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Research on the Subjective Thought of Alienated Labor

-- A Textual Inquiry based on the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844

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ABSTRACT

Since the concept of human essence in Marx's Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 is often identified as an immature product of the young Marx's thought that has not yet broken away from Feuerbach's humanist presuppositions, the positioning of human beings within the subject of social history has been weakened, even impacting the understanding of Marx's view of history. Revisiting the textual study of the Manuscripts aims to clarify the following three points: First, when Marx analyzed the fourfold determinations of alienated labor based on labor activity, he examined the fact of private property in political economy from the perspective of the subjective initiative of workers' labor, thereby initiating a new narrative linking the worker as subject to capitalist history. Second, in the process of questioning the historical causes of alienated labor, Marx discovered that changes in capitalist socio-historical relations constitute the truth of the worker's subjective content, based on which he derived the goal of a genuine communist movement. Third, at the level of philosophical theory, Marx consciously reflected on and criticized Hegel's speculative dialectics centered on spirit as subject, absorbed its rational form, and thereby made possible the transcendence of Feuerbach and the construction of a historical dialectics.

KEYWORDS

Human Essence; Subjectivity; Socio-historical Relations; Historical Dialectics.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Alienated labor" is an important concept of the theory of human alienation revealed by Marx in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 (hereinafter referred to as the Manuscripts). It aims to identify, through an analysis of the economic reality of the time, the manifestations of the alienation of human labor from human beings in the process of social life and its relationship with private property. It serves as an important entry point for studying Marx's thought on human essence. In the Manuscripts, Marx's thinking on the question of "alienated labor" involves extensive dialogue with previous theories. Some affirmative expressions regarding Feuerbach's thought that appear therein have often led to the misconception that the Manuscripts is a completely immature work in which Marx has not yet broken away from old philosophy, especially Feuerbach's humanist philosophy, thereby weakening the understanding of subjectivity and social-historical character within Marx's thought on human essence. In response, some scholars have pointed out that the Manuscripts actually proposes and elaborates a series of basic principles of historical materialism[1], or that at this point Marx had already begun to generate a new materialist view of history distinct from old materialist philosophy[2]. These judgments collectively indicate that the theory of "alienated labor" in the Manuscripts is a product of Marx's independent thinking combined with his critique of predecessors,

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having to a large extent shaken off the intuitive presupposition of human essence by humanism and gradually moving toward a historical elaboration of human essence. It demonstrates that Marx's thought on human essence views the relationship between human beings and reality more from the perspective of social history, which provides an important theoretical premise for confirming the historical subject status of human beings. Therefore, re-tracing, based on the Manuscripts, the process by which Marx's thought on human essence constructs the historical subject is an important step toward clarifying the components of historical materialist thought in the Manuscripts and accurately positioning Marx's intellectual revolution.

2. THE SUBJECTIVE INITIATIVE OF LABOR ACTIVITY

The writing of the Manuscripts originated from Marx's phased study of economics; it is a critical summary of the views of his economics teachers written from the perspective of a learner. Before the Manuscripts, Marx completed A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, achieving the transition from idealism to materialism and from democracy to communism, and completing his own initial exploration of "expressing opinions on material interests." To further explain the practical dilemmas existing in the realm of material life, Marx began to delve into the study of economic works, in which he encountered political economists who defended social reality and neglected the interests of workers. This prompted Marx, standing on the communist standpoint to speak for workers, to spontaneously launch a critique against them. It was precisely in the process of this refutation that Marx's thought underwent a new transformation, yielding new perspectives on human essence and the view of history.

The first step in the germination of Marx's new view of history was to find human subjectivity in alienated labor, which he expressed by criticizing the antinomy of political economy on the question of labor. At the opening of Notebook I [Alienated Labor and Private Property], Marx bluntly states that political economy "does not examine the worker when he is not working, does not examine the worker as a human being"[3]. Whether the worker or wages, both are merely presented as objective things, a link or a law in the operation of capital. In the eyes of political economists, capitalist life and economic relations are an objectively operating natural phenomenon that can be recognized and utilized by human beings; human beings merely rationally recognize economic laws and act in accordance with them. When confronted with the poverty of workers and the suffering of labor, political economists, in order to demonstrate the correctness of economic laws, have had to fundamentally presuppose that alienated labor is a primitively determined and unalterable leftover problem. Obviously, in Marx's view, such an argument that merely treats the existing state of labor as a given fact explains nothing; it excludes historical factors from its own doctrine and is an interpretation that homogenizes and eternalizes human essence. In response, Marx resolved to take economic reality as the premise, treating the existing relationship between alienated labor and private property as a problem to be explained and reinterpreting it as a life fact closely related to workers.

To clarify his objections to political economy, Marx presented four determinations regarding the manifestations of alienated labor: the alienation of human beings from the object of labor, the alienation of human beings from labor activity, the alienation of human beings from their species-being, and the alienation of human beings from other human beings. He attempted to use these four determinations and their internal interrelations to clearly articulate his general views on the proposition of "human essence." However, as a discursive conglomerate blending independent thinking with theoretical borrowing, the textual exposition of this part of the Manuscripts employs multiple discursive symbols-primarily economic concepts, Feuerbach's humanist philosophical concepts, and Hegel's alienation view of history. Adopting different interpretive approaches may yield entirely heterogeneous or even contradictory conclusions. Therefore, in order to approach Marx's true thinking at the time and place when writing the Manuscripts, one should avoid

preconceived and one-sided interpretive approaches, and instead excavate both the stated and unstated content embedded in the text through progressively advancing questions and doubts.

"How to understand the structural relationship among the various determinations of alienated labor" is the starting point of all questions, and the answer to this question lies in reconstructing the logical trajectory of the emergence of the theory of alienated labor. Following the textual order, Marx proceeds from the first determination of alienated labor to the second-that is, from the alienation of the object of labor to the alienation of labor activity-explicitly mentioning that "in the alienation of the object of labor is merely summarized the alienation, the externalization, of labor activity itself"[4]. He holds that the alienation of labor activity is the cause of the alienation of human beings from the object of labor; therefore, relative to the second determination, the first determination clearly occupies a subordinate position in the logical relations of alienated labor. Next, proceeding from the first and second determinations to the third, Marx points out that one can "derive the third determination of alienated labor from the two determinations examined thus far"[5]-that is, from the alienation of human beings from the object of labor and from labor activity, one can summarize the alienation of human beings from their species-being, which means that the third determination also occupies a subordinate position in the logical relations of alienated labor. Immediately following is the fourth determination, the alienation of human beings from one another. Marx holds that "the direct consequence of the alienation of human beings from their own labor product, their own life activity, and their own species-being is the alienation of human beings from human beings"[6]. This fourth determination is determined and generated by the preceding three, so the determination of the alienation of human beings from one another also occupies a subordinate position in the entire structure of alienated labor. Synthesizing the above analysis, it is not difficult to conclude that what plays a fundamental role in the structure of the four determinations of alienated labor is not the first, third, or fourth determination, but can only be the second determination-the alienation of human beings from labor activity-around which the other three determinations revolve and from which they can be derived. This conclusion indicates that whether the materiality of the object, the naturalness of human beings, or the sociality of human beings, all depend on the subjective activity of human beings. Only when activity itself becomes non-autonomous activity and enters a state of alienation do the object of labor, the state of human species-being, and the relations among human beings gradually become alienated. Therefore, alienated labor is ultimately a social reality portrayal of human beings' loss of subjective initiative.

However, the answer to the above question has not ended; there remain many questionable aspects in Marx's view of the subjectivity of human essence.

First, the question of the humanist value presupposition in alienated labor. Marx states that "human beings treat themselves as universal and therefore free beings"[7], and compares this with natural animals outside of human beings. This move inevitably arouses humanist doubts about human species-being, and may even identify alienated labor as a complete application of Feuerbach's philosophical system to the economic concept of labor. If what Marx emphasizes here is human subjectivity, how can one prove that this subjectivity is not an illusory subject conceived by Marx himself? In response to this doubt, Marx himself had already provided an answer. In the "Introduction" to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, he explained why his study of economic history was possible, stating: "The anatomy of man is a key to the anatomy of the ape."[8] Relative to traditional society, in the period of large-scale industry, human activity has already taken the entire natural world as its object of labor, with almost nothing that human beings cannot process and produce. From the perspective of the entire human collective, human labor has indeed reached an unprecedented height, characterized by universality and freedom, and this state of activity possesses the character of "species" in the social reality of the time. It is not innate, nor is it conceived out of thin air, but rather a manifestation of social-historical development reaching the stage of large-scale industrial productive forces. In contrast, from the perspective of the subject of alienated labor-from the perspective of the oppressed workers in the period of large-scale industry-this species-

character does not belong to them; they have not truly enjoyed the fruits brought by the development of large-scale industry, but instead present a state of alienation in labor. At this time and place, Marx, while studying economics, encountered the two-sided nature of social reality revealed in economics: one side is the unprecedented development of social productive forces driven by the labor of the proletariat, while the other side is the relative contraction of the proletariat's own living conditions. These two sides constitute a contradictory unity, both belonging to the production state of large-scale industry in capitalist society, yet thoroughly isolated from each other, becoming what Marx calls "the alienation of human beings from their species-being." Of course, this part of the thought in the Manuscripts is not yet mature; at this point Marx, still as a Feuerbachian, was borrowing Feuerbach's philosophical language and inevitably influenced by what his sensuous concepts denoted, thereby conflating the species-being of the realistic dimension with that of the value dimension. But what can be confirmed is that when Marx anchored labor activity as his object of study, he had actually stood at the height of the dialectical movement among human beings, nature, and society to examine the concrete reality of capitalism, thereby initiating a shift from the natural-sensuous objective dimension of human essence toward the exploration of a realistic social-subject dimension. As he himself criticized in the Theses on Feuerbach, all previous materialism did not conceive reality "as sensuous human activity, as practice, not subjectively"[9], whereas genuine materialism must concern itself with active human beings in real life and with human subjectivity.

Second, the question of the practical significance of labor subjectivity. What is the significance of the labor subjectivity elicited by Marx for refuting political economy? And how does he dissolve the philosophical basis of the erroneous judgments made by political economy regarding the understanding of human essence? In response, Marx provides a brilliant exposition, stating: "Through alienated labor, human beings not only produce their relationship to the objects and acts of production as alien and hostile forces, but also produce the relationship of other human beings to their production and their product, as well as their relationship to these other human beings."[10] In other words, alienated labor is not only related to the living conditions of workers; it is also the driving force behind the generation of entire social relations. It produces workers, it produces capitalists, and it produces the private property that appears infinitely correct in the eyes of political economists. The premise on which political economists treat all economic laws as objective and eternal laws is the innate justice of private property; they are unwilling to acknowledge the contradiction between alienated labor and private property, and thus automatically eliminate the problem horizon regarding the origin of private property. This doctrine only believes in the dominating role of economics over reality, as if whoever masters economic laws can obtain endless wealth; therefore, it believes that in capitalist society everyone can become a subject and autonomously master their own life. But in fact, this "economic man subject" can only be called a one-sided existence, an abstract individual engaged in meticulous calculation activities visible only through a direct gaze. Marx's discovery of labor subjectivity precisely insightfully pierced through this secret: he discovered that private property is both "the consequence of externalized labor"[11] and simultaneously the condition for consolidating and maintaining the state of alienated labor, thus constituting a changing connection and an identification of unequal reality. Political economy cannot see this connection and reality, so the more it proclaims its own objectivity, the more it proves its own historical nihilism, thereby losing the opportunity to penetrate the passive relations of alienated labor and reach an understanding of the subjective initiative of labor. It is precisely in this sense that Marx's discovery contains the universal vision of the subject resisting unequal conditions and pursuing the realization of self-initiative: since human beings produce private property through alienated labor, and private property, as the social environment in which human beings live, reacts upon human labor, then human beings have reason to actively change the environment and produce a new society adapted to the life of the subject. Therefore, Marx concludes: "The emancipation of workers contains the universal emancipation of human beings; this is so because the entire system of human servitude is contained in the relationship of the worker to production."[12] Workers in the period of large-scale industry produce private

property yet are oppressed by it, bearing the mission of transcending private property, changing unequal reality, and driving historical development; they are the true representatives of subjectivity.

The subjective initiative of labor activity is a non-identity understanding derived by Marx from the process of capitalist economic operation; it is the key to unlocking the history of capitalism and even the entire social history. Since economic research is always confined to the existing framework of capitalism, focusing only on objective things external to human beings such as commodities, labor, and markets, political economists can neither transcend the current socio-historical stage to inquire into the historical premises for the formation of capitalism, nor stand on present phenomena to explore other possibilities for the future development of capitalism. Marx adopted the premises of political economy, starting from the various economic laws to which they adhered, yet arrived at conclusions entirely different from theirs due to his different view of labor activity. Through changes in labor activity, he explained the generation process of private property within the capitalist stage, clarified the relationship between private property and workers' labor, untied the various static and abstract determinations that economics bound upon workers, and truly viewed objective socio-historical reality and its changes from the perspective of human activity. Therefore, the subjective initiative of labor activity is the first characteristic of human essence, the key to positioning the historical subject, and also the germination of Marx's view of history in the Manuscripts.

3. THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF SOCIO-HISTORICAL RELATIONS AS THE CONTENT OF SUBJECTIVITY

At the end of Notebook I of the Manuscripts, Marx set himself the next task: to inquire into "how do human beings cause their own labor to be externalized and alienated?"[13] He had already broken away from the basic proposition of "the domination of private property over human beings in the capitalist period," seemingly wanting to trace back the developmental process of human labor in history, thereby answering how alienated labor is generated through the interaction between human labor activity and the natural world. Regrettably, Notebook II of the Manuscripts is almost entirely lost, with only 4 pages of content remaining and some supplements from Notebook III. In such limited exposition, did Marx achieve the goal he set for himself and successfully find the historical cause of alienated labor? This becomes a new question for perfecting the historical character of the thought on human essence.

In the remaining content of Notebook II of the Manuscripts, Marx examined the abstract social relations of capitalism, attempting to answer the question of the cause of alienated labor through historical changes in social relations and to establish a research method distinct from political economy. The process by which political economy studies capitalism is to continuously abstract a series of simple concepts from complex and concrete phenomena, then compose these most abstract concepts into an easily understandable system of knowledge, thereby making capitalism be understood as the real model of these systems. The wages, profit of capital, and ground rent extensively recorded by Marx in Notebook I are manifestations of this abstract method. However, "when concrete representations are abstracted into a series of simple concepts, the socio-historical character of the objects denoted by the concepts is also abstracted away"[14]. Therefore Marx says: "Human beings as the abstract existence of mere laborers... private property has lost its natural and social qualities... the same capital remains identical in extremely diverse natural and social existences"[15]. In the discourse of political economists, workers have no history, private property has no history, and capitalism as a whole has no history; all historical differences are obliterated in the social relations of capitalism. The reason for this result is not that social reality truly does not retain all factors that existed in the past, but that political economy has always only used mathematical abstraction to reconstruct the operational trajectory of economic phenomena; it acknowledges the appearance that social reality presents to people in a way that people can directly understand, and thus turns a blind eye to the hidden, dominated, and non-primary aspects within social reality. In

socio-historical relations, things occupy different positions in the relational structure, with differences among them that change as history changes. Political economy, by contrast, understands social relations as homogenized economic relations, objectifying and eternalizing them into entities. Marx points out that social relations have a history; just as capitalists are not born as such, but are formed through the continuous changes of social relations in the process of development from agriculture to industry, for landowners, capitalists are precisely "the arrogant, liberated, and enriched former slaves"[16]. Therefore, human essence is not a fixed attribute; it is socio-historical relations, the realistic subjects in motion and change and differentiated from one another, and the connections among them. The socio-historical relations of capitalism determine the irreconcilable essential rift between workers and capitalists, just as the antagonistic relations that always existed between landlords and serfs, nobles and burghers before capitalism. While searching for the historical roots of alienated labor, Marx also, at a general historical dimension, encountered the category of social relations closely connected to the content of human essence.

Based on this research method, Marx discovered that the continuous abstraction of concepts by political economy is actually a reflection of reality-that is, concrete socio-historical relations have increasingly been dominated by abstract capital relations in the development of capitalism. The origin of the labor theory of value is the best proof. Early political economy did not recognize labor as the source of value; from mercantilism to the physiocrats, and then to Adam Smith and Ricardo, its understanding of the source of value went through multiple developmental stages. In the mercantilist period, monetary exchange and commodity trade were regarded as the core of capitalism, an understanding corresponding to the trading stage of capitalism where machine production was not yet developed, in which socio-historical relations were still entangled with concrete things that were the results of subjective labor creation. With the development of capitalist production, the physiocrats saw the close relationship between concrete labor attached to land and value. In this regard, Marx believed that for the physiocrats, labor "was not yet understood in its universality and abstractness"[17]; only the political economists from Adam Smith to the Ricardian school truly recognized labor as the source of value in its universality and abstractness, because at this point the results of capitalist development were presented before them "in a more developed and more contradictory form"[18]. This is both the reflection of abstract concepts of conscious activity on changes in social-realistic relations, and the result of the practical activity of subjects in reality intuitively experiencing changes in the status of different socio-historical relations. Marx absorbed this abstract method of political economy and made improvements; he believed that the essence of capitalism cannot be grasped through empirical intuition, and only through the mediation of socio-historical relations and the use of abstract thinking can one grasp its non-substantial, internal contradictory movement. Later in the Grundrisse (1857–1858), Marx summarized this method as: "In all forms of society there is a certain production that determines the position and influence of all other productions, and whose relations therefore determine the position and influence of all other relations. It is a universal light that obscures all other colors and modifies their characteristics. It is a special ether that determines the specific gravity of everything that emerges within it"[19]. The changes in political economy's understanding of value correspond to the historical development process of the capitalist "ether," and Marx's adherence to the labor theory of value in the Manuscripts is precisely the adherence to the correct connection between capitalist concrete reality and theoretical abstraction, and between complex socio-historical relations and human essence.

After basically grasping the socio-historical relations of capitalism, Marx began to further argue: since capitalism is supported by the universal and undifferentiated alienated labor of workers, then communism is the sublation by the entire working class of the socio-historical relations represented by alienated labor and private property. The supplement to page 39 of Notebook II in Notebook III focuses on discussing how workers can resolve alienated labor to achieve genuine communism. In this discussion, Marx presents three views of communism, arguing that the first two are erroneous and only the last is the correct answer of history to itself. First is "crude communism," which advocates the use of coercive means to equally distribute physical property. The community of

women is a typical representative of this proposition; it distributes everything, including human beings, to all people according to the form of equal possession, and is the small producer's fantasy of fairness. Marx believed that this egalitarian communism "has not even reached the level of private property, let alone transcended it"[20], and is merely a romanticist ideology. Second is political or state communism, which is an unfinished form of communism; "although it has already understood the concept of private property, it does not yet understand its essence"[21]. Workers striving for state political power to achieve democracy and freedom is only one dimension of the communist movement, and not the essential dimension. Here Marx continued the basic viewpoint in A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right that "material needs play a decisive role in state politics," emphasizing that understanding and sublating the socio-historical relations of private property within the realm of material life is more important than sublating the state political system of private property. Finally, there is the communism that Marx highly praised in the Manuscripts as "the positive sublation of private property, i.e., human self-alienation." This "positive sublation" is a combination of theory and reality: "The entire movement of history is both the real generative activity of this communism-the birth activity of its empirical existence-and, for its thinking consciousness, its understood and recognized becoming movement"[22]. Human beings living in social history inevitably experience the past, present, and future of the socio-historical relations of private property occurring in reality; they come to understand and actively promote historical development through subjective practice, thereby eliminating the various conditions that cause the subject to become alienated. Ultimately, "this communism, as completed naturalism, equals humanism, and as completed humanism, equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between human beings and nature, and between human beings and human beings, the genuine resolution of the struggle between existence and essence, objectification and self-confirmation, freedom and necessity, individual and species"[23]. Therefore, the antagonistic relations of all past classes, including capitalism, and the tense relations between human beings and nature, are transformed in the communist movement. The return of human essence precisely refers to the movement process of this activity, and the working class is the historical subject that recognizes and carries out this activity from the height of the entire historical development of capitalism.

In subsequent texts, Marx continued to uphold and develop the view that socio-historical relations constitute the content of human essence. First, in the Theses on Feuerbach, Marx made a preliminary distillation and summary of human essence: first, "human essence is no abstraction inherent in the single individual. In its reality, it is the ensemble of social relations"[24], indicating that social relations can manifest the essential particularity among human beings; second, "all social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice"[25], meaning that all answers exist in the socio-historical life constituted by the subjective practical activity of human beings. Subsequently, in The German Ideology, these two determinations were further extended by Marx and Engels to the more general and universal concept of "real individuals," forming historical materialism centered on the theory of basic social contradictions and encompassing the theory of human needs and the theory of social division of labor, perfecting the methodological premise for analyzing "human essence." Finally, in Capital, Marx, using the life imagery of the capitalist movement, depicted a vivid picture of socio-historical relations in the ontological sense of human beings, fully demonstrating the contradictions and conflicts within socio-historical relations through the concept of fetishism. The above views all indicate that, for Marx, human beings whose essence is socio-historical relations are fundamentally unified with the historical subject that transforms the old society and creates a new society.

4. HISTORICAL DIALECTICS DISTINCT FROM HEGEL'S SPIRITUAL SUBJECT

Starting from the national economic fact of private property, Marx discovered the truth of human essence within private property through the question of alienated labor, and innovated the materialist view of history from the perspective of the subject acting upon the changes of realistic socio-historical relations. This new view of history, germinating from the metaphysical economic research, necessarily required Marx to question his own metaphysical philosophical thought, so as to criticize old philosophy from a theoretical height and summarize a new philosophical method that can accurately position the subject in reality and guide the subject's realistic activities. Marx seemed to realize that it was necessary to rethink Hegel's speculative dialectics, which had once served as his intellectual teacher, so after discussing communism in Notebook III he wrote [Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole]. Some scholars believe that it was precisely this move that gave him the possibility of thoroughly transcending Feuerbach from the ontological foundation and reasonably appropriating the heritage of Hegelian philosophy[26].

Hegel's speculative dialectics contains its fundamental idealist error. "Human essence, human being, in Hegel's view = self-consciousness"[27]. In the argument closely tied to human essence, Hegel posits the category of self-consciousness, causing human activity to give way to the activity of consciousness, so that the manifestation of human essence is nothing but the manifestation of self-consciousness, and the creative essence of human beings is nothing but the positing function of self-consciousness. Therefore, the occurrence of alienation or the alienation of human essence "is nothing but the alienation of self-consciousness"[28]; real alienation becomes the appearance of the alienation of self-consciousness, and the reflection of thinking on alienation is elevated above the actual occurrence of alienation. Meanwhile, since self-consciousness has the ability to externalize and posit thinghood, it pre-exists human beings and interacts with the world, so objectification is fundamentally not the objectification of human activity but the false externalization of self-consciousness. Thinghood becomes the shell of the created object, while the object presents itself as nothingness, possessing the properties of a thing yet not being a genuine thing. In the process of interaction between self-consciousness and the thinghood object it posits, self-consciousness achieves its return through sublating this object. This merely demonstrates that self-consciousness is a spiritual entity detached from nature and possessing the ability to plan history; it wears "a completely negative and critical appearance," and although it formally traverses a path consistent with the activity of real human beings, it "actually already contains a critique that often precedes later development"[29]-that is, thinking's presumption of the sublation of alienation precedes reality's overcoming of alienation. Althusser identified this fundamental precondition of speculative dialectics: "The simple primitive unity develops within itself through the action of negation, and throughout its entire development, each time it becomes a more 'concrete' totality, what it restores is nothing but that primitive unity and simplicity"[30]. Hegel reversed the positions of self-consciousness and the sensuous objective activity of human beings, causing the purpose of human activity to be directed toward the overcoming by consciousness or spirit of its externalized object, thereby constraining the richness of real history into a unidirectional linear goal. Obviously, Hegel believed in the subjectivity of self-consciousness over history but did not acknowledge the subjective role of the sensuous objective activity of human beings in history; his supreme spiritual entity is illegitimate, and the speculative dialectics rooted in self-consciousness is ultimately nothing but the form of self-deduction of this illegitimate entity.

However, there are also rational elements within Hegel's speculative dialectics, which is "the critical form possessed by the non-critical movement"[31]. The externalization and objectification of self-consciousness require the sublation of the externalized object; when we understand it from the developmental process of dialectical movement rather than from the posited result, we find that dialectics "conceives the objective human being, the real and therefore genuine human being, as the result of his own labor"[32]. This returns the positing function of the transcendental subject to the

initiative possessed by human activity in creating the subjective living environment, so that human self-production can be understood as a process of subject-object interaction. Although human beings are treated by self-consciousness as tools, as means for sublating objects and achieving the negation of the negation, it does formally regard the relations occurring within human beings themselves as active relations, placing human creativity and driving force within the active form of negation, requiring the overcoming of objects after objectification and the sublation of externalization after externalization. Of course, Hegel's dialectics at most possesses only formal rationality; merely preserving this rationality does not enable one to reasonably utilize it. One must fundamentally reshape the subject of dialectics, truly transforming the dialectics of thinking into a dialectics with human beings engaged in sensuous objective activity as the subject. This dialectics necessarily requires real human beings to carry out a real sublation movement against real objects, to find in social history the mediation that truly ought to be revolutionized, thereby creating a new history for human beings. Marx summarizes this as: "When the real, corporeal human being, standing on the solid, round earth and exhaling and inhaling all natural forces, through his own externalization posits his own real, objective essential powers as alien objects, the positing is not the subject; it is the subjectivity of objective essential powers, and therefore the activity of these essential powers must also be objective activity"[33]. The heritage of Hegel's speculative dialectics lies precisely in its finding an expression for historical movement, a philosophical form that reflects real history through false logic.

Marx highly praised Feuerbach's outstanding contribution in exposing the idealist error of Hegel, and also objectively pointed out Feuerbach's limitations in understanding Hegel's speculative dialectics. He believed that Feuerbach's great merit lay in proving that Hegelian philosophy "is nothing but religion expressed in thought and elaborated through thinking"[34], and in calling those logically infinite things and abstractly universal concepts religion and theology. Regarding the negation of the negation in Hegel's speculative dialectics, Feuerbach also merely treated it as a movement of philosophy circling around within theology, firmly believing that if philosophy does not "start from the sensuously certain," it will ultimately restore theology. However, Feuerbach's pulling of philosophy from the beyond back to this world does not mean that philosophy has found the correct object of study; there is still something in Hegel that he did not discover. Marx says: "We must both explain the abstract form this movement (the movement of history-author's note) takes in Hegel, and explain the difference between this movement in Hegel and modern critique, i.e., the same process described in Feuerbach's The Essence of Christianity"[35]. It can be seen that Marx realized that learning from Feuerbach to criticize Hegel only completed one aspect of the critique. The sensuous pre-existence of human beings as the premise and carrier of human essence is certainly correct, but if separated from human activity, or rather from the existence of human beings situated within historical movement, then human essence remains incomplete. Therefore Marx emphasizes that "thoroughgoing naturalism or humanism, distinct from both idealism and materialism, is at the same time the truth that unites both"[36]. Human essence is precisely the creation by the sensuous objective activity of human beings of the history in which human beings exist; lacking any one factor is impermissible.

The errors of political economy, Hegelian philosophy, and Feuerbachian philosophy are not so much errors of theory in recognizing reality as errors caused by reality obstructing the capacity for recognition. The socio-historical relations of capitalism are the same social reality faced by theorists of capitalist society, a historical big Other completely alien to the subject; human beings situated within it, relying on experience and tradition, are helpless in the face of this big Other. Similarly discussing the category of human labor, both political economy and Hegelian philosophy understand labor from its abstract aspect: the former's abstraction settles in the pure reflection and acknowledgment of socio-historical relations by economic concepts, while the latter's abstraction appeals to the blind domination and negation of the negation of socio-historical relations by the spiritual entity. They cannot find in reality a path for the subject to actively overcome the problem of alienation, so their erroneous understanding of reality instead becomes a defense of reality, to the

point that theory loses its own critical and revolutionary character. Although Feuerbach emphasizes sensibility, the natural sensibility that is discarded along with real history likewise presents its conservative character. Lukács states that "becoming appears as the truth of being, process as the truth of things"[37]; that human beings are subjective existences rather than thing-like existences is manifested in human beings actively generating history rather than passively experiencing history. The working class is the subjective existence that transforms socio-historical relations and generates new history in the capitalist period; their strong demand for changing alienated life is universally released through uniting as a class, and they require theory to respond to this. Therefore, Marx, standing on the workers' standpoint, naturally possesses the practical courage to confront the historical big Other, which is reflected in his critical attitude toward capitalist reality. Those doctrines that defend the status quo, after his critical analysis, ultimately can only become theoretical nourishment for his continuous perfection of the scientific worldview. Therefore, from the dimension of the mutual mediation between theory and reality, the key to why historical dialectics is possible, distinct from other philosophical methods, lies in the self-participation pursued by the historical subject in the already formed universal social life and the autonomous consciousness of creating history. This is the internal connection between theory and reality, and also the fundamental reason why Marxism can remain vibrant as the times develop; it ultimately must reveal in theory the reality, necessity, and directionality by which the historical subject can transform history.

5. CONCLUSION

The complex thought embedded in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 synthesizes economics, anthropology, German classical philosophy, and Marx's critique and reconstruction of all these intellectual viewpoints. It both focuses on discussing private property and the communist future, and provides a preliminary explanation of the materialist view of history. Whether the viewpoints already held by predecessors or the complex intellectual collisions of Marx himself, none can deny the Manuscripts' thinking and innovation regarding the thought of human essence and the question of the historical subject. From the discovery of the subjectivity of alienated labor and capitalist socio-historical relations through national economic facts, to the confirmation of the sensuous objective activity of human beings by historical dialectics, the Manuscripts can be said to be the venue for Marx's great intellectual experiment; many mature Marxist viewpoints can find their beginnings in the Manuscripts, and therefore it fully deserves to be called an important beacon for understanding and grasping the entire territory of Marx's thought. Today, the ways in which capitalism manifests its socio-historical relations are myriad and strange, and its ideological influence on human beings has become even more severe. We may as well capture the basic orientation of the critique of capitalism from its source, thereby understanding and consciously following the guiding principles of scientific socialism.

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