

The second feature was that true positivists displace metaphysics, but such materialists occupy the seat of God and command all things. He criticizes here “the conception of nature as it is,” which Engels and Tadashi Kato adore:

It [materialism] thereby also destroys the positivism under which it takes cover. It was out of modesty that Comte’s disciples reduced human knowledge to mere scientific knowledge alone. They confined reason within the narrow limits of our experience because it was there only that reason proved to be effective. The success of science was for them a fact, but it was a *human* fact. From the point of view of man, and for man, it is true that science succeeds. They took good care not to ask themselves whether the universe in *itself* supported and guaranteed scientific rationalism, for the very good reason that they would have had to depart from themselves and from mankind in order to compare the universe as it *is* with the picture of it we get from science, and to assume God’s point of view on man and the world. The materialist, however, is not so shy. He leaves behind him science and subjectivity and the human and substitutes himself for God, Whom he denies, in order to contemplate the spectacle of the universe. He calmly writes, “The materialist conception of the world means simply the conception of nature as it is, without anything foreign added.”

What is involved in this surprising text is the elimination of human subjectivity, that “addition foreign to nature.” The materialist thinks that by denying his subjectivity he has made it disappear. But the trick is easy to expose. *In order* to eliminate subjectivity, the materialist declares that he is an *object*, that is, the subject matter of science. But once he has eliminated subjectivity in favour of the object, instead of seeing himself as a thing among other things, buffeted about by the physical universe, he makes of himself an *objective beholder* and claims to contemplate nature as it is, in the absolute.

There is a play on the word objectivity, which sometimes means the passive quality of the object beheld and, at other times, the absolute value of a beholder stripped of subjective weaknesses. Thus, having transcended all subjectivity and identified himself with pure objective truth, the materialist travels about in a world of objects inhabited by human object. And when he returns from his journey, he communicates what he has seen: “Everything that is rational is real,” he tells us, and “everything that is real is rational.” Where does he get this rationalistic optimism? We can understand a Kantian’s making statement about nature since, according to him, reason constitutes experience. But the materialist does not admit that the world is the product of our constituent activity. Quite the contrary. In his eyes it is we who are the product of the universe. How then could we know that the real is rational, since we have not created it and since we reflect only a tiny part of it from day to day? The success of science may, at the most, lead us to think that this rationality is *probable*, but it may be a matter of a local, statistical rationality. It may be valid for a certain order of size and might collapse beyond or under this limit.

Materialism makes a certainty of what appears to us to be a rash induction, or, if you prefer, a postulate. For materialism, there is no doubt. Reason is within man and outside man. ... However, by a dialectical reversal which might have been foreseen, materialist rationalism “passes” into irrationalism and destroys itself. If the psychological fact is rigorously conditioned by the biological, and the biological fact is, in turn, conditioned by the physical state of the world, I quite see how the human mind can express the universe as an effect can express its cause, but not in the way a thought expresses its object. How could a captive reason, governed from without and manoeuvred by a series of blind causes, still be reason? (Sartre 1968b, pp. 188 – 189)

Following these criticisms, Sartre begins to criticize Engels’ and Lenin’s picture theories, which are their epistemologies.

How could I believe in the principles of my deductions if it were only the external event which has set them down within me and if, as Hegel says, “reason is a bone”? What stroke of chance enables the raw products of circumstances to constitute the keys to Nature as well? Moreover, observe the way in which Lenin speaks of our consciousness: “It is only the reflection of being, in the best of cases an approximately exact reflection.” But who is to decide whether the present case, that is, materialism, is “the best of cases”? We would have to be within and without at the same time in order to make a comparison. And as there is no possibility of that, according to the very terms of our statement, we have no criterion for the reflection’s validity, except internal and subjective criteria: its conformity with other reflections, its clarity, its distinctness and its permanence. Idealistic criteria, in short. Moreover, they determine only a truth *for man*, and this truth not being constructed like those offered by the Kantians, but experienced, will never be more than a faith without foundation, a mere matter of habit.

When materialism dogmatically asserts that the universe produces thought, it immediately passes into idealist scepticism. It lays down the inalienable rights of Reason with one hand and takes them away with the other. It destroys positivism with a dogmatic rationalism. It destroys both of them with the metaphysical affirmation that man is a material object, and it destroys this affirmation of the radical negation of all metaphysics. It sets science against metaphysics and, unknowingly, *a metaphysics against science*. All that remains is ruins. (Sartre 1968b, pp. 189 – 190)

Through *Materialisme et Revolution*, Sartre conducted the most thorough critique of materialism of the time. As discussed, Engels had unfortunately not enough time to study philosophy but had nonetheless written books such as *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science*, and so forth to promote Orthodox Marxism (i.e., “Marxism without Marx”). Engels, it could be said, prevented fledgling Marxists from properly

understanding Marx's dialectic.

#### Fourth Installment in the Series: Sartre's Critical Interpretation of *Theses on Feuerbach*

I would now like to discuss the article *Materialism and Revolution* in more depth (first introduced in the last part of the third installment). After I investigated this article both through a Japanese translation and the original French text, I came to discover that it is a critical commentary of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*. If a worldwide circle of Marxists existed, this would be considered the "discovery of the century." Engels called the *Theses on Feuerbach* "genuine seed of the new world view," but there have been no other commentaries about it worth mentioning.<sup>13)</sup>

Unfortunately, the theses appeared for the first time as an Appendix in Engels' *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, and many interpretations, including Plekhanov's commentary, under the influence of Engels' particular brand of materialism, ignored Marx's general criticism of materialism at the beginning of the thesis and did not explain how Marx describes dialectic of practice.<sup>14)</sup> As a result, dialectic in Marxism became extinct and only materialism was valued and put in the seat of science.

Around this same time, Sartre appeared and initiated contact with the French Communist Party (PCF) in order to criticize it in his article *Materialism and Revolution*. Roger Garaudy and Pierre Naville, who were members of the PCF, raised questions in regard to Sartre's critique. Sartre, however, regarded them as mere expressions of absurdity in their materialism and made it his duty to criticize them in order to progress the revolution in the post-war period.<sup>15)</sup> Sartre criticized materialism and science because he believed pseudo-philosophy to be mere myth, which prevents the free practice of human beings: liberation and revolution. Materialism is the philosophy that claims that material is the profound origin of all beings and the spirit is also created by material. It means that human beings and their spirit are only shadows of material and human subjectivity is denied. Human beings just follow the material and the necessities of nature and become their victims. In his *Being and Nothing*, Sartre made humans' freedom the ultimate foundation and described it as "Man is condemned to be free." So we can easily understand that he cannot accept the materialism that denies and crushes this innate human freedom.

---

13) These days, we can read some commentaries on the theses in French. Cf. Labica 1987; Macherey 2008.

14) Cf. Engels 1990; Kato 2014; Plekhanov 1974. These are all commentaries of the materialism and do not discuss dialectic. Kato even says: "The thesis does not treat dialectic at all." This means that Marxism had neither useful commentary of the theses on Feuerbach nor decent understanding of it. Marxism has been, therefore, Marxism without Marx, that is, "Engelsism." For this reason, Engels would have raised Marx and put himself down.

15) Cf. The debate of Sartre with Garaudy and Naville at the end of Sartre's life, in 1955.

As for Sartre, *Materialism and Revolution* serves as a mediator between *Being and Nothing* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, as the concept of freedom that is dominant in the second section of *Materialism and Revolution* (“The Philosophy of Revolution”) originates directly from *Being and Nothing*. In addition, “practico inert” in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is the developed version of the critique of materialism in the first section of *Materialism and Revolution* (“the Myth of Materialism”). There have been many studies of *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, but few have discussed the relationship between *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and *Being and Nothing*, as most previous examinations claim that Sartre changed his standpoint between writing these two works. Such philological studies that interpret Sartre from an external viewpoint do not think much of his activities during and after the war and are satisfied with classifying Sartre to the vague philosophical school of existentialism. Such are the typical attitudes toward Sartre among scholars of philosophy.<sup>16)</sup>

Sartre published *Materialism and Revolution* first in 1946 and then twice in *Les Temps Moderne*, a magazine that Sartre founded. The article was recollected in *Situation III* in 1949 and he added this time a note about Marx’s “unfortunate meeting with Engels” (Sartre 1968b, p. 232). As such, it was not Marx but rather Engels that Sartre attacked with his strong criticism.

*Materialism and Revolution* consists of two sections: “The Myth of Materialism” and “The Philosophy of Revolution.” The first section is primarily a critique of Engels, Lenin, and Stalin and the second section clarifies the concept of practice, which he asserts was not made clear enough by Marx. If the article is viewed as a critical commentary of *Theses on Feuerbach*, the first section is an expanded critique of the intuitive materialism in the theses and the second section is further explanation of Marx’s practice. It would be better to begin an examination of the article with the second section, which deals with Marx’s materialism, as the aim of this installment is the revival of materialism.

### 1. Fundamental contradiction between human beings and nature

First of all, I would like to describe the fundamental relationship between human beings and nature, which is Sartre’s fundamental starting point, his description of which is clearer than both Engels and Marx.

If we are to fundamentally contradict with nature, then embedding human beings in nature (i.e., the world of materialistic necessity) or declaring that “all is science” is to bring humans, which are both free and obsessed with day-to-day uncertainty, to the world of satisfaction and contention (i.e., to

---

16) *Materialism and Revolution* was neglected by Marxists and read mostly by young people who were not contaminated by Marxism. They attended the May Revolution in France and only Sartre did not lose their faith (Cf. Wolin 2010). Originally, Daniel Cohn-Bendit’s words “L’Imagination a Pouvoir” [Put Imagination in Power] came from Sartre. Even more Jorge Semprun says that he talked with Polish philosopher Adam Shaff about Sartre’s *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (Semprun 1980).

the death). The freedom of human beings means that humans fundamentally contradict nature. Nature originally took the instinct out of human beings and deported us from the world of nature. Fortunately, human beings found food and shelter and developed strategies to survive; however, humans have struggled with nature since then.

This is the easily understandable reason why we should work to live even in the developed civilization. Human beings are, in short, not a natural or necessary existence, but rather an accidental and unnatural existence. Marx said that the production of material lives is the foundation of human society, not because he tried to analyze the world by means of Engels' materialism, but rather that the struggle to survive despite nature is the foundation of the human society.<sup>17)</sup> That is, human beings are fundamentally anti-nature and dialectic. Nature denied or cast out human beings; therefore, they need to pursue its practices in order to survive in nature, that is, the denial of denial.

Such fundamental contradiction between human beings and nature inevitably causes class struggles in human society (i.e., the contradiction and struggle among human beings, to live are based on the body or the natural and material existence, so they also are natural). In the struggle with nature, human beings appear mutually as related but enemies and must fight for property, creating inevitable class struggles. Thanks to capitalism, which developed with the Industrial Revolution, the bourgeoisie live in materially great comfort and have a great belief in natural sciences, forgetting this fundamental contradiction. It is understandable; however, Engels, who must have been a revolutionist, cut short Marx's practice to experiment and industry,<sup>18)</sup> made socialism degenerate (in his *From Utopia To Science*), and became impermissibly an adherent of the sciences. Engels' thought, then, discredits and disperses the revolution and the revolutionary parties, which must lead the revolution, must secure one of the stable elements in the bourgeoisie state after the crisis, like war or depression.

---

17) Marx says in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*: "Man as an objective, sensuous being is therefore a suffering being – and because he feels that he suffers, a passionate being. Passion is the essential power of man energetically bent on its object.

< But man is not merely a natural being: he is a human natural being. That is to say, he is a being for himself. Therefore, he is a species-being, and has to confirm and manifest himself as such both in his being and in his knowing. Therefore, human objects are not natural objects as they immediately present themselves, and neither is human sense as it immediately is – as it is objectively – human sensibility, human objectivity. Neither nature objectively nor nature subjectively is directly given in a form adequate to the human being. > And as everything natural has to come into being, man too has his act of origin—history—which, however, is for him a known history, and hence as an act of origin it is a conscious self-transcending act of origin. History is the true natural history of man. (Marx 1975, p.337).

18) Engels says "practice—namely, experiment and industry" (Engels 1990, p. 367), but Marx says in *The Eighth Thesis on Feuerbach* that "All social life is essentially practical." (Marx 1976, p. 5)