

Marx & Engels: The German Ideology

by Alan McEachran

The Student's Guide:
A Précis of the Text in Plain English

Preface

Hitherto men have constantly made up false conceptions about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be. Most 'radical' German thinkers seem to think that reality will be changed by people changing the way they see the world around them. But these are innocent and childlike fancies, like the notion that we only drown because we have the idea of gravity in our heads! The task of this book is to debunk this kind of thinking.

Idealism and Materialism

According to German ideologists, in recent years there has been an unparalleled revolution going on, a revolution in thought so profound that it makes the French Revolution look like child's play. It is certainly true that changes in thought are happening. We are witnessing the final decomposition of the whole Hegelian system of ideas, and the ideological vultures have gathered round to feed on the corpse, squabbling among themselves as to their rightful share of the bones. Prominent among these are the Young Hegelians, but their claims are as inflated as their vision is parochial and petty. In this they exemplify the wider problem of German social criticism.

The trouble with German social thought is that it has never quitted the realm of philosophy, and it remains obsessed with the system of Hegel. Rival thinkers seem to extract one aspect of Hegel's thought and use it to attack each other. Further, the whole body of German thought from Strauss to Stimer is confined to criticism of religious conceptions. The view that everything that is right or wrong with modern society stems from religious belief seems nowhere to be challenged; while Old Hegelians admire religion and assert its necessity and predominance, the Young Hegelians argue that all our ills stem from religion, and conclude that the abandonment of religion is the key to radical change.

More generally, the Young Hegelians have not freed themselves from Idealism. They consider thoughts, ideas, to be the real chains of men, and seek only to fight against these illusions of consciousness. Since, according to their fantasy, the relationships of all men, all their doings, and their limitations, and the products of their consciousness, they propose to bring about a change in men's consciousness and a corresponding change in the conditions of their lives. Despite their claims to radicalism, in this they are the staunchest conservatives! They are in no way combating the real existing world, only its phrases. It has not occurred to these thinkers to examine the connection between German thought and the underlying reality which gives rise to it.

First Premises of the Materialist Method

Our theory is based, not on dogmatic assertions or arbitrary claims, but on a method which begins with the basic material conditions in which people live. The premises of our method can be verified in a purely empirical way. All human history must be written from the starting point of an understanding of the relationship men have to the natural world surrounding them. Men continually change this natural world and it is this which, essentially, is the defining characteristic of human beings. Men can be distinguished from animals by reference to consciousness, religion or anything else you like, but the crucial factor is that of PRODUCTION – as soon as men began to produce their means of subsistence they took the crucial step in the transition from animal to man.

In every society men produce their subsistence by means of a specific mode of production. This implies always certain modes of organisation and social relationship. Historically, the beginnings of human production went together with the growth of human population, and there began to appear a division of labour. We can now see that the extent of development of the productive forces of a society can be measured by the complexity of the division of labour. Each new step forward in production causes a further development of the division of labour.

An early consequence of the division of labour is always the separation of town and country and a conflict of interest between them. There then seems to follow a separation between industrial and commercial areas of economic activity.

Various stages in the development of the division of labour are also stages in forms of ownership of property, and these can be summarised historically in this way:

- 1 Tribal This is a relatively undeveloped stage of production. Here, there is an elementary division of labour based on the family. Sometimes there is also slavery, which is a relationship always latent within the family in any case.
- 2 City Here there are mainly communal forms of ownership, but the beginnings of private property too.
- 3 Feudal This is based on the countryside and is characterised by the existence of Serfdom.

Different forms of society give rise to different ideals and beliefs. At first, men's consciousness is closely bound up with the direct, everyday business of material life and material survival. Thus material production is accompanied by mental production – expressed in the language of laws, morality, religion, and so on.

Later in human social development, ideas may seem less closely associated with the

particular mode of production, but this always forms the context within which ideas are produced. In all ideology, the world is not depicted quite as it really is; men and their circumstances appear upside down, just as the retina inverts the object which it sees.

German thought does not appreciate this. While it wants to descend to earth from heaven, we wish instead to ascend from earth to heaven – that is to say, we wish to show how men's ideas stem from their material life-processes, and reflect them. We claim that this relationship is empirically verifiable. There is no history of morality, religion, metaphysics, or of the rest of ideology except the reflection of the development of men's material life. Let it be understood: it is not life which is determined by consciousness, but consciousness which is determined by life.

This does not mean that history is to be seen as a collection of dead facts, as it is with the empiricists, and more than it is the history of thought, as it is with the idealists. It is to be seen as the object of scientific inquiry, and such a real, positive science makes philosophy as an independent branch of human knowledge redundant. The sorts of abstract discussion in which philosophy engages has no value whatsoever viewed outside an understanding of the real historical process.

History: Fundamental Conditions

Since the Germans have never understood the materialist basis of history, they have produced no worthwhile historians. The French and the English, however limited their contributions may have been, have nevertheless made the first efforts to produce a genuine historical science by being the first to actually write histories of civil society, of commerce and industry. Genuine historians of the future will see that the basic premises of their discipline are:

- 1 Life before anything else involves basic survival – food, clothing, a habitation and so on. The first historical act is the production of the means to satisfy these needs.
- 2 The satisfaction of these needs leads on to the creation of new needs to be satisfied, and so on.
- 3 People enter into sexual and biological relationships with each other – they create the family. To begin with, the family is to only social relationship, but subsequently becomes a subordinate one.
- 4 New forms of social relationship are created around a particular mode of production.

How does consciousness enter into the picture? It is certainly tied up with language. Language is as old as consciousness, and like it arises because of the need men have

of entering into social relationships with other men. Consciousness is a social product, therefore. At first, it is tied in a very immediate way to the natural environment in which men find themselves. At this stage, nature is regarded by men as an alien, all-powerful and uncontrollable force; they are overawed and dominated by it, like animals. Consciousness of other men and of society is mere herd-consciousness; at this point men are only different from sheep in that their instincts are conscious ones. However, with the development of production, the increase of population and the division of labour, consciousness begins to change. It takes a particular step when there emerges the division of intellectual and manual labour; now, consciousness begins to break free from its close, immediate connection to material life and begins to be more abstract, so that 'pure' philosophy, theology, ethics and so on appear. It is possible that this consciousness begins to come into contradiction with existing social relations; if so, this can only be because those social relations have themselves come into contradiction with the existing forces of production

Private Property and Communism

The division of labour could be said to be based on the natural division of labour in the family and the separation of society into separate families opposed to one another. With the appearance of a more general division of labour comes the appearance of property. Again, the first form of property in a sense lies in the family, where the wife and children are the slaves of the husband. All of this means the existence of another contradiction – that between the interest of the separate individual or family and the interest of labour involves both the mutual cooperation of individuals and at the same time their mutual antagonism!

Out of this contradiction there develops the state, which represents the illusory communal life of the society. Though seemingly independent of the conflicts within society, the state of course is not so, but is a spokesman for the class interest of the dominant class. There must be a continual struggle for mastery of the state, and all political struggles which seem to be about general political principles – e.g. the struggle between democracy, aristocracy, monarchy, and so on, – are merely the illusory forms in which the struggle between the different classes is carried out. Every class which seeks to gain mastery of society and change it in accordance with its own interests, must first of all conquer for itself political power in order to represent its own interests as the general interest.

Only with the attainment of communism is it possible to get beyond the permanent conflict between the individual and society which exists in a class society. The division of labour itself will be transcended in communism. Here, men will hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman, or critic.

Until the abolition of class society our social activity consolidates itself into an object power which exists over us, escaping our control, thwarting our expectations. This social power appears to individuals as an alien force which exists outside them, which has origins of which men are ignorant. Communism will destroy the alien relations which exist between men and between men as producers and the products of their labour. In communism the supposed necessity of the law of supply and demand will be dissolved into nothing.

Meanwhile, the broadening of economic activity today into a world market system means yet more enslavement of people by this alien power. But world capitalism makes more possible the coming of communism as a world event which will result in the real liberation of individuals. Capitalism today means the enormous growth of production and alienation can only be abolished through such a continued increase in production, and through the abolition of property relations. All must be involved in the advent of communism; if any group is left in want, the whole filthy business of class society and of property ownership would start again. Communism, to mean anything, must mean the universal abolition of want, an abolition to be brought about by the simultaneous action of the proletariat. As the property-less class, the proletariat is a world-historical phenomenon.

Communism for us is not some sort of imagined, ideal state of affairs which society must somehow aspire to or adjust itself to; instead, communism we think of as a real movement which abolishes the present state of things.

Civil Society and the Conception of History

Civil society is the real stage on which history is acted out. History is not about the high-sounding dramas of princes and states. Civil society includes the totality of the material relationships of men within a particular stage in the development of productive forces. The concept of civil society developed during the eighteenth century, and it came to be understood that the separateness of civil society emerged with the emergence of bourgeois society.

A materialist view of history which focuses on civil society is one which recognises that history cannot be written as though all developments had the same global – as though, for example, the discovery of America was “historically necessary” in order that eventually the French Revolution would come about! There is no mysterious “world spirit” calling into existence in some metaphysical way a world society; if a world society is developing; it is because of the economic transformation of local economies into a world economy. This is a straightforward material process, and will result, as in the past, in revolution. Revolution not thought and criticism, is the driving force of history and is responsible for, not determined by, changes in religion, philosophy, and all types of theory.

A proper understanding of the materialist view of history also destroys the bogus notion that there is some 'essence' of 'man', as though 'man' was an unchanging, permanent, trans-historical phenomenon. All that can be said about man is that he is as the real, historical conditions in which he is found, have made him.

The materialist view also means that if the productive and class forces necessary to produce communism do not exist, it is immaterial whether the idea of revolution or of communism has been expressed a hundred times already. The trouble is that all previous history has been written from an Idealist viewpoint. In each epoch historians have shared their own particular illusion which has typified that epoch; French and English historians have been preoccupied with politics, which the Germans have seen religion and ideas generally as the cause of historical change. We find the fullest expression of this in the work of Hegel.

Feuerbach: Philosophic and Real Liberation

Feuerbach calls himself a communist. However, he arrives at his embrace of communism via a mistaken kind of thinking. He tries to demonstrate that men have always had the same sorts of need – for example, that they need and have always needed each other. He thinks that enthusiasm for communism will grow by spreading the general appreciation of human needs, while for the real communist of course, the problem is how the existing order is to be overthrown, and by whom.

Feuerbach talks about men's 'essence' as though it was the same as their existence, and when he talks about 'nature' it is as if it has not been subdued by human activity. Every new invention, as we know, detaches another area from this domain. The progressive overcoming of nature is the precondition for real liberation; slavery was effectively abolished by the steam engine and serfdom by the improvement of agriculture. Human emancipation is achieved in the real world by the use of real names; people cannot be liberated unless they are able to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quantity and quality. Liberation is an historical not an intellectual act.

Feuerbach makes much of the 'sensuous certainty' of the objects which surround him, but he forgets that the 'nature' he speaks of so lovingly is the product of thousands of generations of human activity. The cherry tree he describes outside his window was of course transplanted to our region by commerce, and he is only able to talk about it at all for this reason. The 'nature' he refers to no longer properly exists.

Now, when we conceive of things in this correct, materialist way, we have no need of philosophical speculation of the type that is still clung to by Feuerbach. Philosophical problems can be resolved, quite simply, into empirical facts, and have practical solutions. This scientific attitude is one with which Feuerbach shows some sympathy, but he does not take it far enough. He speaks of discovering the secrets of

nature, but forgets that physics and chemistry would have made little progress without industry and commerce. 'Pure' natural science is provided with its aim, as much as with its materials by trade and industry – that is, by the sensuous, productive activity of men

Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas

The ideas of the ruling class are in every age the ruling ideas. The class which is the dominant material force in a class society is at the same time the class which is the dominant intellectual force. This class controls not only the means of material, but also of mental production. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the generalised, idealised expression of the specific class interests of the dominant class. Such ideas always reflect the class struggle in some way; when, for instance, in an age and in a country where royalty, aristocracy, and the bourgeoisie are contending for power, the constitutional doctrine of 'the separation of powers' seems to be a dominant notion, even being expressed as 'an eternal law'!

We have already spoken of the importance of the division of labour as one of the chief forces of history. It must now be added that a crucial development in this is the division of mental and manual labour; within the dominant class there appears a specialised group of intellectuals, full-time thinkers whose historical task seems to be the perfecting of the illusion of the ruling class about itself. There are the 'active' members of the ruling class, intellectually speaking, and on occasion there may even develop a conflict of sorts between the different sections of the ruling class. In a similar manner, of course, the existence of revolutionary ideas in any period presupposed the existence of a revolutionary class of whose interests they are, essentially, the expression.

We can now understand why different ideas predominate at different points in history. During the time that the aristocracy was dominant, for example, the concepts 'honour, loyalty' and so on were dominant, and with the rise of the bourgeoisie we saw the growth of 'equality', 'freedom' and the rest. What happens is that each new ruling class which puts itself in place of the one ruling before it is compelled, in order to carry through its own aims, to project its own specific class interests as somehow equivalent to the general interests of the whole population – its own ideas are given a sort of spurious universality of application. It is of course possible that some of its own ideas do in fact have a wider significance than in relation to its own narrow class interests but this is by accident rather than design. Similarly, the victory of a new ruling class can result in some real benefit in other classes or individual members of those classes, but only in the sense that the opportunity can now exist for members of such classes to rise into the new ruling class. Historically, each new ruling class therefore managed to achieve a more broadly-based hegemony than the ruling class which preceded it, but this only makes the opposition of the subordinate classes all the more profound and wide-ranging!

With the ending of class society we will abandon the mistaken notion that the rule of a particular class is somehow only the dominance of a particular set of ideas; this idealist illusion is one which obviously depends upon the existence of class society for its intellectual currency in the first place. The false separation between ideas and the classes which are their creators, the idealist illusion, furthermore gives rise to another abstraction – the abstraction from all the specific relationships between men to the bogus general concept, 'man', as though 'man' had some essence.

The Division of Labour: Town and Country

The real material basis of ideology must now be considered. A crucial element of this is the division of labour, and historically, a basic feature of the division of labour was the division into town and countryside which characterised the whole transition from barbarism to civilisation. The conflict between town and country permeates all history down to the present day. The countryside suggests individuals being tied together by some bond – whether of family or tribe, while the town suggests individuals becoming independent of each other and held together only by exchange. In the countryside, rough common sense prevails in everyone's dealings with nature, while in the town there develops the separation of manual and intellectual work. In the country, forms of domination are personal and direct, while in the town they are mediated by money. In the country there is a minimal division of labour, while in the town it becomes great. The existence of the town also implies the need for administration, police, taxes and the like.

The division between town and country is an expression of private property, and the abolition of the antagonism between the two is one of the first conditions of a truly communal life.

The Rise of Manufacturing

The growth of towns saw the separation of commerce and production, and the rise of manufacturing as a machine-based activity, typified in its form by the textile industry. With the rise of manufacturing as a machine-based activity, typified in its form by the textile industry. With the rise of manufactures there began an intense struggle for trade between nations, fought out both through protective duties and wars. Manufacturing also saw the shattering of the old patriarchal relationship between journeyman and master; from now on, the monetary transaction between worker and capitalist employer becomes the norm.

Starting first in Britain, 'Big Industry' began to dominate the landscape in Europe and eventually in other parts of the world, and created everywhere the same basic relationships between classes, destroying as it did so the peculiar individuality of the different countries. While the bourgeoisie of different nations retained their own separate national interests, Big Industry began to create a class which in all nations

has the same interest and in which nationality is effectively dead: the proletariat. Furthermore, Big Industry, by creating big industrial cities, large factories, and cheap and quick communication, itself promotes the unity and common identity of the proletariat.

The Relation of State to Law and Property

With the gradual separation of private property from the community, the state has become a formal entity, an institution seemingly alongside and outside civil society, but it is essentially the representation of the class interests of the bourgeoisie and the laws it creates guarantee its property and power. The state gives the illusion of promoting some sort of common interest or common will, and law the illusion of rules which regulate the individual decision of citizens; thus the reality of exploitation can be masked as a freely-made contract between the worker and the bourgeois.

Individuals, Class and Community

In modern times, we have seen the gradual growth of the bourgeoisie as a class. Though individual bourgeois are in competition with each other they form a class in the sense that they have a common economic interest and must carry on a common battle against other classes. Like other classes, the bourgeois class can be said to have an independent existence over and above the individuals who comprise it, so that those individuals effectively find their conditions of existence determined by the fact that they are members of a class. This determining fact of class membership can of course only be changed through the abolition of classes themselves and the abolition of property relationships.

This does not mean that in a classless society people would either become simply 'individuals' or faceless members of a collective, the community. On the one hand, individualism and freedom require the existence of a community since it is only through others that we are able as individuals to realise our gifts and attain our potential. A future classless society will for the first time achieve a genuine community rather than, as in the past, a mere substitute for one, since it will be a community not based on coercion and exploitation. On the other hand, we must recognise that there are no 'pure' individuals as identified by some philosophers, only real individuals as they exist in their given historical circumstances. In bourgeois society individuals seem somehow more free – their social position seems less determined. In fact this is illusion; what happens to individuals in this society is as much determined by the overall working of the economic and social system as in any previous class society. Proletarians may be 'free' to live where they wish and work for whom they wish, but are in some ways less free than feudal serfs, since they have no control at all over their own labour. Even a serf could free himself from serfdom by his own efforts. How is a proletarian to do this?

Forms of Intercourse

Communism will transform all previous relations of production and forms of social intercourse. It can best be described as the self-organisation of united individuals. It will be built not on the basis of some general plan or abstract scheme, but on the foundation created by the historical, material development of society preceding its creation.

The historical process which has led to our present level of social development is one by which a particular form of social intercourse becomes a fetter on future production, so that this creates a tension or contradiction giving rise to revolution, then a new form of intercourse takes the place of the old, and so on in an evolutionary fashion. This evolution takes place 'naturally' – that is, it is not the intended outcome or design of individual actions. It happens slowly, so that for long periods of time what could be seen as 'out-moded' forms of social organisation can exist. Consciousness can even be said to 'leap ahead' of material circumstances, in the sense that in later struggles the theoreticians of those earlier epochs can be referred to or cited as authorities! The fundamental contradiction between the forms of intercourse of a society and its productive forces always result in the intensification of the class struggle, in the battle between contending ideas and so on. Though participants in the struggle may actually fail to see this themselves, all great historical upheavals share this same basic origin.

Conquest

Traditionally, violence, war, pillage, and murder have been seen as the driving forces of history. But this is too simple a picture. Sometimes the 'conquerors' end up adopting the 'superior' culture, productive technologies and so on of the conquered! Conquest does, after all, have its limits; it must be followed up by production and this creates its own priorities.

Contradictions of Big Industry: Revolution

Only with the historical advent of big industry does the basic contradiction between private property and maximised production become clear. At the same time, only the massive extension of production in modern capitalism does the abolition of private property really become possible. All previous revolutions resulted in the creation of a new kind of class society, but modern capitalism has created the proletariat, which for the first time is a 'universal' class.

The proletariat forms the majority of all members of society today, and it is from this class that revolutionary consciousness develops. If other classes also develop such a consciousness, it can only be thought the contemplation of the situation of the proletariat. Only the proletariat is the genuine revolutionary class which will destroy

all existing property religions; this class is unique because it is the expression of the dissolution of all classes – it speaks for all men because in embryo it is equivalent to all men. The interests of the proletariat today are the same as the interests of all men in general tomorrow! Today's proletariat is tomorrow's 'people' since tomorrow there will no longer be any classes, and the proletariat will have been the class which has brought about the ending of class!

The process by which the proletariat does this will of course be one involving the revolutionary struggle against the existing ruling class. In this revolutionary struggle the proletariat will rid itself of all the muck of ages – it will achieve a psychological liberation – which will make it fitted to create a new society.

Kant and Liberalism

Kant's ethical doctrine is essentially a bourgeois one. His notion of individual duty – the 'good will' corresponds to the impotence, depression and wretchedness of the German bourgeoisie. Kant is the white-washing spokesman of this class. Kant succeeds in separating the theoretical expression of the interests of this class from those interests themselves.

The Language of Property

The bourgeois sees himself as an individual to the extent that he has property. A preoccupation with property is characteristic of bourgeois thought, and dominates the thinking of even anarchists like Stirner, who rejects the possibility of communism on the grounds that individuals will always want to have things, even if what they 'have' is a stomach ache! Now this is obviously just playing with words. The point of communism is not that it will abolish some notion of abstract 'property', but real, material property! No political theory can rest on such a foolish game-playing with the concept of property! This shows how the language of modern discourse has become so bourgeois; relationships of market buying and selling suffuse the meanings of so many of our terms.

Philosophy and Reality

It is essential to go beyond philosophy and to study the actual world itself. Philosophy and the study of the actual world have the same relationship to each other as masturbation and sexual love.

Personal versus General Interests

The idea of communism is incomprehensible to thinkers like Stirner, since communists do not see matters in terms of the supposed dichotomy between egoism

and self sacrifice as though communism were a moral argument asserting the latter as against the former. Rather, communists try to see this moral dichotomy in terms of the material basis which engenders it. We communists do not preach morality at all; we do not argue for mutual love as against selfishness or for the 'general' interest as opposed to that of the 'individual'. We do not seek some sort of Hegelian unity of these two sides of a seeming contradiction; instead we see this contradiction in terms of the material circumstances which give rise to it, and we seek to abolish these material circumstances, and to create a society in which this conflict does not exist.

One-Sided Development

One-sided forms of thought reflect particular forms of material life. If people are able to transcend such thought, such local narrow-mindedness, it is not because of their will, but because in their particular empirical reality there has developed trade and intercourse on a world scale.

Will as the Basis of Right

It is a typical illusion of lawyers and politicians that political and civil history is the history of successive laws, and that law reflects a 'ruling will', a predominant set of ideas. In fact law, like the state, reflects material circumstances and class interests.

Artistic Talent

Artistic geniuses like Raphael succeed in developing their talent as a result of the division of labour and the culture which resulted in turn from this. There has been too much emphasis given to the uniqueness of artists, so that we forget how much organisation and cooperation is necessary for artistic achievement. Exclusive talent in some people means its suppression in the broad mass of people, and it is a consequence of the division of labour. In a communist society there will not be 'painters', but at most people who engage in painting among other activities.

Utilitarianism

This is the sort of calculative thinking which clearly reflects bourgeois society in that it subordinates all relationships between people to the one, abstract, monetary, commercial relation. In a similar fashion, utilitarianism reduces all the relationships between people to the one calculable criterion of usefulness. Mill's version of this doctrine is more complex than that of Bentham, and corresponds to the period of developed bourgeois ascendancy rather than the earlier period during which the bourgeoisie was rising to power.

The Philosophy of Enjoyment

Hedonism, the doctrine that teaches pleasure is the highest good, is an ancient one, but one which has been reasserted several times in history. In its different guises it is never anything but the ingenious language of those groups and classes which are capable of enjoying the privilege of having pleasure in life: the leisured few. In modern times, Hedonism became the doctrine espoused by the nobles of the court during the period of absolute monarchy which followed the decline of feudalism. When it was taken up by the rising bourgeoisie it was given a much more generalised expression and applied to all individuals without distinction, unlike in previous forms of it. But when the bourgeoisie it was given a much more generalised expression and applied to all individuals without distinction unlike in previous forms of it. But when the bourgeoisie overthrew the nobility and began to be faced with its new enemy, the proletariat, it abandoned Hedonism and embraced more solemn and strict, self-denying moral notions.

Needs and Conditions

Stirner seems to believe that up to now people have formed concepts of what man is, and then won freedom for themselves to the extent that was necessary to realise this conception. This idealist notion is of course false. In reality, people have achieved freedom for themselves to the extent that was made possible by the productive forces which defined the limitations of their historical period. This has meant in practice that some – the few – have achieved freedom at the expense of others – the majority – who have been engaged in a constant struggle to satisfy their essential needs. The prospect of real freedom for all only now appears as a result of the revolutionary transformation of the productive resources of society brought about by capitalism.

The Free Development of Individuals

In the modern epoch, the domination over individuals of material circumstances, the dwarfing and suppression of individuality, has reached its sharpest and most universal form. People have now been presented with the task of reversing this relationship, and of asserting the domination of individuals over their material surroundings. But such liberation cannot, as Stirner suppose, be the task of each individual separately, but is the collective task of the creation of a communist society.

Under conditions of a market system, of classes, and of the division of labour, true individual freedom is not possible. Modern society creates only the illusion of freedom, in which 'the individual' appears as an abstract but meaningless notion. True individuals are real people with their real characteristics; only in communism will the free development of individuals cease to be a mere phrase. Abstract and meaningless 'individualism' will not merely be replaced by a denial of individuality

and the assertion of the contrary principle of 'solidarity'; rather, in communism individuals' consciousness of their mutual relations will transcend the dichotomy of collective self-denial and egoism.

Language and Thought

For philosophers, one of the most difficult tasks is to descend from the world of thought to the actual world. Philosophers make the mistake of bestowing on thought and language some sort of independent existence as though they had nothing to do with the material reality of the society in which they are enmeshed. This mistake arises from the fact that as a result of the division of labour and social complexity, thought and language come to seem as though they are somehow separate.

'True' Socialism

A number of German thinkers seem to have absorbed a few French and English communist ideas and have amalgamated them with their own German philosophical premises. These 'socialists' or 'true socialists' as they call themselves, think that the development of communist thought has not been a reflected form of the real struggle of classes, but has been some sort of evolution of 'pure thought'. This delusion leads them to suppose that communist ideas reflect the need to create a 'reasonable social order' rather than reflecting the needs of a particular social class! By insisting on attaching communist ideas to the German philosophical tradition, these 'true socialists' go on to transform the interests of specific groups and classes in society into the supposed interests of 'man' as though they were a general interest or such an abstract thing as 'man'. Consequently, 'true socialism' has lost all revolutionary enthusiasm and proclaims the universal love of mankind. Its appeal is not to the proletariat, but to the German petty bourgeoisie and its ideological spokesman.

Theses on Feuerbach

- 1 The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism is that the material reality which it talks about is conceived only as an object of consciousness and of knowledge, not as something which is part of sensuous human activity, of human practice. As a result, the active, creative side of what it is to be human was taken up and developed abstractly by Idealism. Hence Feuerbach does not understand the importance of 'revolutionary' activity.
- 2 The question of whether objective truth can be attributed to human thought is not a theoretical one but a practical one. Man must prove the truth of his thought in practice. It is pointless to suppose that thinking can be isolated from human practical activity.

- 3 The traditional materialist doctrine insists that men are the product of their environments, but forgets that men's circumstances are the product of human activity. The idea of 'mankind changing itself' is best understood as revolutionary practice.
- 4 Feuerbach rightly attacks religion, but he fails to see it as a product of the cleavages and contradictions which exist within society. For religion to be overcome, the social basis for its existence must be transformed. If the earthly family is the secret that lies behind the Holy Family, the former must then be destroyed in theory and in practice.
- 5 Feuerbach fails to see sensuousness as practical, human-sensuous activity.
- 6 Feuerbach sees the essence of religion in the 'human essence'. But there is no such human essence as if it were an abstraction inherent to each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of human social relations. It cannot be abstracted from the historical process.
- 7 As a result, Feuerbach does not see that religion is a social product, and that the abstract individual whom he analyses belongs to a particular form of society.
- 8 All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in our understanding of it.
- 9 The highest point reached by contemplative materialism, that is, materialism which does not see sensuousness as practical activity, is the contemplation of single individuals and of civil society.
- 10 The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society, or social humanity.
- 11 The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.