

MATERIALISM OF LUDWIG FEUERBACH

Introduction

Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach (July 28, 1804 - September 13, 1872), German philosopher, fourth son of the eminent jurist Paul Johann Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach, was born in Landshut in Bavaria and died in Rechenberg (since 1899 a district of Nuremberg). In Feuerbach, Marx found a refutation of Hegel and a case for materialism. With one blow it placed materialism on the throne again, the spell was broken. The Hegelian system was exploded and cast aside, one must have experienced the liberating effect of Feuerbach's books to get an idea of it. Marx used many of Feuerbach's principles as foundation stones of his later philosophy. Here we present the materialism of Feuerbach from his critique on religion, from his materialistic epistemological perspective of sensuousness, from his materialistic anthropology and his ethics. We make our critique combining the notions of Karl Marx as presented in the classes and our own reflections.

Materialistic Outlook on Religion

One of the ways Feuerbach adopted to enter into the phase of materialistic philosophy was to criticize the prevailing religious concepts, especially the Christian concept of God which is philosophically supported by Hegel. He does it from three different perspectives: 1) Religion as the product of feeling and Imagination, 2) Religion as the product of Human projection and 3) Critiquing the Love and Infinite Spirit aspects of Christianity.

Religion as the Product of Feeling and Imagination

Feuerbach believed that religion was principally a matter of feeling which manifests itself in longing. He regarded feeling as "unrestricted subjectivity;" that is, as unfettered by reason or nature. It assumes the deepest wishes of the heart to be true.

Longing is the necessity of feeling, and feeling longs for a personal God. There is a picture of the human self in the writings of Feuerbach in the grip of the rage to live and longing for a reality that can grant its deepest wishes. This "omnipotence of feeling" breaks through all the limits of understanding and manifests itself in several religious beliefs. Imagination is the original organ of religion, according to him. It is original for three reasons. First of all, the imagination, unlike abstract thought, produces images that have the power to stir the feelings and emotions. Human beings are sensuous creatures who require sensuous images as vehicles for their hopes and dreams. Second, the imagination corresponds to personal feelings because it can set aside limits and all laws painful to the feelings. It can make objective to man the immediate, absolutely unlimited satisfactions of his subjective wishes. Third, the imagination, unlike feeling, can deal with abstractions taken from the real world. In this sense it is a mode of representation, but, unlike thought, drapes its abstractions in sensuous imagery.

Religion as the Product of Human Projection

He develops the idea that God does not exist in reality but as a human projection only, and that the Christian principles of love and solidarity should be applied directly to fellow humans rather than being regarded as an indirect reflection of God's love. In religion the believer projects his being into objectivity, and then again makes himself an object of an object, another being than himself. Religious orientation is an illusion and is unhealthy, as it deprives and alienates the believer from true autonomy, virtue and community, for even love, in itself the deepest, truest emotion, becomes by means of religiousness merely ostensible, illusory, since religious life gives itself to man only for God's sake, so that it is given only in appearance to man, but in reality to God.

God as Love & God as Infinite Spirit: Critique on Christian Concept of God

When Christians affirm that God is love, it is the predicate that is decisive. The Christian could not permit the possibility of a subject behind the predicate, so to speak, who could or could not love. But if love is the defining predicate, and if the Christian is affirming that God renounced his Godhead for the sake of humanity, then Feuerbach

argued that this is an unconscious confession that love is more important than God. Who then is our Saviour and Redeemer? God or Love? Love; for God as God has not saved us, but Love, which transcends the difference between the divine and human personality. As god has renounced himself out of love, so we, out of love, should renounce God; for if we do not sacrifice God to love, we sacrifice love to God, and in spite of the predicate of love, we have the God — the evil being — of religious fanaticism.

To confess that God is love, Feuerbach argued, is already to transcend the popular conception of God as absolute person. And whereas in the Dissertation he had appealed to the unity and universal identity of reasoning, here he used the language of love. Love, he argued, is the unity of personhood and when one enters into the bond of love "essence becomes object of essence, essence touches essence, and in this unity of essence, the separated individual and particular being of both of you disappear with all distinctions and divisions in and between you". True religion, then is to understand that the desire for a separate life after death is egoism and to embrace death as the total dissolution of the self. Death is the place, so to speak, in God where all particular beings become one, where they are consumed and abolished. Further, to claim that God is an absolute person is inevitably to conceive of God as finite, as one being existing alongside of other beings. It is to deny God as Spirit for God cannot be Spirit if he is distinguished from nature because then nature falls outside of his essence. Rather God can be Spirit only if nature is included with the divine being. Spirit is the unity of nature and personhood. "God is everything, his essence and being are all essences, not the being of something".

Materialistic Epistemology: Sensuousness

Almost all materialistic philosophers and philosophical systems when they present the epistemology they base it only on sense perception. Ex. The Indian philosophical system of Charvaka. Following the same line Feuerbach presents Sensuousness as his key concept of epistemology.

The new philosophy claims that "certainty and immediately are only given by the senses, perception, and feeling". Only the sensuous is clear and certain. Hence, "the secret of immediate knowledge is sensuousness". It includes, for example, what we

normally call perception and sensation but it also encompasses much that can not be so classified; for example, he wrote as though feelings and the apprehension of the feelings and intentions of others are perceived by sense.

Man, too, is given to himself only through the senses; he is an object of himself only as an object of the senses. Or again, We feel not only stones and lumber, flesh and bones; we also feel feelings, in that we press the hands or lips of a feeling being. The task of philosophy and of science in general consists, therefore, not in leading away from the sensuous, that is, real, objects, but rather in leading toward them, not in transforming objects into ideas and conceptions, but rather in making visible, that is, in objectifying objects that are invisible to ordinary eyes. Men first see the objects only as they appear to them and not as they are.... Only now, in the modern era, has mankind arrived again...at the sensuous, that is, the unfalsified and objective perception of the sensuous, that is, of the real.

Materialistic Anthropology

Feuerbach, it is said, regarded the I as a bodily, temporal, spatially conditioned thing, only an abstraction from materiality. This, in turn, has important implications for understanding human nature, the aims of society, and the conditions for human liberation. Being as the object of being-and this alone is truly, and deserves the name of being-is sensuous being; that is the being involved in sense perception, feeling, and love. To-be-here (*Dasein*) is the primary being, the primary determination. Here I am — this is the first sign of a real, living being. And *Dasein*, in turn, is constituted by its own unique constellation of senses for mediating the world to consciousness. Each human sense organ has its own unique need for satisfaction and, hence, experiences joy as well as pain, and each is an instrument of consciousness. One might even say that the body is constituted in its mode of being as feeling.

Feuerbach argued that the human being unlike the animal, is not a particular but a universal being. He meant by this that by possessing consciousness, the human organism is not a "limited and restricted being" but rather an unlimited and free being, for

universality, unlimitedness, and freedom are inseparable". This universality does not consist in some special faculty such as reason but because "this freedom and this universality extend themselves over man's total being."

His criticism of religion and of idealism were motivated by the desire to replace an other-worldly type of practice and belief with a this-worldly, humanistic engagement with repressive social conditions. The outlines of a position appear in two monographs, one finished in the early Sixties entitled "Concerning Spiritualism and Materialism," and the other unfinished entitled "On Eudäimonism". Informing both of them are two fundamental principles. The first is one to which Feuerbach had long been wedded and that reflects the lingering influence of Hegel; namely, that human self-consciousness only emerges in relationship to another self-consciousness. To use Feuerbach's formulation, the I (Ich) only emerges along with a Thou (Du). This means that only a social person is a person, that the *Gattung* is exemplified in community.

Materialistic Ethics of Happiness

Feuerbach presents his ethics basing it on the principle of happiness. The principle is that every living organism, including the human, is in the grip of a drive towards self-fulfillment. The object of this drive, *Glückseligkeit*, is normally translated "happiness" but it is clear from its explication that Feuerbach means something more like Aristotle's "well-being."

Those contemporary German scholars interested in re-appropriating Feuerbach tend to emphasize the priority of the Ich-Du principle. But in the two writings referred to above, the Ich-Du relationship is explicated in the context of happiness. And the reason for this seems to be that Feuerbach wished to argue against those theorists who postulate the existence of an independent and free will, on the one hand, and those, on the other hand, who will not permit self-interest in on the ground floor of moral theory.

Although Feuerbach sometimes refers to happiness as the basic drive, he also employs the term to refer to the aggregate of all human drives, needs, and predispositions. In his 1848 lectures on religion, it is defined as "that necessary, indispensable egoism — not

moral but metaphysical, i.e., grounded in man's essence without his knowledge or will — the egoism without which man cannot live...that egoism inherent in the very organism” Although every drive is in some sense a drive-to-happiness, not all drives are of equal importance, and the function of reason and will are to direct these drives in the interest of the entire organism. The will is not an independent and autonomous faculty but another name for the seat of feeling. It follows that there is no freedom of the will in the sense of an affectless faculty that springs into action at the direction of the reason. Feuerbach wrote that it is a property of the body serving the well-being of the organism and within the conditions of natural necessity." It is free when it can serve the drive to happiness without hindrance.

Happiness is not itself subject to moral judgments; rather, it is the presupposition of any theory of morality that which must be taken into account when one makes moral judgments. Morality only arises when one considers the effects of one's actions arising from the drive-to-happiness on others. And in reflecting on these effects, morality does not require that one set aside happiness as a criterion guiding one's actions. It only requires that one consider the happiness of others. "Morality...cannot abstract from the principle of happiness; even if it repudiates its own happiness, then it must recognize the other's happiness...otherwise the ground and object of the duty to others falls away, as does even the basis of morality ... "

Critical Evaluation on Feuerbach

Feuerbach is criticized by later philosophers mainly on two accounts. They criticize him for not presenting a comprehensive philosophical view. We see 3 main shifts in his thinking. He supports Hegel, He moves away from Hegel and he presents the materialistic philosophy in the third phase. The materialistic philosophy he presented they say is a cluster of assertions not arguments.

Marx was not in favor with the anthropology of Feuerbach since he writes in *Thesis on Feuerbach* :”The defect of all hitherto existing materialism, that of Feuerbach

included, is that the object, reality, sensuousness is conceived only as the form of the object of contemplation but not human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectivity.”

From the point of his materialism I present the critique in the following way. First of all we have a number of Christian philosophers who have presented the concept of God intelligibly and that is sufficient to reject the materialistic perspective of him. He says that given a choice between God and love he will opt for love and people should also opt with him for love than God. What will he do in the case of Jesus Christ. In the person of Jesus Christ, we have a God who is not a concept but an incarnated form of love. Feuerbach also argues that when essence is lost in love person has an invalid existence. We have a number of mystics like St. John of the Cross, who lived a love life in a transformed way without losing their love life as the result of the mystical experiences. Marx criticizes Feuerbach’s notion on religion because he thinks that Feuerbach is starting his methodology from religion and reduce it to man. Marx says that instead of the reduction Feuerbach should had attempted for an analysis of the historical origin and material conditions of the development of concrete religions.

His epistemology belittles human being. By reducing human person into sensuousness and feeling he does injustice to humanity. Psychologies and other credible sciences have stressed the need of rational and will power for the making of better human personalities. He does not seem to buy those faculties in his writings. It is true that Marx has accepted the universal concept of man from Feuerbach and Buber has developed his idea of intersubjectivity basing it on Feuerbach’s idea of I – Thou. But it is sad that Feuerbach presents man only from the perspective of happiness. Marx believe that Feuerbach as materialist should not have gone for the concept of sensuousness as an objectifying element. For Marx, man is a subject but Feuerbach objectifies the subject in his epistemology. Human happiness is the ideal for Marx too. In fact, the communism looks for the welfare. Marx forwards collectivism and humanism as his basic ideal for human happiness.

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