

ENGELS FRIEDRICH

FEUERBACH: THE
ROOTS OF THE
SOCIALIST PHILOSOPHY

Friedrich Engels
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the socialist philosophy**

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Содержание

INTRODUCTION	4
AUTHOR'S PREFACE	24
FEUERBACH	27
I	27
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	28

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INTRODUCTION

This work takes us back nearly sixty years, to a time when what is now a movement of universal significance was in its infancy. Hegel and the Revolution of 1848; these are the points of departure. To the former, we owe the philosophic form of the socialist doctrine, to the latter, its practical activity as a movement.

In the midst of the turmoil and strife and apparent defeat of those days two men, Marx and Engels, exiled and without influence, betook themselves to their books and began laboriously to fashion the form and doctrine of the most powerful intellectual and political movement of all time. To the task they brought genius, scholarship, and a capacity for hard work and patient research. In each of these qualities they were supreme. Marx possessed a colossal mind; no thinker upon social subjects, not even Herbert Spencer, has been his superior, for the lonely socialist could claim a comprehensiveness, a grasp of relations and a power of generalization, together with a boldness of

conception, which place him in a class by himself. Engels was the able co-adjutor and co-worker with Marx. He was a deep and acute thinker, a most patient investigator, a careful writer. More practical than his friend, he was better able to cope with material problems, and his advice and his purse were always at the disposal of Marx.

The latter could hardly have worked under more discouraging conditions. Poverty, inadequate opportunities, lack of stimulating companionship, and the complete absence of any kind of encouragement and such sympathy as a man of his affectionate temperament craved fell to his lot. His most learned works were written for groups of workingmen, his most laborious efforts were made without the slightest hope of recognition from the learned and the powerful.

All through these years Engels remained his faithful friend, and helped him over many hard places when family troubles and straitened circumstances pressed upon the old revolutionist.

This work is Engels' testimony with regard to the method employed by them in arriving at their philosophical conclusions. It is the statement of the philosophical foundations of modern socialism by one who helped to lay them; it is an old man's account of the case upon the preparation of which he has spent his entire life, for, this work, short as it is, represents the results of forty years of toil and persevering effort.

As the "Communist Manifesto" was a gage flung with all the impetuosity of youthful impatience into the face of constituted

authority, so this is the deliberate statement of the veteran, who has learned the game too well to leave any openings, and proceeds to the demolition of pet opinions in a quiet, deadly and deliberate fashion.

Step by step, the argument is built up. The ghosts of old controversies long since buried are raised, to show how the doctrine imperishably associated with the names of Marx and Engels came into existence; the "Young Hegelians," the "Tuebingen School," and finally Feuerbach himself are summoned from the grave to which the Revolution of 1848 had consigned them. Still, ancient history as these controversies are from the German standpoint, such is the backwardness of philosophy among English-speaking peoples, that we find Engels exposing again and again fallacies which persist even in our time, and ridiculing sentiments which we receive with approbation in our political assemblies, and with mute approval in our churches and conventicles.

The anti-religious note is noticeable throughout, in itself an echo of controversies long past, when the arguments of the critics of the Bible were creating now fury, now dismay, throughout Christendom, before the Higher Criticism had become respected, and before soi-disant sceptics could continue to go solemnly to church.

Moreover, the work was written in German for German workmen for whom religion has not the same significance as it apparently still continues to possess for the English-speaking

people, whose sensitiveness upon the subject appears to have outlived their faith. However that may be, religious bodies possess a curious and perhaps satisfactory faculty of absorbing the truths of science, and still continuing to exist, and even to thrive, upon what the inexperienced might easily mistake for a deadly diet.

Under the circumstances there is no reason why Engels' remarks should affect even the timorous, although it must be remembered that a very able English socialist philosopher is reputed to have damaged his chances irretrievably by an ill-judged quotation from Mr. Swinburne.

It must be confessed that the occasional bitterness in which Engels indulges is to be deplored, in a work of so essentially intellectual a character, but it is little to be wondered at. His contempt for university professors and the pretentious cultivated classes, who claim so much upon such slight grounds, is not strange, when we consider the honest labors of himself and his colleagues and the superficial place-hunting of the recognized savants. He loves learning for its own sake, for the sake of truth and scientific accuracy, and he cannot feel anything but scorn for those who use it as a means to lull the consciences of the rich, and to gain place and power for themselves. The degradation of German philosophy affects him with a real sorrow; the scholar is outraged at the mockery. "Sterility," "eclecticism," these are the terms in which he sums up the teachings of the official professors, and they are almost too gentle to be applied to the

dispiriting and disheartening doctrines which are taught to the English-speaking student of to-day under the name of economics or philosophy.

In the first part of his pamphlet, for it is little more in size, Engels gives a short and concise account of the work of Hegel and the later Hegelian School. He shows how the philosophy of Hegel has both a conservative and a radical side and how conservatives and radicals alike might, (as a matter of fact they did), each derive support from his teachings, according to the amount of stress laid respectively upon the great divisions of his work, the "System" and the "Dialectic."

The Extreme Left developed through the application of the dialectic, and applied the philosophic doctrine thus derived to the criticism of existing political and religious institutions. This resulted in the gradual throwing away of the abstract part of the Hegelian philosophy, and in the study of facts and phenomena to an ever-increasing degree.

Marx had, in his youth, allied himself with the "Young Hegelians," as this school was called, and this fact had no slight influence upon his subsequent career. His critics lay the blame for much of the obscurity of language from which "Capital" in particular suffers, at the door of this training. His painful elaboration of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, his insistence upon the dialectic, and his continual use of the Hegelian philosophical expressions are due to his earlier controversial experiences. Still, on the other hand, his patient investigation of

actual facts, his insistence on the value of positive knowledge as compared with abstract theory, and his diligent and persistent use of blue-books and statistics, were in a great measure results of the same training.

Now and again, we find Engels in this work displaying remarkable controversial acumen, as in his discussion of the phrase, "All that is real is reasonable, and all that is reasonable is real" (Alles was wirklich ist, ist vernuenftig, und alles was vernuenftig ist, ist wirklich). From this expression, by the development of the Hegelian argument, he arrives at the conclusion involved in the statement that the value of a social or political phenomenon is its transitoriness, the necessity of its disappearance. Hence the abolition of dogmatic statement and mere subjective reasoning in the realm of philosophy, the destruction of the old school of which Kant was the chief exponent, and the creation of a new school the most advanced teachers of which were, as they still are, the materialistic socialists, of whom Engels and Marx are the chief.

The object of this historical sketch is to show the origin of Feuerbach's philosophy as well as of that of Marx and Engels. As the fight between the Young Hegelians and the conservatives grew hotter, the radicals were driven back upon the English-French materialism of the preceding century. This was embarrassing for followers of Hegel, who had been taught to regard the material as the mere expression of the Idea. Feuerbach relieved them from the contradiction. He grasped the question

boldly and threw the Hegelian abstraction completely to one side. His book, "Wesen des Christenthums," in which his ideas were set forth, became immediately popular, and an English translation, which was widely read, was made of it by George Eliot under the title of "Essence of Christianity."

Engels is by no means grudging of expressions of appreciation with regard to this work, and its effects both upon himself and the educated world in general. This "unendurable debt of honor" paid, however, he proceeds to attack the idealistic humanitarianism which Feuerbach had made the basis and sanction of his ethical theories.

Although Feuerbach had arrived at the materialistic conclusion, he expressed himself as unable to accept materialism as a doctrine. He says that as far as the past is concerned he is a materialist, but, for the future, he is not so – "Backward I am in agreement with the materialists, forward not" – a statement which impels Engels to examine the materialism of the eighteenth century, which he finds purely mechanical, without any conception of the universe as a process, and therefore utterly inadequate for the philosophic needs of the period at which Feuerbach wrote; for by that time the advance of science, and the greater powers of generalization, arising from patient experimentation, and the development of the evolutionary theory, had rendered the eighteenth century views evidently absurd.

The "vulgarising peddlers" (vulgarisirenden Hausirer) come

in for a great deal of contempt at the hands of Engels. These were the popular materialists – "the blatant atheists," who, without scientific knowledge and gifted with mere oratory or a popular style of writing, used every advance of science as a weapon of attack upon the Creator and popular religion. Engels sneers at these as not being scientists at all, but mere tradesmen dealing in pseudo-scientific wares. He calls their occupation a trade, a business (Geschaeft). Of the same class was that host of secularist lecturers who at one time thronged the lecture platforms of the English-speaking countries and of whom Bradlaugh and Ingersoll were in every way the best representatives. These secularists have now ceased to exercise any influence, and the Freethought societies, at one time so numerous, have now practically disappeared. In accordance with the theories as set forth by Engels they were bound to disappear; their teachings had no real bearing upon social progress, they contributed nothing of any scientific value to modern thought, and as Engels carefully shows, the reading of history by these lecturers was vitiated by a lack of scientific grasp, and inability to take a rational view of the great principles of historical development.

In the third part of this little book Engels deals with a very interesting question which still disturbs the minds of philosophers, and concerning which much discussion goes on even among the materialists; that is the question as to the effect of religion upon social progress. Feuerbach had made the statement

that periods of social progress are marked by religious changes. He uses religion as a synonym for human love, forcing the meaning of the word religion from the Latin "religare," "to tie," in order to give it an etymological and derivative meaning in support of his statement, a controversial trick for which he is rebuked by Engels. The declaration that great historical revolutions are accompanied by religious changes is declared by Engels not to be true, except in a limited degree as regards the three great world-religions – Christianity, Mahommedanism and Buddhism.

Engels declared that the change in religion simultaneous with economic and political revolution stopped short with the bourgeois revolt which was made without any appeal to religion whatsoever. It is evident that this is not entirely true, for in the English-speaking countries, at all events, not only the bourgeois but frequently also the proletarian movements attempt to justify themselves from Scripture. The teachings of the Bible and the Sermon on the Mount are frequently called to the aid of the revolutionary party; Christian Socialists, in the English and American, not the continental sense of the term, as such are admitted to the International Congresses; and other evidences of the compatibility of religion with the proletarian movement can be traced.

But in the broader sense of his statement Engels is undoubtedly correct. The proletarian movement, unlike that of the bourgeois, has produced no definite religious school, it has

not claimed any particular set of religious doctrines as its own. As a matter of fact, there appears to be an ever-widening chasm between the Church and the laborer, a condition of affairs which is frequently deplored in religious papers. The famous Papal Encyclical on Labor was certainly intended to retain the masses in the Church, and the formation of trades unions under the influence of the priests was a logical conclusion from the teachings of the Papal Encyclical. But such religious movements are in no sense representative of the working-class movement; in fact they are resented and antagonized by the regular proletarian movement which proceeds under the leadership of the Socialists.

Feuerbach's exaltation of humanitarianism, as a religion, is derided by Engels in a semi-jocular, semi-serious manner, for his statement that Feuerbach's ideals can be completely realized on the Bourse, cannot be taken seriously. Engels' clear-sightedness with regard to the ineffectiveness of a purely humanitarian religion is very remarkable, although the forty years' additional experience which he had over Feuerbach was a great advantage to him in estimating the actual value of humanitarian religion as an influence in human affairs. Since the time of Feuerbach various experiments in the direction of a religion based entirely on Love have been tried, and none of them has succeeded. Positivism or its religious side has been a failure. It has appealed to a small set of men, some of whom are possessed of great ability and have accomplished much, but as a religion in any adequate sense of the word positivism will be admitted a failure by its most sincere

adherents. Brotherhood Churches, the Church of Humanity, the People's Church, and other like organizations have been formed having the same humanitarian basis, professing to cultivate a maximum of love with a minimum of faith, and have failed to impress ordinary men and women. Theosophy, a system of oriental mysticism based on an abstract conception of the brotherhood of man, has also put forth its claims to notice, on the grounds of its broad humanitarianism. None of these humanitarian religions, however, appear to satisfy the needs of the times, which do not seem to demand any humanitarian teachings. The only religions which evidently persist are the dogmatic, those appealing undisguisedly to faith, and even these do not maintain their proletarian following.

Engels' remarks appear to be more than justified by the facts of to-day, for so far from the proletarian forming a new religion representing his needs on the "ideological" field, he appears to be increasingly desirous of releasing himself from the bands of any religion whatever, and substituting in place of it practical ethics and the teachings of science. Thus we are informed that five out of six of the working classes of Berlin, who attend any Sunday meetings whatever, are to be found in the halls of the Social Democratic Party, listening to the lectures provided by that organization.

The revolutionary character of Feuerbach's philosophy is not maintained in his ethic, which Engels declares with much truth to be no better than that of his predecessors, as the basis on which

it stands is no more substantial. Feuerbach fails as a teacher of practical ethics; he is smothered in abstraction and cannot attain to any reality.

With the last part of the work Engels abandons the task of criticising Feuerbach, and proceeds to expound his own philosophy.

With absolute candor and modesty he gives Marx credit for the theory of the materialistic conception of history, upon the enunciation and proof of which he had himself worked almost incessantly ever since the first idea of the theory had occurred to them, forty years prior to the time when he wrote this work. The footnote to the first page of the fourth part is the testimony of a collaborator to the genius of his fellow-workman, an example of appreciation and modest self-effacement which it would not be easy to match, and to which literary men who work together are not over-prone. Nothing else could bear more eloquent testimony to the loftiness of character and sincerity of purpose of these two exiles.

The Marxian philosophy of history is clearly stated, and so fully explained by Engels that there is no need to go over the ground again, and there only remains to call attention to some of the modern developments in the direction of rigidity of interpretation, and to the exaggeration of the broad theory of the predominance of the economic factor into a hard and fast doctrine of economic determinism.

When we examine the claims of Engels on behalf of

the materialistic doctrine it will be found that they are not by any means of such a nature as to warrant the extreme conclusions of subsequent socialist publicists and leaders. It must be remembered that the subject of the influence of economic conditions on religious and political phenomena has been closely examined of late years and continual and accumulating evidence has been forthcoming respecting the remarkable influence of economic facts upon all other manifestations of social activity. It is very probable that the successful investigations in this new field have led, temporarily, to the formation of exaggerated ideas as to the actual value of the economic factor.

Marx, in one of his short critical notes on Feuerbach, says: "The materialistic doctrine that men are products of conditions and education, different men therefore products of other conditions, and a different kind of education, forgets that circumstances may be altered by man and that the educator has himself to be educated." In other words, the problem, like all problems, possesses at least two quantities; it is not a question solely of conditions, economic or otherwise; it is a question of man and conditions, for the man is never dissolved in the conditions, but exists as a separate entity, and these two elements, man and conditions, act and react the one upon the other.

This is quite a different position from that taken by Lafargue in his fight with Jaures. Lafargue there argued that economic development is the sole determinant of progress, and pronounces in favor of economic determinism, thus reducing the whole

of history and, consequently, the dominating human motives to but one elementary motive. Belfort Bax, the well-known English socialist writer, makes a very clever argument against the determinist position by comparing it with the attempts of the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers to reduce nature to one element. His remarks are so pertinent that a brief abstract of his argument is here quoted in his own language. He says in "Outlooks from a New Standpoint":

"The endeavor to reduce the whole of Human life to one element alone, to reconstruct all history on the basis of Economics, as already said, ignores the fact that every concrete reality must have a material and a formal side, – that is, it must have at least two ultimate elements – all reality as opposed to abstraction consisting in a synthesis. The attempt to evolve the many-sidedness of Human life out of one of its factors, no matter how important that factor may be, reminds one of the attempts of the early pre-Socratic Greeks to reduce nature to one element, such as water, air, fire, etc."

And again:

"The precise form a movement takes, be it intellectual, ethical or artistic, I fully admit, is determined by the material circumstances of the society in which it acquires form and shape, but it is also determined by those fundamental psychological tendencies which have given it birth."

Enrico Ferri, the famous Italian member of the Chamber of Deputies and criminologist, appears to be at one with Bax

in this matter. He says, quoting from a recent translation of his "Socialism and Modern Science": "It is perfectly true that every phenomenon as well as every institution – moral, juridical or political – is simply the result of the economic phenomena and the conditions of the transitory, physical and historical environments. But as a consequence of that law of natural causality which tells us that every effect is always the resultant of numerous concurrent causes, and not of one cause alone, and that every effect becomes in its turn a cause of other phenomena, it is necessary to amend and complete the too rigid form that has been given to this true idea.

"Just as all psυχical manifestations of the individual are the result of the organic conditions (temperament) and of the environment in which he lives, in the same way, all the social manifestations of a people are the resultant of their organic conditions (race) and of the environment, as these are the determining causes of the given economic organization which is the physical basis of life."

These may be said to be fairly representative of the views of the opposition to the extreme of economic determinism.

The whole controversy has spread over a tremendous amount of ground and involves much reading. Some of the chief results have lately been summarized by Professor Seligman in his "Economic Interpretation of History." (Macmillan, 1902.) His written views show a closer approximation to and understanding of the teachings of the socialist philosophy on this subject than

we have been accustomed to receive at the hands of official savants, so that it would seem as if the value of Marx's work was at last beginning to be appreciated even in the foggy studies of the professors. Two extracts from the writings of Engels are quoted by Professor Seligman. These extracts apparently go to prove that Engels by no means contemplated the extreme construction which has been placed upon the doctrine, and that he would find such a construction inconsistent with his general views.

These extracts are quoted here for the purpose of further elucidating the views of Engels and as further explanatory of the position assumed by him in the last part of the work under consideration.

They form part of a series of articles written for the "Sozialistische Akademiker" in 1890, and are as follows:

"Marx and I are partly responsible for the fact that the younger men have sometimes laid more stress on the economic side than it deserves. In meeting the attacks of our opponents it was necessary for us to emphasize the dominant principle denied by them, and we did not always have the time, place, or opportunity to let the other factors which were concerned in the mutual action and reaction get their deserts."

And in another letter to the same magazine he says: "According to the materialistic view of history, the factor which is, in last instance, decisive in history is the production and reproduction of actual life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. But when anyone distorts this so as to

read that the economic factor is the sole element he converts the statement into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase. The economic condition is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure – the political forms of the class-contests, and their results, the constitutions – the legal forms and also all the reflexes of these actual contests in the brains of the participants, the political, legal, philosophical theories, the religions views – all these exert an influence on the development of the historical struggles, and in many instances determine their form."

Here we may leave this much disputed matter for the present, as any involved discussion of controversial questions would be out of place here. The question in its ultimate form is merely scholastic, for not even the most extreme determinist would hold that only the economic argument must be relied upon by the orators and the press of the proletarian movement. Any one, however, who wishes to pursue the subject farther can find abundant material in the already great and growing amount of literature in connection with it.

There is no doubt that the ideas of Marx respecting the basis of historical progress have already revolutionized the teaching of history in the universities, although but few professors have been honest enough to give him credit for it. The economic factor continually acquires greater importance in the eyes of the student of history, but the practical discoverer of this factor is still slighted and the results of his labors are assimilated with a self-satisfied hypocrisy which is, unfortunately, characteristic of

the colleges of the English-speaking countries.

The bourgeois writers upon socialism generally content themselves with the bold statement that Marx employs the dialectic method of investigation and statement. This is so much Greek to the ordinary reader, and the subject of the dialectic as used by socialist writers requires a few words of explanation.

The first part of this work is very valuable, therefore, as showing what Marx and Engels meant when they used the expression, and as declaring their estimation of that method compared with that in general use in their day, and always, prior to their time, employed in philosophy, history and economics.

A fuller and more detailed definition of the dialectic as applied by Engels is given by that philosopher in his famous reply to Eugene Duhring known as the "Umwaelzung der Wissenschaft." In that work a more thorough and patient investigation is made into the sources of materialistic philosophy of the socialist movement, for the reputation of his antagonist appears to have acted as a spur to Engels' faculties which certainly never showed to better advantage than in that work. A portion of the argument, in fact an abstract of the general train of reasoning, with the omission of the more obviously controversial parts, has been reprinted under the title of "Socialism from Utopia to Science." The following quotation is taken from the translation prepared for the "People" in 1892:

"We also find, upon a closer enquiry, that the two poles of an antithesis, such as positive and negative, are as inseparable

from as they are opposed to each other, and that, despite their antagonism, they mutually pervade each other; and in the same way we find cause and effect to be conceptions whose force exists only when applied to a single instance, but which, soon as we consider that instance in its connection with the cosmos, run into each other and dissolve in the contemplation of that universal action and reaction where cause and effect constantly change places – that which is effect, now and here, becoming, then and yonder, cause, and vice versa.

"None of these processes and methods of reasoning fits in the metaphysical framework of thought. To dialectics, however, which takes in the objects and their conceivable images above all in their connections, their sequence, their motion, their rise and decline, processes like the above are so many attestations of its own method of procedure. Nature furnishes the test to dialectics, and this much we must say for modern natural science, that it has contributed towards this test an extremely rich and daily increasing material, whereby it has demonstrated that, in the last instance, nature proceeds upon dialectical, not upon metaphysical methods, that it does not move upon the eternal sameness of a perpetually recurring circle, but that it goes through an actual historic evolution.

"This new German philosophy culminated in the system of Hegel. There for the first time – and herein consists its merit – the whole natural, historic, and intellectual world was presented as a process, i. e., engaged in perpetual motion,

change, transformation and development. Viewed from this standpoint, the history of mankind no longer appeared as a wild tangle of senseless deeds of violence, all equally to be rejected by a ripened philosophic judgment, and which it were best to forget as soon as possible, but as the process of the development of mankind itself – a development whose gradual march, through all its stray paths, and its eternal law, through all its seeming fortuitousness, it now became the task of the intellect to trace and to discover."

Kirkup, in his "History of Socialism," has this to say upon the dialectic method of investigation as used by Marx: "In the system of Marx, it means that the business of enquiry is to trace the connection and concatenation in the links that make up the process of historic evolution, to investigate how one stage succeeds another in the development of society, the facts and forms of human life and history not being stable and stereotyped things, but the ever-changing manifestations of the fluent and unresting real, the course of which it is the duty of science to reveal."

The translator has endeavored to render the meaning of the original in as simple an English form as possible, and to, generally speaking, avoid technical terms.

Austin Lewis.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

In the preface of the "Critique of Political Economy," published at Berlin, in 1859, Marx explained how we two, in 1845, in Brussels, intended to work out together the antagonism of our views – that is, the materialistic philosophy of history, as developed by Marx – to the ideological German philosophy, and, in fact, to compare it with our present philosophic knowledge. The design was carried out in the form of a criticism of post-Hegelian philosophy. The manuscript, two big octavo volumes, had long been at its intended place of publication in Westphalia, when we received the news that altered circumstances did not permit of its being printed. We postponed the publication of the manuscript indefinitely, all the more willingly, as we had attained our main object, an understanding of our own position.

Since then more than forty years have elapsed, and Marx has died without either of us having had an opportunity of coming back to the antithesis. As regards our position with reference to Hegel, we have explained that, as occasion has arisen, but, nowhere, as a whole. We never came back to Feuerbach, who occupies an intermediate position between the philosophy of Hegel and our own.

In the meantime the Marxian philosophy has found champions beyond the boundaries of Germany and of Europe, and in all the languages of the civilized world. On the other

hand, the classic German philosophy has had a sort of new-birth abroad, particularly in England and Scandinavia, and even in Germany they appear to be substituting the thin soup of eclecticism which seems to flow from the universities under the name of philosophy.

Under these circumstances a short, compact explanation of our relations to the Hegelian philosophy, of our going forth and departure from it, appears to me to be more and more required. And just in the same way a full recognition of the influence which Feuerbach, more than all the other post-Hegelian philosophers, had over us, during the period of our youthful enthusiasm, presents itself to me as an unendurable debt of honor. I also seize the opportunity the more readily since the editor of the "Neue Zeit" has asked me for a critical discussion of Starcke's book on Feuerbach. My work was published in the fourth and fifth volumes of 1886 of that publication and here appears in a revised special edition.

Before sending this manuscript to press I once again hunted up and examined the old manuscript of 1845-6. The part of it dealing with Feuerbach is not complete. The portion completed consists in an exposition of the materialistic view of history and only proves how incomplete at that time was our knowledge of economic history. The criticism of Feuerbach's doctrine is not given in it. It was therefore unsuitable for our purpose. On the other hand, I have found in an old volume of Marx the eleven essays on Feuerbach printed here as an appendix. These are notes

hurriedly scribbled in for later elaboration, not in the least degree prepared for the press, but invaluable, as the first written form, in which is planted the genial germ of the new philosophy.

Friedrich Engels.

London, 21 February, 1888.

FEUERBACH

I

The volume before us brings us at once to a period which, in the matter of time, lies a full generation behind us, but which is as foreign to the present generation in Germany as if it were quite a century old. And, still, it was the period of the preparation of Germany for the revolution of 1848, and all that has happened to us since is only a continuation of 1848, only a carrying out of the last will and testament of the revolution.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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