

On the Existential Implication and Practical Value of Theses on Feuerbach

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Keywords: Theses on Feuerbach; Existentialism Implication; Philosophical Basis; Existential Philosophy; Concrete Expression; Realistic Value

Abstract: In domestic academic circles, *Theses on Feuerbach* was often regarded by most scholars as a classic work marking the germination of Marxist materialist world outlook. However, from the perspective of existentialism, this work also contained some existential implications. This paper mainly used the method of literature research and inductive research to reveal and elaborate the existential meaning of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, and analyzed its practical value in combination with the current social reality and practice in China. The research materials included *Theses on Feuerbach* and some relevant research results of current Chinese academic circles, as well as some actual phenomenon in current social real life. Specifically, in the study of this paper, on the one hand, the author researched *Theses on Feuerbach*, as well as reviewed and referred some of the relevant research papers. On the other hand, the author made a theoretical analysis of some actual phenomenon in the current social real life. Based on the above two aspects of work, this paper formed. The main body of this paper researched the philosophical basis of existentialism in *Theses on Feuerbach*, and analyzed the difference between existential implication and existential philosophy in *Theses on Feuerbach*, then elaborated the concrete expression of the existential meaning in the *Theses on Feuerbach*. Finally, the main body of this paper revealed the realistic value of the existential implication of the *Theses on Feuerbach*. This paper held that the realistic value revealed above mainly included three parts as follows: First, We should constantly improve people's way of life in the process of promoting the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Second, We should constantly promote people's free and all-round development on the basis of promoting high-quality economic and social development; Third, We should realize the people's beautiful living conditions in the new journey of building a socialist modern country in an all-round way.

1. Introduction

From the current research situation, previous scholars mainly studied the specific content and status of the *Theses on Feuerbach* (hereinafter referred to as the *Theses*). In the research of its content, previous scholars mainly studied some main viewpoints and specific concepts in the *Theses*. For example, They studied Marx's view of practice, human nature and philosophy in his "new world view" [1] as well as specific concepts: practice [2], society [3], civil society [4], social relations [5], etc; In the study of its status, most scholars in the past believed that the outline was a classic work marking the germination of Marxist materialist world view. However, from the perspective of existentialism, this work also contained some existential implications. However, there was little research on this aspect in the past. Concerning this, this paper mainly revealed the existential meaning of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, and analyzed its practical value combined with the current social reality and practice in China. This paper mainly used the method of literature research and inductive research to reveal and elaborate the existential meaning of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, and analysed its practical value in combination with the current social reality and practice in China.

The research materials included *Theses on Feuerbach* and some relevant research results of current Chinese academic circles, as well as some actual phenomenon in current social real life. Specifically, in the study of this paper, on the one hand, the author researched *Theses on Feuerbach*, as well as reviewed and referred some of the relevant research papers. On the other hand, the author made a theoretical analysis of some actual phenomenon in the current social real life. Based on the above two aspects of work, this paper formed. The main body of this paper researched the philosophical basis of existentialism in *Theses on Feuerbach*, and analysed the difference between existential implication and existential philosophy in *Theses on Feuerbach*, then elaborated the concrete expression of the existential meaning in the *Theses on Feuerbach*. Finally, the main body of this paper revealed the realistic value of the existential implication of the *Theses on Feuerbach*. This paper held that the realistic value revealed above mainly included three parts as follows: First, We should constantly improve people's way of life in the process of promoting the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Second, We should constantly promote people's free and all-round development on the basis of promoting high-quality economic and social development; Third, We should realize the people's beautiful living conditions in the new journey of building a socialist modern country in an all-round way.

2. Research materials and methods

This paper mainly used the methods of literature research and inductive research. The research materials included *Theses on Feuerbach* and some relevant research results of current Chinese academic circles, as well as some actual phenomenon in current social real life. Specifically, in the study of this paper, on the one hand, the author researched *Theses on Feuerbach*, as well as reviewed and referred some of the relevant research papers. On the other hand, the author made a theoretical analysis of some actual phenomenon in the current social real life. Based on the above two aspects of work, this paper formed.

3. The philosophical basis of existentialism in Theses on Feuerbach

Theses on Feuerbach (hereinafter referred to as the *Theses*) was a classic work that marked the germination of Marxist materialist world outlook, which was often agreed by most domestic scholars. However, from the perspective of existentialism, this work also contained some existential implications to a certain extent. However, the existential implication in *Theses on Feuerbach* was not produced out of thin air, nor was abstract or general, but had its philosophical basis. This philosophical foundation was the historical materialism founded by Marx. Historical materialism was founded by Marx on the basis of sublating the German classical philosophy represented by Hegel and Feuerbach. On the one hand, Marx sublated Hegel's idealistic dialectics, not only absorbed the basic principles and reasonable core of dialectics, but also established materialist dialectics on the basis of materialism. Materialist dialectics provided a scientific methodology for Marx to establish historical materialism; On the other hand, Marx sublated Feuerbach's "half materialism", not only adhered to materialism in the field of nature, but also implemented materialism into the field of social history, so as to establish historical materialism.

The foothold of Marx's historical materialism was "realistic individual" and its perceptual practice. This perceptual practice mainly referred to the activity that people transformed the nature by exerting their subjective initiative on the premise of following the objective laws of nature and society, so as to produce material means of life, and then maintained their own survival and development. In other words, for this perceptual practice, its main significance and value lay in maintaining human survival. In terms of its main significance and value, this perceptual practice was also human survival practice. Based on this point, this perceptual practice made Marx's historical materialism have a certain existential meaning.

4. The difference between existential implication and existential philosophy in Theses on Feuerbach

To clarify the existential meaning of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, we have to clarify the difference between it and existential philosophy. The main representatives of existential philosophy were Heidegger, Sartre and Kierkegaard.

A central proposition of Heidegger's existentialist philosophy was "being is living". In other words, in Heidegger's view, existence mainly referred to a state of man in the world. He advocated returning to man himself to explore the meaning of man's existence in the world. Heidegger's existential philosophy and Marx's *Theses* have distinct differences in the following aspects: First, Marx's main theoretical goal was to lay a theoretical foundation for the practice of emancipating mankind, while Heidegger's main theoretical goal was to solve the problem of the existence significance of traditional metaphysics. Second, Marx criticized traditional metaphysics and focuses on human liberation, while Heidegger criticized traditional humanism and focused on solving the existing problems of metaphysics. Third, Marx always explained the historical process of human existence and development based on human practice [6]. Heidegger's interpretation of human existence ignored human practice and the historical process of human existence and development, but was based on the congenital structure. Therefore, Heidegger's interpretation of human existence lacked historical vision and was still abstract. The core of Sartre's existentialist philosophy was that existence was freedom. In other words, Sartre emphasized that freedom was the essential attribute of existence. His existentialist philosophy was centered on freedom. At the same time, Sartre also had a famous proposition, that is "existence precedes essence". This proposition emphasized the priority of existence relative to essence, which broke through the neglect of existence in traditional metaphysics and epistemological philosophy to a certain extent. However, Sartre's early interpretation of the existing problems was mainly based on some transcendentalist theoretical systems. Therefore, this interpretation was more abstract. Although in his late period, he tried to approach Marx's historical dialectics to explain the existing problems, on the whole, Sartre's interpretation of the existing problems was still relatively abstract. The core of Kierkegaard's existentialist philosophy was to emphasize the particularity of individual existence. Although different existential philosophers had their own special ideas, the existential philosophy they represented also had one thing in common: it only studied the existing problems based on the abstract theoretical framework, ignoring the practice of human beings. Therefore, it couldn't find a realistic and feasible path to solve the existing problems under the objective social and historical conditions.

The philosophical basis of the existential implication in the *Theses* lay in the historical materialism founded by Marx. Marx's historical materialism was based on the "realistic individual" and its perceptual practice, and historical materialism was founded by Marx on the basis of subsuming the German classical philosophy represented by Hegel and Feuerbach. On the one hand, Marx sublated Hegel's idealistic dialectics, not only absorbed the basic principles and reasonable core of dialectics, but also established materialist dialectics on the basis of materialism. Materialist dialectics provided a scientific methodology for Marx to establish historical materialism; On the other hand, Marx sublated Feuerbach's "half materialism", not only adhered to materialism in the field of nature, but also implemented materialism into the field of social history, so as to establish historical materialism. The foothold of Marx's historical materialism was "realistic individual" and its perceptual practice. This perceptual practice mainly referred to the activity that people transformed the nature by giving play to their subjective initiative on the premise of following the objective laws of nature and society, so as to produce material means of life, and then maintained their own survival and development. In other words, for this perceptual practice, its main significance and value lay in maintaining human survival. In terms of its main significance and value, this perceptual practice was also human survival practice. Based on this point, this perceptual practice made Marx's historical materialism have a certain existential meaning. In short, the meaning of Existentialism in the *Theses* was to take care of people's living state and its historical evolution based on people's practice. Therefore, it could also be based on practice.

5.The concrete expression of the existential meaning in the *Theses on Feuerbach*

Based on the interpretation of the text, the specific expression of the existential meaning of the *Theses on Feuerbach* mainly lay in the following points:

5.1 Practice is the way of human existence as the subject

5.1.1 Practice is a consistent way for people to transform the environment and change themselves

In the Theses, Marx emphasized that practice was man's perceptual and objective activity. Through its practical activities, people not only changed the environment in which they live, but also changed themselves. In Marx's view, the essential difference between man and animals lay in that animals only passively adapted to the external natural environment by relying on their own instincts to continue their life, while man fully exerted his subjective initiative on the premise of following the objective natural law and constantly transforms "free nature" into "humanized nature" with his own practical activities, so as to continuously obtain material and energy from nature to maintain and continue their own survival. At the same time, people also changed themselves in this process. This change was mainly reflected in the change of people's thinking and behavior, which involved not only the change of people's living style in order to adapt to the environment, but also the enhancement of people's own strength. In short, people realized the unity of transforming the environment and changing themselves through their own practice. It is through changing the environment and in the process of changing the environment that people realized their own survival and constantly promoted their own survival practice. Thus, as a consistent way for people to transform the environment and change themselves, practice also constituted people's way of life.s.

5.1.2 Practice is the essence of human social life

In the Theses, Marx pointed out that "all social life was practical in essence" [7]. The expression of the practical essence of social life was not abstract, but concrete. One embodiment of this concreteness lay in the concreteness of the subject of social life. Specifically, the subject of social life was "real individual". These "realistic individuals" were individuals with fresh life, who were engaged in practical activities such as practical material production practice, establishing and dealing with social relations under certain social and historical conditions as well as the objective laws of nature and society. The whole social life was composed of the social life of every "real individual". In other words, all social life was the collection of all "real individuals" social life. It was in their social life that people could maintain their own survival, continuously promote their survival practice as well as establish and deal with various social relations. It could be seen that people's social life also inherently reflected their way of life. In other words, social life was also a specific representation and content of people's way of life. In Marx's view, social life was practical in essence. Based on this, we could also draw a conclusion: practice was the way of human existence as the subject.

5.1.3 Practice is a way for people to discover and confirm their realistic essence

In the Theses, Marx pointed out that "human essence was not the inherent abstraction of a single person. In its reality, it was the sum of all social relations" [7]. Thus, Marx believed that human nature was not a congenital and abstract thing possessed by a single person. In other words, human nature was for the whole human being or as a kind of person. In addition, human nature was also realistically reflected in social life. Specifically, the realistic expression of human nature was all social relations. Social relations were not formed spontaneously and naturally in nature, but the product of human activities, and it was also a special existence exclusive to human society. Specifically, these social relations were established by people through their own continuous practice. It was through the establishment of these social relations that man could confirm and reflect his realistic essence in this real world. It could be seen that social relations had a very important and irreplaceable significance for human survival. Therefore, from the perspective of the significance of practice to human realistic essence - social relations, practice could also be regarded as the living way of human.

5.1.4. Practice is the standard to test the truth and rationality of human thinking

In the *Theses*, Marx emphasized that “people should prove the truth of their thinking in practice” [7]. This paragraph contained a core view of Marx’s view of truth: practice was the standard to test the truth and rationality of human thinking. As far as the essential attribute of human was concerned, man was not only an objective and material existence, but also a conscious and purposeful existence. The concrete manifestation of human as a conscious and purposeful being was that human’s practical activities were always dominated by human’s consciousness and purpose. A specific manifestation of human consciousness was that people could form their own understanding of things, and carried out their daily survival activities in their own unique way under the guidance of this understanding. Based on this, practice was the standard to test the truth and rationality of human thinking. In a sense, it shew the decisive role of practice in human cognition. Since practice determined human’s cognition, and cognition guided human’s survival activities. Therefore, from the decisive role of practice in people’s understanding and the guiding significance of people’s understanding for their way of life, practice also constituted human’s way of life in a sense.

5.2 The foothold of new materialism is the union of people in the living state of free and all-round development

In the *Theses*, Marx pointed out that “the foothold of old materialism was civil society, and the foothold of new materialism was human society or socialized humans” [7]. In the context of Marx’s theory, “human society or socialized humans” here referred to “the union of free people”, that was, the Communist society. In the Communist society, opposition between different classes won’t exist any longer, and the exploitation and oppression between different people won’t exist any longer, too. “Each individual’s free development would be the condition for everyone’s free development”. In other words, in the Communist society, a harmonious coexistence, symbiosis and all-win relationship will be established between people. Everyone’s free and all-round development can also promote the free and all-round development of others, and a high degree of unity will be realized between individuals and society in terms of interests. In other words, the foothold of new materialism will be the Communist society, a consortium composed of people in a state of free and all-round development. In this consortium, everyone can achieve free and all-round development. Therefore, new materialism has the meaning of existentialism.

5.3 The ultimate goal of transforming the world is to achieve a better living state

Article 11 of the *Theses* pointed out that “philosophers only interpret the world in different ways, and the problem was to change the world” [7]. According to the literal meaning of this sentence, in Marx’s view, only “explaining the world” was not enough, “changing the world” was more important and urgent than “explaining the world”. It was also a problem that needed more attention and solution. From the perspective of philosophical types, “explaining the world” here pointed to epistemological philosophy, and “transforming the world” pointed to practical philosophy. In other words, by criticizing the epistemological philosophy of “explaining the world”, Marx vigorously advocated and tried to establish a practical philosophy [8]. As he pointed out, “for Communists, that was, practical materialists, the whole task was to revolutionize the whole real world” [7]. In other words, in Marx’s view, Communists should pay attention to practice and strive to realize the revolutionary change of the whole world through their own practice. However, in Marx’s view, the ultimate goal of “transforming the world” didn’t lie in itself. “Transforming the world” was to break up the old world with class opposition, exploitation and oppression between people and establish a beautiful and ideal new world. In other words, it was to establish the “union of free people” of the Communist society. In this union, antagonism between different classes disappeared, and the exploitation and oppression between people won’t exist any longer, “each individual’s free development would be the condition for everyone’s free development”. In other words, in the Communist society, the relationship between people will become a harmonious symbiotic relationship. Everyone can achieve free and all-round development, and each individual’s free development will be the condition for everyone’s free development. This means that by

“transforming the world” to establish the “union of free people” of Communist society, people can achieve a better living state. This is also an embodiment of the meaning of Existentialism in the *Theses*.

6. The realistic value of the existential implication of the theses on feuerbach

6.1 We should constantly improve people’s way of life in the process of promoting the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics

In the *Theses*, Marx believed that practice was the consistent way for people to transform the environment and change themselves, and it was also the standard of the truth and rationality of people’s thinking. It could be seen that practice is human’s way of life. Marx once said, “the weapon of criticism couldn’t replace the criticism of weapons, and material power could only be destroyed by material power” [7]. In other words, to change the situation of the real world, we must resort to practice. Based on this, to change people’s way of life, we must also resort to practice. In the context of Marx’s theory, changing people’s way of life was to seek the progress and development of people’s way of life. In other words, it was to change the unreasonable and beautiful places in people’s way of life. Its goal and destination was to improve people’s way of life. In current China, the theme of social practice is socialism with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, in current China, in order to improve people’s way of life, we must resort to the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In other words, we should constantly improve people’s way of life in the process of promoting the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Specifically, according to the new era conditions and practical needs, we should constantly guide people to establish a healthy and reasonable mode of production and lifestyle suitable for the new stage of high-quality development, and constantly promote the harmonious coexistence between man and nature, man and man, man and society, as well as the high-quality development of economic and social undertakings.

6.2 We should constantly promote people’s free and all-round development on the basis of promoting high-quality economic and social development

In the *Theses*, Marx determined human society as the foothold of new materialism. This “human society” is the union of free people. Specifically, it is an ideal future society for people based on everyone’s free and all-round development. In short, it is a communist society. Communist society is the future ideal society put forward by scientific socialism in Marxism. The great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics adheres to the guidance of Marxism and the basic principles of scientific socialism. Therefore, the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics must also move forward towards the establishment of a communist society, an ideal society in the future.

In Marx’s vision, the foothold of old materialism is civil society, which is also modern capitalist society. The foothold of new materialism is human society, which is the union of free people or communist society. Compared with modern capitalist society, Communist society will have outstanding advantages. This advantage can be reflected through the comparison of the two social types. Specifically, the modern capitalist society promoted the great development of the whole social productive forces and the continuous accumulation of the achievements of modern civilization. However, at the same time, it also caused people’s alienated living state – people became slaves to goods, capital, technology and other creations and their social relations, and there is a serious separation and imbalance between the production and consumption of the whole society, which also led to people becoming “one-dimensional people”. The Communist society will be not only based on the highly developed social productive forces and rich achievements of modern civilization, but also will overcome the alienated living state of human beings – human beings become slaves to goods, capital, technology and other creations and their social relations, as well as the serious separation and imbalance between the production and consumption of the whole society. Therefore, Communist society has great advantages over modern capitalist society. In a sense, it will represent a new type of civilization. Meanwhile, the living state of people in

Communist society will be the future ideal state of the way of life revealed by Marx. This living state will be a dialectical unity of production and consumption on the basis of highly developed productive forces and rich achievements of modern civilization. It will be also a living state in which people can achieve free and all-round development. This ideal state is the survival state of the Communist society, which can be regarded as a new type of civilization. It can be seen that in order to realize the future ideal state of survival mode or the survival state under the new civilization type of Communist society, we must have highly developed productive forces and rich achievements of modern civilization. In the final analysis, to have highly developed productive forces and rich achievements of modern civilization, we still need to rely on the continuous development of economy and society.

The highest ideal of the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics under the guidance of Marxism is to establish a communist society. Based on this, there is also an inevitable connection between the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the Communist society. In terms of current social reality, the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics has not only promoted the rapid development of social productive forces and created rich achievements of modern civilization, but also maintained social harmony and stability and significantly improved the living conditions of the people. In other words, socialism with Chinese characteristics overcomes the negative effects such as the alienation of the way of life caused by the civilization type of modern capitalism, and also indicates the possibility of the generation of a new human civilization type of Communist society to some extent. The survival mode corresponding to this type of civilization is the future ideal state of the survival mode, that is to say, the dialectical unity of production and consumption on the basis of highly developed productive forces and rich achievements of modern civilization, and people can realize free and all-round development. Therefore, in the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics, we should also constantly promote the development of social productive forces and accumulate the achievements of modern civilization, so as to lay a solid material foundation and rich achievements of civilization for the realization of the future ideal state of the way of life. Combined with China's actual conditions and social practice, in order to promote the development of social productivity and accumulate the achievements of modern civilization, we must promote the high-quality development of economy and society. At the same time, on the basis of promoting high-quality economic and social development, we must constantly promote the common prosperity of all people, realize people's yearning for a better life, meet people's needs for a better life, improve people's material and cultural living standards, and promote people's free and all-round development. Only in this way can we truly overcome the alienated living state of people brought about by the modern capitalist society, reflect the great advantages of socialism with Chinese characteristics over the modern capitalist society, and make continuous progress towards the ideal living state of people in the future or the living state under the new civilization type of Communist society, So as to finally realize the living state of Communist society — the dialectical unity of production and consumption and people's free and all-round development on the basis of highly developed productive forces and rich achievements of modern civilization.

6.3 We should realize the people's beautiful living conditions in the new journey of building a socialist modern country in an all-round way

In the *Theses*, Marx clearly defined the theoretical mission and value goal of his new materialism or historical materialism, that was "transforming the world". However, in his view, the ultimate value goal of his new materialism or historical materialism was not to "transform the world" itself, but to establish a communist society or a union of free people. In the final analysis, the establishment of a communist society or a union of free people was to promote people's free and all-round development and realize people's good living conditions. The guiding ideology of the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics is Marxism. Historical materialism is also an important content of Marxism. Based on this, the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics under the guidance of Marxism is also under the guidance of historical materialism.

The theoretical mission and value goal of historical materialism is to “transform the world”, and “transform the world” in the final analysis was to establish the Communist society or the union of free people. In this regard, the highest ideal of the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics is to establish a communist society. The establishment of a communist society is ultimately to realize people’s good living conditions. In this regard, the establishment of a communist society is not the ultimate value goal of the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics. As far as its ultimate value goal is concerned, socialism with Chinese characteristics is also to realize people’s beautiful life. Today, with the comprehensive completion of a well-off society, the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics has also opened a new journey of building a modern socialist country in an all-round way. In this new journey, China must also focus on achieving a better life for the people, constantly improve the people’s living standards and meet the people’s needs for a better life on the basis of promoting high-quality economic and social development.

7. Conclusion

Based on the research in this paper, the specific expression of the existential meaning of the *Theses on Feuerbach* mainly lay in the following points: First, practice is the way of human existence as the subject. Second, the foothold of new materialism is the union of people in the living state of free and all-round development. Third, the ultimate goal of transforming the world is to achieve a better living state.

Combined with the current social reality and practice in China, this paper held that the realistic value revealed above mainly included three parts as follows: First, We should constantly improve people’s way of life in the process of promoting the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Second, we should constantly promote people’s free and all-round development on the basis of promoting high-quality economic and social development; Third, We should realize the people’s beautiful living conditions in the new journey of building a socialist modern country in an all-round way.

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Proceedings of the International Conference on Contemporary Education. Social Sciences and Ecological Studies (CESSES 2018), 2018, 179.