

## Chapter VIII

HEGEL

FEUERBACH, ENGELS

In the positing of man's complete independence, the concept of immortality has necessarily to be eliminated. Its mere negation, however, for crudely materialistic reasons convinces no one, least of all those bending all their power of intelligence to the exaltation of man emancipated. Such minds would be the last to wish to sweep away at a blow that which obviously constitutes man's superiority over the rest of animate nature, namely his intelligence. It is a question, therefore, rather of retaining for man's intelligence all the excellence which the concept of spiritual immortality implies, while eliminating from that concept any note that could be construed as placing man in a dependent, subject position. Thus it is necessary that man should create his own personal immortality, an immortality which must coincide with the physical powers, since the concept of man as a disembodied spirit, out adrift from his physical, tangible strength and energy which is so real to him, is an affront to human dignity. In Hegel one sees the beginning of the gradual transposition of immortality, as a concept responding to the recognition of something divine in man, from the plane of spirituality, where it constantly menaced man's boast to be answerable to none but himself, to the plane of matter

which assumes a kind of incorruptibility due to its very formlessness. It cannot be the immortality of the individual corporeal man, since he is very clearly destructible. It is rather the immortality of the matter which composes him, conceived precisely under the aspect of its fundamental indetermination, an indetermination on the brink of nothingness.

But how can such a transposition of that which is great in man from the plane of spirituality to the illusory grandeur of indestructible, formless matter be considered anything other than a degradation? It can only be explained in terms of that terrifying paradox whereby an intellectual creature, to retain his independent singularity will divest himself, at least in intention, of all that within him which is of another and, if need be, struggle to lose himself in nothingness. As a last taunt to the ruler of the universe, man can invest that which is lowest in being, matter, with all the attributes of divinity: eternity, incorruptibility, omnipotence, preferring, if necessary, as a sign of unbending fearlessness, to attribute to that which is most unlike God, to that which is farthest beneath him, the excellence he cannot have himself.

Yet this device, to the thinking rebel, can be little more than an act of defiance more than an act of defiance rather than an actual judgment. To those who follow their revolt out unwaveringly to its stark conclusion, there can be only one refuge:

nothingness, oblivion. Let the weak of heart console themselves with dreams of earthly bliss and unending material satiety for humanity in some distant millenium. For the strong, for the ruthlessly consistent thinker, there is only one goal: le néant.

As Bertrand Russell says, we must build our soul's foundation "on the firm foundations of unyielding despair." (Philosophical Essays, 'The Free Man's Worship,' p.61 et seq., quoted in The Idea of Immortality, Seth Pringle-Pattison, Oxford, 1922, p.194)

Thus, whereas the crude materialistic denial of immortality, leaves untouched man's conviction of the divine in him, it is really the scholarly perversions of men like Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, and Engels who disarmingly assume the significance of the concept but deftly warp it into what is ultimately an expression of crass materiality, but a materiality which necessarily appears as the rigid result of cogent and lofty deductions fully consonant with man's dignity. Needless to say, this is the really devastating achievement, since the guileless sectary of man's creative independence is confidently and undoubtingly carried from the pinnacle of his spiritual grandeur to the lowest depths of materiality in an apparently progressive manner which he heartily endorses. Thus it is possible to destroy immortality while ostensibly defending it, as has been the ultimate result of its defence by Descartes and Kant in particular.

One of Kant's most important benign destructions was

the elimination of the substantiality of the soul which enabled his successors to consider it merely as a superior outgrowth of the body and, ultimately, of inorganic matter. "Do we need a soul in any other sense - or can we understand what is meant by a soul in any other sense - than the systematic unity of the conscious experiences of a particular individual centre -- the individual centre being defined or determined at the out set by the bodily organism?" (Pringle-Pattison, op.cit. p.100, cf. also pp. 80 and 95) With this much achieved it is possible to begin to assimilate the nature of the mind and its laws to those of nature, Hegel paved the way to this accomplishment by Engels, by his doctrine of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, whereby he produced the triumphal feat of merging contradictories, of making of contradiction the very essence of being and truth. This was a tremendous achievement on the path of man's self-destruction since it henceforth enabled him to reach out and embrace evil and falsehood with all the ardor directed towards goodness and truth, as an inexhaustible source of creative activity. Such is the fruit of what Engels calls Hegel's "dialectical poem." (op.cit. p.224) Thanks to him we now have dialectical materialism, "the philosophy which, along with Marx, he (Engels) founded, is not merely a philosophy of history, but a philosophy which illuminates all events whatever, from the falling of a stone to a poet's imaginings. And it lays particular emphasis on the inter-connection of all processes, and the artificial character

of the distinctions which men have drawn..." (Haldane's preface to Engels, op. cit., p.xv)

The lapidary statement of Hegel's farreaching thesis is contained in Hegel's Logic, no.9: "Being is the single empty immediateness which has its opposite in pure Nought, and whose union therewith is the Becoming... (The 'sound common sense,' as one-sided abstraction often calls itself, will not admit the union of Being and Nought. ...It asserts, therefore, the impossibility of Beginning.)" (Hegel, Selections, Edited by J. Lowenberg, New York, 1920, p. 104)

The union of Being and Nothing permits the negation of negation. "The Infinite in general, when seized in the form of the Infinite Progress, is the process of cancelling the restraining limit whether it be qualitative or quantitative, so that this restraining limit passes for something positive, and continually reappears after its negation. The true Infinite, however, is the NEGATION OF NEGATION, inasmuch as the restraining limit is to be understood as really a negation. In it the progress beyond the Finite does not posit again a new restraining limit, but through the cancelling of the restraining limit, the Being is restored to identity with itself." (ibid. no. 28, p. 108)

The notion of infinite progress based upon the cancelling and engulfing of all limitations, even the most contradictory, of a progress necessarily based upon conflict, was to furnish Marx

and Engels with a complete Weltanschauung. Thus one reads: "The end of the Middle Ages is indissolubly linked with the fall of Constantinople. The new age begins with the return of the Greeks. Negation of the negation! "(Engels, op. cit. p. 218)

But whereas Hegel elevated internal contradiction into the very essence of being, he left one great synthesis unaccomplished, that of man and the divinity. That the course of the world's history was not a purely unintelligent development of indestructible motion in matter, but the unfolding of a one Spirit and Reason, similar to the Nous of Anaxagoras, was for Hegel an apodictical conclusion. Thus in the opening lecture of his courses on "The Introduction to the Philosophy of History, " he says of Reason: The only Thought which Philosophy brings with it to the contemplation of History, is the simple conception of Reason; that Reason is the Sovereign of the World; that the history of the world, therefore, presents us with a rational process. This conviction and intuition is a hypothesis in the domain of history as such. In that of Philosophy it is no hypothesis. It is there proved by speculative cognition that Reason - and this term may here suffice us, without investigating the relation sustained by the Universe to the Divine Being, - is Substance as well as Infinite Power; its own Infinite Material, underlying all the natural and spiritual life which it originates, as also the Infinite Form, - that which sets

this Material in motion." (Hegel, op.cit. p.348) This conception necessarily implies a subservience on the part of man, a subjection to a reason other than his own, although in reality it is Hegel's reason which controls the Reason he professes to revere. "What I have said thus provisionally, and what I shall have further to say, is, even in reference to our branch of science, not to be regarded as hypothetical, but as a summary view of the whole; the result of the investigation we are about to pursue; a result which happens to be known to me, because I have traversed the whole field. It is only an inference from the history of the World, that its development has been a rational process; that the history in question has constituted the rational necessary course of the World-Spirit - that Spirit whose nature is always one and the same, but which unfolds this its one nature as the phenomena of the World's existence." (ibid. p.350) Such a conception was a definite affront to man's dignity as epitomized in the thought of Engels. For him, any necessity had to be a creation of man. To posit a divine necessity was merely to elevate chance and the momentarily inexplicable into God, and thereby degrade necessity. "...The proof of necessity lies in human activity, in experiment, in work: if I am able to make the post hoc, it becomes identical with the propter hoc, .....Whether I term the cause of the inexplicable chance, or whether I term it God, is matter of complete indifference as far as the thing itself is concerned. Both are only expressions which say:

I do not know, and therefore do not belong to science." (Engels, op. cit. p.231)

But although Engels could later write: "Natural science has simply ignored these propositions (of Hegel, whereby chance becomes necessity), as paradoxical trifling, as self-contradictory non sense, (ibid. p. 233)," nevertheless Hegel's World-Spirit impeded the completion of the Marx-Engels philosophy of the evolution of the world through the conflict of material forces. Although Engels suspected that the World-Spirit was none other than Professor Hegel himself, dialectical materialism remained in something of an impasse until 1843.

"Then came Feuerbach's Essence of Christianity. With one blow it pulverized the contradiction, in that without circumlocution it placed materialism on the throne again. ...Nature exists independently of all philosophy; it is the basis upon which men, themselves products of nature, have grown up... nothing exists outside of nature and man, and the higher beings our religious fantasies have created are only the fantastic reflection of our own essence. ...The spell was broken ... the contradiction shown to exist in our imagination, was dissolved. ... Enthusiasm was general; we all became Feuerbachians on the spot. "(Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie, Stuttgart, 1895, p.11) Later on, Lenin was to write: "Marx did not stop at the materialism of the eighteenth century, but moved philosophy forward.



He enriched it by the achievements of German classical philosophy, especially by Hegel's system, which in its turn led to the materialism of Feuerbach." (V.I. Lenin, Marx, Engels, Marxism, New York, 1935, p.51)

How did Feuerbach accomplish this pulverizing of the contradiction that set dialectical materialism in march again? He did so by "the dissolution of the religious world into its secular basis" (Engels), by demonstrating to the satisfaction of contemporary materialists that the divinity was nothing but the alienation of man's own essence, that immortality was nothing but an egotistic and unnatural yearning.

Feuerbach's life work is summed up in the following words by one who studied him from the Marxist point of view: "Jusqu'au jour où la mort, qu'il s'était habitué dès son âge mûr à considérer comme une fin normale, humaine et naturelle, vint l'interrompre à son travail, Feuerbach consacra sa vie à poursuivre tous les dogmes, toutes les illusions, toutes les autorités qui prétendent, selon le mot de Nietzsche, diviniser ou diaboliser les choses naturelles et humaines." (A. Levy, La Philosophie de Feuerbach, Paris, 1904, p.51) "Si ... on cherchait à définir la formule génératrice de sa philosophie, on serait amené sans doute à l'énoncer à peu près en ces termes: Il faut rendre à toute existence son essence aliénée; il faut restituer aux hommes et aux choses leur âme projetée au ciel; il faut rapatrier dans ce vieux monde la vie qui a voulu

franchir le pas de la mort pour chercher le bonheur dans de mystérieuses demeures extraterrestres." (ibid. pp. 53-54)

Like a true Marxist he avers a morbid love of death, that annihilation which will allow complete escape from God. Thus Levy writes of his Rimes on Death: "Dans les Rimes de la Mort, le poète, comme Faust, signe le pacte avec le diable, pour boire ici-bas la coupe de la vie. Il renonce au royaume des anges; il a des idées païennes, il ne veut pas aller chez les ombres: il préfère se disperser au sein de la nature et servir d'aliment aux vies nouvelles qui germent sans cesse. Tout le rythme du monde n'est qu'une danse avec la mort; entrons joyeusement dans le cortège. ...J'ai vu dans chaque source claire la douce nuit de la mort; j'ai rencontré à chaque lisière de forêt la limite de mon éternité... Je ne vivrai qu'une fois, mais ma vie sera singulièrement intense: ce qui ne se répète pas est éternel." (ibid. p. 79)

But though such was the desire of Feuerbach, something more was required to definitely stifle man's natural hunger for immortality. "...Il reste toujours au fond de l'homme une voix qui proteste contre la mort, quand on lui prouve que cette condamnation est sans appel, et qui parle encore en faveur de l'immortalité, quand on lui a démontré qu'une autre vie est impossible. Pour persuader, il faut une méthode vraiment positive et féconde: ... elle donne ainsi la vraie solution des énigmes; la foi s'éva-

nouit en se découvrant, mais il reste l'affirmation des besoins et des désirs qui l'ont fait naître." (ibid. pp. 82-83) This was the task of Das Wesen des Christentums: to transform the natural appetite for immortality, by means of the theory of alienation, into an expression of purely material needs.

This is done by Feuerbach's supposed demonstration that the desire for immortality, especially for immortality as visualized in the Christian religion, is nothing other than the selfish desire of the individual to separate himself from the species, and from a material world he cannot dominate. "Das ehelose, überhaupt ascetische Leben ist der directe Weg zum himmlischen, unsterblichen Leben, denn der Himmel ist nichts Andres als das übernatürliche, gattungsfreie, geschlechtslose, absolut subjektiven Leben." (Feuerbach, op.cit. p.244) Thus, with diabolical mastery Feuerbach sets out to show that the desire for immortality is necessarily egotistic, whereas its denial in favor of purely material satisfactions is the essence of altruism. It is as though he fiercely resented the attempt of any to rise above the material life with which he had sworn to content himself in defiant independence. The only real man is one who lives for the life of the species, as essentially represented by the union of the sexes. "Wer daher in Bewusstsein der Gattung lebt, war sein Gemüth und seine Phantasie beschränkt, bestimmt durch die Anschauung des wirklichen Lebens, des wirklichen Menschen der kann sich kein Leben denken, wo das Gattungleben und

damit der Geschlechtsunterschied aufgehoben ist, er halt das geschlechtslose Individuum, den himmlischen Geist fur eine gemütliche Vorstellung der Phantásie." *ibid.* p. 246) The doctrine of immortality is a kind of escape from reality, which is represented by the Gattungsleben and the Geschlechtsleben. As modern psycho-analysts explain, all inquietude about the immaterial is merely a frustration or sublimation of some mal-adjustment in the life of the flesh. This thesis was pioneered by Feuerbach's theory of alienation. Thus a man who cares for his soul can either be considered to be sick or selfish. Such is the tyranny of materialism, which having veiled the heavens to itself is also intent upon veiling them forcibly from others, even as the Devil is intent upon dragging down to hell other souls with himself. What the proud cannot have, neither shall the good have. Thus also wickedness derives a certain excellence by its destruction and debasement of that which is good.

But despite his accomplishment in the destruction of any other immortality than that of the Gattung being constantly renewed by the continuance of generation, Feuerbach did not complete his reduction of all things to the material, since he left supreme an abstraction called "humanity." "He overlooks the fact that after completing his work, the chief thing still remains to be done.... Thus, for instance, once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then be theoretically

criticized and radically changed." (Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach, Anhang, No. 4)

However, Feuerbach had the merit of replacing materialism on the throne. He had dealt the deathblow to spiritualism and speculative idealism, to the World-Spirit of Hegel. Thus Levy writes : "La première oeuvre commune de Marx et d'Engels - la Sainte Famille - est une apologie de Feuerbach contre Bruno Bauer. Les auteurs disent expressément dans leur préface que leur intention est de défendre l'humanisme réel contre son ennemi le plus dangereux, le spiritualisme ou idéalisme spéculatif, qui met à la place de l'homme réel et individuel la conscience (Selbstbewusstsein) ou l'esprit et qui enseigne avec l'évangéliste : C'est l'esprit qui donne la vie; la chair ne sert à rien." (op. cit. p. 277) Levy quotes Marx's own words : "Ce n'est que Feuerbach qui a su poser les principes de la vraie critique de la spéculation hégélienne, en réduisant l'Esprit absolu, synthèse de la substance et de la conscience, à l'homme réel au sein de la nature." (cf. Mehring, Nachlass II, pp. 248-250)

But this is not enough, one cannot stop at a vague love of the Gattung, one cannot leave humanity as an abstraction. This is not true humanism. The real core must be the singular individual. The notion of humanity presupposes something greater than

the individual, and is a dangerous abstraction. "Dans la situation des travailleurs anglais (1845), Engels se propose de faire connaître la situation réelle du prolétariat : c'est cette connaissance qui, selon lui, manque le plus aux théoriciens allemands, presque tous convertis au communisme par la philosophie de Feuerbach. ... Le communisme est toujours pour lui (Engels) l'application pratique de l'humanisme." (Levy, op. cit. pp. 284-285)

Thus dialectical materialism develops as a synthesis of Hegel and Feuerbach, wherein the former supplies the notion of progress through contradiction, and the latter that of the material as the supreme reality which reduces all else to the state of empty abstraction. Thus the property-owning classes and the proletariat are two forms of human alienation in the sense of Feuerbach, but they are also the thesis and the antithesis of a Hegelian opposition. "En ce sens, leur évolution est déterminée d'avance. Le prolétariat résoudra la contradiction qui le fait souffrir en supprimant les deux termes." (Levy, op. cit. pp. 281-283)

This necessarily excludes all empty talk about "humanity" as a kind of God, a fault which modern American Hegelians are prone to fall into. "La victoire du prolétariat est le triomphe de l'humanité. Ce qu'il faut donc étudier avant tout, c'est les conditions de la bataille, les phases de la lutte. Sur ce point Engels se sépare des socialistes qui ne tiennent pas compte de l'évolution his-

torique, et qui font appel à la philanthropie stérile, à l'amour universel, au lieu de compter sur la fécondité de la misère." (Levy, op. cit. p. 286).

Marx and Engels began therefore the last great synthesis on the path of man's striving for his own self-attained, and self-maintained excellence, namely the reduction of idealism into materialism. Originally idealism pulled away from matter and reality in order to rise solely by its own force and, beholden to none, to the greatest heights. Reality came thus to be interpreted solely in terms of man who informed it by his mind. As a final step, it is time for man to return to the world which now he alone creates. Materialism has reached its goal since now it may summon to its aid unconditionally all the strength of the mind. Instead of matter serving man, man must now serve matter, such is the pattern of emancipation by pride. Thought and being are once more reunited, yet now it is not being which measures thought, but thought which measures being. This may appear idealistic rather than materialistic, yet it is to be remembered that this thought which measures being is to be now considered a product of matter and subject to the laws of matter, the laws of matter themselves being free to man's independent hypotheses, which virtually create these laws. Matter, however, unintelligent, unfeeling, unfathomable, remains the ultimate. Such is the sad paradox of man who will not submit to an all-perfect God and ultimately subjects himself to formless matter and nothingness.

The immortality of the soul is denied by which man is but a little lower than the angels, and its place is assumed that which is lower than a worm, pure matter. Is this the freeing of man, the elevating of man ? Is this progress ?

This re-integration of mind into matter envisaged by Marx and Engels constitutes dialectical materialism. The defect of idealism, to their mind, is to see in sensible reality only an object of knowledge and not a source of activity. Its aggressively creative powers, however, are not to be spurned. "Ce sont donc ces forces actives (de l'idéalisme) qu'il faut selon Marx enlever à l'idéalisme pour les réintégrer dans le système matérialiste. ... L'idée de Marx est donc la suivante : de même qu'à nos représentations correspondent des objets réels au dehors de nous, de même à notre activité phénoménale correspond une activité réelle hors de nous, une activité des choses ...: l'activité révolutionnaire a désormais une portée métaphysique." (Levy, op. cit. pp. 290-291)

However, at least theoretically speaking, Marx goes farther than the concrete individual in establishing the human essence. Farther towards non-being, of course. "Qu'est-ce, en effet que cette essence humaine que Feuerbach a retrouvée en analysant l'Etre divin qu'adorent les religions ? N'existe-t-elle que dans les consciences individuelles ? Marx ne se contente pas de cette



essence psychologique, de cette abstraction; il cherche comme toujours la réalité extérieure correspondante : la réalité de l'essence humaine est selon lui la société. ... L'essence réelle de l'homme est donc, selon Marx, l'ensemble des relations sociales." (*ibid.*)

These social relations are in turn a by-product of matter, which thus retains its place of honor in dialectical materialism.

Thanks to dialectics it is possible for man to restore his unity with nature, to realize that subjective thought and the objective world are subject to the same laws (*Engels, Dialectics of Nature* p. 313), that the contradictions in the one are of the same nature as the conflicts in the other. In matter there is attraction and repulsion. ("Hegel is quite right in saying that the essence of matter is attraction and repulsion." (p. 259)... "Life as life, involves the germ of death, and ... the finite, being radically self-contradictory, involves its own self-suppression." (Hegel, quoted by Engels, *op. cit.* p. 341) As science progresses, "the more man will not only feel, but also know, their unity with nature, and thus the more impossible will become the senseless and anti-natural idea of a contradiction between mind and matter, man and nature, soul and body, such as arose in Europe after the decline of classic antiquity and which obtained its highest elaboration in Christianity." (*ibid.* p. 293) Thus Engels is able to say, with a new meaning, what a thousand years before had appeared evident to all : "... Laws of thought and laws of nature are necessarily

in agreement with one another, if only they are correctly known."  
(ibid. p. 239) What is the basis for this agreement? Matter, activated by indestructible motion, of which the human mind is the highest product, is the basis. (ibid. p. 184)

Thus one is confronted with what may be called an enormous petitio principii. What is begged is the assumption of a purely material world, sole producer of all that exists. This assumption is so confident that it borrows a sort of certitude from its dogmatic refusal to be involved in any arguments to the contrary. Strangely enough, this assumption of pure materialism is based upon the previous assumption of pure idealism. In the idealists had not first gratuitously separated themselves from objective external reality, it would never have been possible for the dialectical materialists to transpose the disembodied elaborations of the idealist mind into the sphere of reality without any subservience to objective facts. For despite the loudly proclaimed assertions of men like Engels that all knowledge must be based upon experience and observation, that which is observed is done so according to a pre-conceived idealist notion of the universe. Thus it is possible to affirm the identity of idealism and dialectical materialism, since it is thanks to the former's detachment from objectivity, and consequent denial of the substantiality and distinctive intellectuality of the soul, that the latter can posit matter as the sole reality and enounce laws concerning it that have

no need for previous objective and intellectual verification.

Because of this idealistic-materialistic tendency to define things in function of what one wills to be rather than what is, one is confronted with the strange paradox of a materialism which is fundamentally idealistic by its genesis in the irresponsible mind of its authors, inveighing bitterly against a supposed spiritualism and supernaturalism which comes in conflict with the idealistic materialists precisely because it refuses to accept any interpretation of nature except that which can be derived from material nature itself.

That the basis of dialectical materialism is fundamentally idealistic and unobjective, in other words that it is precisely committing the sin of the angels in assuming the divine prerogative of being the measure of truth rather than being measured by truth, and of setting itself up as the judge of good and evil, may be indirectly demonstrated by the violence which it does to nature. As long as idealism remained within the mind, its consequences, though frightfully destructive, were less immediately visible. In our day, for the first time, thanks to dialectical materialism having gained a commanding position in a great part of the world, one can now contemplate it at work actively reshaping nature. With what result? With the result that never has humanity screamed out in such pain and agony. In the course of history, epidemics, floods,

earthquakes, famines, due to natural sources which man was unable to control have swept hundreds of thousands from the face of the earth. But never has there been anything to equal the deliberate, man-made destruction and devastation undertaken by dialectical materialism under its two-headed form of Communism and National Socialism in its calm intent to wipe out whole populations, whole races if need be, all in the name of re-uniting man with nature, all in the name of benignly following the rules of nature. Whereas nature, without any interference from man, remains a constantly productive force, allowing even its destructive forces to be tamed and canalized for man's benefit, and many of whose supposed ravages are nothing other than consequences of man's greed as Engels himself remarks (op. cit. p. 295), dialectical materialism is based upon the assumption of an essentially hostile world, one that evolves by violence and conflict, and the full force of this conception is turned first upon that which even they recognize as the highest product of nature, man himself. Thus one is confronted with the terrible sight of human slaughter before which the whole of nature must hang its head in shame and revulsion. For while the animals live in harmony and love at least their own kind, and while even the rapacious animals only kill to eat and without refinedly torturing their victims beforehand, one sees the executors of the philosophy which holds the keys to the secrets of nature, fomenting by every means in their power the war of man against man, wantonly

murdering thousands at a time in a manner which no sensitive person would even use on a dog, torturing their victims with all the exquisite torments which the human mind can devise. How the heavens must weep to see thousands of men for whom nature brings up wheat from the ground, wine to please the heart, for whom it spreads out the sky and the flowers, men whom it labors to make fair and strong and kings of the universe, these same men starved, dirty, ragged, and broken, shot in the head and cast into a common pit like so much carrion. How nature must weep at this the fate of her master for whom she labors and for whom she produces all her beauties. How incomprehensible for her that man, the best favored of all the creatures of the earth, should do this to man! This is the philosophy which pretends to unite man to nature, which is to elevate man to his true dignity.