepted that observed regularities, known as "natural laws," are generally fairly dependable guides to human practice, and although they are frequently not altogether correct and even disappointing, they are improved constantly and elaborated upon through the progress of science. If at times man is referred to as the "lawmaker of nature," it must be added that nature very often disregards these laws and summons man to make better ones.

The practice of life, however, comprises much more than the scientific study of nature. The relation of the natural scientist to the world, despite his experimentation, remains sensuous-observational. To him the world is an external thing. But in reality people deal with nature in their practical activities by acting upon her and making her part of their existence. Through his labor man does not oppose nature as an external or alien world. On the contrary, by the toil of his hands he transforms the external world to such an extent that the original natural substance is no longer discernable, and while this process goes on, man changes, too. Thus, man creates his own world: human society in a nature changed by him. What meaning, then, has the question of whether his thinking leads to truth? The object of his thinking is that which he himself produces by his physical and mental activities and which he controls through his brain. This is not a question of partial truths such as, for instance, those of which Engels wrote in his book on Feuerbach that the artificial production of the natural dye *alizarin* would prove the validity of the chemical formula employed.\* This is not, to repeat, a question of partial truths in a specific field of knowledge, where the practical consequence either affirms or refutes them. Rather the point in question here is a philosophical one, namely, whether human thought is capable of encompassing the real, the deepest truth of the world. That the philosopher, in his secluded study, who is concerned exclusively with abstract philosophical concepts, which are derived in turn from abstract

\*) This formula did not prove — as Engels believed — the validity of materialism as against Kant's "Thing in itself." The "Thing in itself" results from the incapacity of bourgeois philosophy to explain the earthly origin of moral law. The "Thing in itself" has thus not been contradicted and proven false by the chemical industry but by historical materialism. It was the latter that enabled Engels to see the fallacy in the "Thing in itself," although he offered other arguments.

scientific concepts also formulated outside of practical life experiences, should have his doubts in the midst of this world of shadows is easily understood. But for human beings who live and act in the real every day world the question has no meaning. The truth of thought, says Marx, is nothing other than power and mastery over the real world.

Of course this statement embodies a contradiction: Thinking cannot be said to be true where the human mind does not master the world. Whenever — as Marx pointed out in *Capital* — the products of man's hand grows beyond his intellectual power, which he no longer controls and which confronts him in the form of commodity production and capital as an independent social entity, mastering man and even threatening to destroy him, then his mental activity submits to the mysticism of a supernatural being and he begins to doubt his ability to distinguish truth from falsehood. Thus, in the course of many centuries the myth of supernatural deity overshadowed the daily materialistic experiences of man. Not until society has evolved to a point where man will be able to comprehend all social forces and will have learned to master his environment — not until a communist society prevails, in short — will his ideas be in full accord with the realities of the world. Only after the nature of social production as a fundamental basis of all life and therefore of future development has become clear to man, only when the mind — be it only theoretically at first — actually masters the world, only then will our thinking be fully correct. And only then will materialism, the science of society as formulated by Marx, gain permanent mastery and become the only applicable philosophy. The Marxian theory of society in principle means the renewal of philosophy.

Marx, however, was not concerned with pure philosophy. "Philosophers have only interpreted the world differently, but the point is to change it," he says in the theses on Feuerbach. The world situation pressed for practical action. At first inspired by the bourgeois opposition to feudal absolutism, later strengthened by the new forces that emanated from the struggle of the English and French proletariat against the bourgeoisie, Marx and Engels, thanks to their careful study of social realities, arrived at the conclusion that the proletarian revolution following on the heels of the bourgeois revolution would bring the real liberation of humanity. Their activity was devoted to this revolution, and in the *Communist Manifesto* they laid down the first directions for the workers' class struggle.

Marxism has since been inseparably connected with the class struggle of the proletariat. If we ask what Marxism is, we must first of all understand that it does not mean everything Marx ever thought and wrote. The views of his earlier years, for instance, are representative only in part; they are developmental phases leading toward Marxism. While the role of the proletarian class struggle and the aim of communism is already outlined in the *Communist Manifesto*, the theory of surplus value is developed much later. All of Marx's developing ideas are determined by the social relation,