

A Critical Analysis of Marx's Dialectical Materialism

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Abstract

This paper examines how the concept of dialectical materialism has evolved in the history of philosophy and its distinct features based on the work of Marx and Engels. Dialectical materialism, as a fundamental philosophical outlook of Marxism, is one of the greatest contributions of Marx and Engels in the history of philosophical discourse. The importance of dialectical materialism is far beyond imagination in analyzing the nature of things and human social development in a manner that conceiving social development against a linear and disconnected mode of cognition and things. As being foundational to Marxian thought, dialectical materialism deal in wide range of subjects, such as understanding of the nature of things and change, the nature of man and also the nature of social development. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to critically analyze the concepts of dialectical materialism in terms of its origin, evolution, and how it was understood by Marx and Engels in connection with its divergence from both mechanical materialism and metaphysical conception of the nature of things.

Keywords: dialectics, dialectical materialism, idealism, materialism, metaphysics.

1. Idealism vs. materialism

From the history of philosophy, one can witness that every philosophical system, though with its own distinctive marks in a particular epoch and place, has to a large extent recourse to either of the dominant strands of philosophy-idealism and materialism. Since antiquity philosophers have sought answers to the fundamental question of philosophy-the nature of connection between consciousness and being, without which it is hardly possible to address the other problems of philosophy. In this regard, Engels says:

The great basic question of all philosophy, especially modern philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being. ...the answers which the philosophers have given to this question split them into two great camps. Those who asserted the primacy of spirit to nature and therefore in the last instance assumed world creation in some form or another...comprised the camp of idealism. The others, who regarded nature as primary, belong to the various schools of materialism (quoted in Cornforth, 1997: 20).

Indeed, both trends are as old as philosophy itself. Plato is lined up with idealism, and Democrats and Epicurus were classical founders of the materialist school.

The question whether those things referred as material things exist only in the mind (consciousness) or not, and whether which is prior or foundation to the other, is the locus of the difference between idealism and materialism. Materialists argue that everything that we

commonly regard as the external world exist objectively “out there” independently of man’s consciousness. Accordingly, the external world is the primary foundation of everything that exists. For materialists, “matter is eternal, that no one had ever created it and that consciousness is the product of the historical development of matter” (Afanasyev, 1980: 15). Idealists, on the other hand, give a different solution to the fundamental question of philosophy. They insist that the material world is the product of “idea” or “consciousness”, which has a primacy over matter. Though this is the central tenet of all idealist philosophers, they are divided on the question what kind of idea (consciousness) is responsible to create the external world. As a result, there are two versions of idealism – subjective and objective idealism.

2. Subjective idealism

Subjective idealism is a philosophical doctrine which denies the objective existence of the material world independently of the perceiving mind. George Berkeley, the British empiricist, is the one who fiercely expounded the views of subjective idealism. Berkeley, a subjective idealist, argues that everything normally regarded as the material world exists only in the mind of the perceiving subject. Can things really be “out there” without being perceived by anybody else? Berkeley answers the question by saying “no”. For him, nothing could exist without being perceived by somebody. His line of argument goes like this: we all know about the external world through our sensations and impressions, and these sensations are found only in the mind of the perceiver. Thus, what we know about things is perceived through the sensations of our mind.

For the reason that all objects are the combination of sensations in the perceiving subject, Berkeley draws the conclusion that nothing could exist besides the perceiving mind. He says, “...all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any substance without a mind...” (Berkeley, 1967: 49). This means there is no any difference between material things and sensations.

However, Berkeley further argues that something which seems self-contradictory to his thesis that nothing exists besides the perceiving mind. To him and most of us, it is undoubtedly true that sensations appear and disappear without the will of the perceiving mind. This is to say, it is not in our intention that sensations come to appear to the senses and disappear, rather sensations come to us and vanish against the will of the perceiver (Whether we be conscious of it or not). In this regard Berkeley says:

...the idealist actually perceived by sense have not a like dependence on my will. When in broad day light I open my eyes, it is not my power to choose whether I shall see or not, or to determine what particular objects shall present themselves to my view; and so likewise as to the hearing and other senses, the ideas imprinted on them are not creatures of my will (*Ibid.*: 53)

From this one can draw a strange conclusion which might seem self-contradictory to Berkeley’s famous dictum, that is, ‘to be is to be perceived’. From this it follows that besides the perceiving subject there exist things which are acting upon our senses, causing sensations. If we accept that sensations are emerged and vanished independently of man’s will, then it might be logical and consistent to argue that there are things independently of the perceiving subject. He defeated solipsism * by postulating the concept of ‘God’, an absolute perceiver. As such, things persist to exist even if they are not perceived by anybody else.

3. Objective idealism

Unlike subjective idealism, which denies the objective existence of the material world independently of the perceiving mind, objective idealism recognizes the independent and

objective existence of the material world apart from the perceiving subject. This kind of idealism is found in the thoughts of Plato and Hegel. According to their reasoning, sensory experience could not furnish the essence of things which is only possible by forming concepts. It asserts that the kind of knowledge that we can obtain through our senses is very limited and superficial one, for the object of sensory experience is a specific object which is transient and temporal. From this premise they inferred that the essence of things is grasped by concepts which are derived from the common feature of particular isolated objects.

Plato, a classical objective idealist, argues that sensory experience tells us only what an individual isolated things look like. In other words, the object of our sensory experience is an isolated individual thing which is subject to perpetual flux and motion. In order to penetrate and discern the essence of things, one should be aware of the immutable, eternal, and common qualities which manifest themselves in isolated individual objects. This means, essences are grasped through thought alone. Besides the enumerable specific particular things which are the object of sensory experience, there are objective “Ideas” which are found “out there” being the ultimate basis of all intelligible things.

It is through Hegel in the nineteenth century that the views of objective idealism became dominant in the western philosophical system. For Hegel, the essence of a thing is neither perceived by the senses nor imagined; instead, it is grasped only in thought alone. How does Hegel come to arrive at this conclusion? According to Hegel’s reasoning, we cannot comprehend the essence of a “table” by perceiving its perceptual qualities. Rather this is possible only by comprehending the features that are common to all “tables”, which is not the object of sensory experience but of thought alone. From this Hegel draws the conclusion that concepts are the underlying reality of everything that exists. They are found objectively “out there” independently of the perceiving subject. “Since theses ‘ideas’ embrace the whole world, they must clearly be the ideas of some ‘spirit’” (Afanasyev, 1980: 17). Hegel calls it “World Spirit” or the “Absolute Idea”. According to Hegel, “the Absolute Idea and the world are identical. Nature is the other-being of the Absolute Idea and we should...speak of nature as a system of unconscious thought, as fossilized intelligence and man as the “conscious idea” (*Ibid.*). This is the gist of objective idealism which holds that the world is based on the “Absolute Idea”, rather than, on man’s subjective consciousness.

4. Dialectical materialism

Dialectical materialism, as a fundamental philosophical outlook of Marxism, is one of the greatest contributions of Marx and Engels in the history of philosophical discourse. Though “dialectics” and “materialism” had been pertinent to the long tradition of philosophical discourse, it was Marx who synthesized the terms together to signify the fundamental nature of things- the nature of natural and social development. I think, in order to understand the nature of dialectical materialism, one should first recourse to inquire and investigate the way materialism had been understood by Marx’s predecessors.

Materialism has a long history even before Marx and Engels. Indeed, its inception is dated back to the philosophy of ancient Greeks, though in a naïve and crude form (Waddington, 1974: 33). Philosophical thoughts beginning from Thales to Epicurus and Democritus had primarily preoccupied with ascribing the nature of things from a basic primordial material substance (Thales – ‘water’, Heraclitus – ‘fire’, and Epicurus and Democritus – ‘atoms’). These philosophers had tried to explain the nature of the world without giving concession for any mysticism, God or any ideal expressions.

A different sort of materialism, more scientific and profound than the ancient Greek materialism, emerged in the enlightenment period. In the 16th and 17th centuries – mechanical

materialism – often associated with the emergence of bourgeoisie society flourished in Europe (Cornforth, 1976: 31). Mechanical materialism, as a new model of explaining the nature of things was the result of various social and scientific incidents. It was not emerged spontaneously, rather it is accompanied by various scientific and social movements developed during the period. With the rapid growth of science and technology, especially mechanics, philosophers and scientists sought to adopt the principles and laws of mechanics so as to understand the nature of society and institutions.

As the collapsed of feudalism, the birth of modern science and development of the bourgeoisie class, mechanical materialism, as a new form of materialism, came into being in the 16th and 17th centuries (*Ibid.*). The new science which viewed the world as the mechanical interaction of various particles was used by the bourgeoisie to fight against feudalism and idealism. The bourgeoisie used the new mechanical conception of nature to give meaning and direction for abolishing the old feudal system which was marked by considering things as being God-given and immutable (*Ibid.*). In other words, mechanical materialism was used to undermine the long-existing feudal idea which conceives the world as simply a hierarchy of beings having a permanent and eternal place in the universe, and in this hierarchy, God is put at the top and everything beneath him have also their own respective positions and obligations (Cornforth, 1976: 32).

This conception of the world was also reflected in the social realm in which the feudal lords put at the top and the serfs were treated as subordinate and destined to be the servants of the lords. Mechanical materialism, on the other hand, “considers things to exist, not in a God-ordained relationship to each other, but in a mechanical relationship (Waddington, 1974: 35). It conceives that the world is a totality of distinct particles in interaction, and this interaction is governed by mechanical laws. Mechanical materialism recognizes the movement of things as a result of the application of external forces which trigger any motion and movement in objects. This conception of nature, in fact, overlooked the inherent inner motion of objects and phenomena in the universe, for nothing move without the application of external forces. It views the world as a machine which is composed of various distinct parts interact each other by mechanical laws, and once the machine has set in motion it continues to exhibit the same kind of mechanical motion eternally.

Marx and Engels rejected the sort of materialism which conceives the world as a totality of distinct particles interacting together due to the application of external causes. In the account of Marx, mechanical materialism has shortcomings which could perhaps be diametrically opposite to the view he endorses in dialectical materialism.

Marx’s materialism is dialectical. Both Marx and Engels claim that the mechanical conception of the world which is characterized by the interaction of distinct particles governed by mechanical laws open up the door for idealist mysticism and religion (Waddington, 1974: 37). If the world is like a machine which had been set in motion some unknown time in the past, then this will certainly lead us to raise the question who has set the “first impulse” (*Ibid.*). In fact, this question will ultimately call for the insertion of the idealist supposition that “God” or “Absolute Spirit” could be considered as the first impulse responsible for any movement and motion in the world.

The other shortcoming associated with mechanical materialism is the view which depicts the reluctance to recognize new developments and the emergence of new qualitative changes in motion (Cornforth, 1976: 36). Though mechanical materialism acknowledges the motion and movement of particles in the universe, it considers this movement as the repetition of the same forms and qualities (*Ibid.*). Mechanical materialism recognizes only a cynical repetition of things which is quite outlandish to the dialectical conception of nature, which characterizes the

birth of new qualities from the demise of the old. Things in their interaction with each other not only repeat the features they hold, but also assume new qualitative changes and new features.

Marx and Engels put themselves in a distance to mechanical materialism due to the later rejection of the existence of inner contradiction inherent in objects (Waddington, 1974: 37-38). For mechanical materialism, everything is at rest where nothing external force is applied to them. But Marx and Engels recognize the inseparability of matter and motion (*Ibid.*). They concede the inner motion of things being responsible for the emergence of new qualitative changes and development. This is to say that there is motion in things even in the absence of the application of external forces. Ultimately the mechanical materialist conception of nature opens the door for reactionary theories.

5. Dialectics vs metaphysics

Dialectical materialism, as it is viewed by Marx and Engels, is not only distinct from mechanical materialism but also from the metaphysical conception of cognition. The metaphysical conception of nature, as opposed to dialectical materialism, considers things or phenomena in isolation from other objects or phenomena (Cornforth, 1976: 58). In other words, it treats things in themselves by undermining their dialectical connection and relationship with other things in the universe. By studying things in themselves, the metaphysical conception of nature fosters the view which “fixes” the characteristics of things permanently and once for all by considering them at a particular historical period (*Ibid.*). For dialectical materialism, on the other hand, things constantly modify and change their qualities or nature while interacting with other objects. Since things manifest different nature at different historical period, it is hardly possible to “fix” permanent characteristics of things by ignoring their interaction and connection with other things. In other words, dialectical materialism abandons the metaphysical claim that it is possible to “fix” the characteristics of things in the absence of their interaction and connection with other objects. Engels rightly expressed the transient nature of everything in the universe as follows:

The world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes, in which the things apparently stable no less their mind images in our heads, the concepts, go through an uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away (quoted in Waddington, 1974: 40).

Contrary to metaphysics, dialectical materialism claims that it is hardly possible to treat things in isolation from the process they have come into being. The characteristics of things or objects cannot be understood without recognizing their relationship and interaction with other objects. The nature of things cannot be known without giving due regard to the connection, contradiction and processes by which they have come in to being. Marx’s rejection of the metaphysical understanding of things can be understood from the way he shattered the view which conceives the nature of “man” abstractly. For Marx, it is impossible to talk about the essence of “man” without giving due emphasis to the social system that largely make men who they are. In this connection, Marx denied the long existing tradition of the western philosophy which “sets” certain characteristics to be the eternal and unchanging essence of human beings.

Dialectical materialism conceives a continuous change and movement of things by virtue of their connection and relationship with other objects. Thus, proper understanding of things requires us to inquire the historical process by which they have come into being. But this view is not tenable for dialectical materialists, for one and the same object might have different qualities depending upon the interaction that a thing has with other objects at different period.

Things come into being as a result of the connection, process and interaction they have with other objects or phenomena. Things are continually changing, so that we cannot “fix” permanent characteristics once and for all to them by studying at a specific historical period,

rather their quality has to be studied in connection with the historical process they have come into being. Dialectics, therefore, rejects the view which claims that the universe is a totality of ready-made objects which could be studied in their own without stressing their interaction and connection with other objects.

6. Hegel’s influence on Marx

Dialectics and materialism were not the invention of Karl Marx. The word “dialectics” is of ancient Greek origin. “Initially it meant the ability to conduct disputes and bring out the truth by disclosing and resolving contradictions in the arguments of the opponents (Afanasyev, 78: 19). Dialectics and materialism had been developed by Marx’s predecessors Hegel and Feuerbach respectively. It is from Hegel that Marx borrowed the concept of dialectics. Although Hegel has been credited as a prominent figure in western philosophical systems, the idea of dialectics is dated back to ancient Greek philosophy. Some Greek philosophers upheld the perpetual change and flux of everything. For them, things appear and disappear, are connected in one way or another and marked by inner contradictions. Heraclites was one of those philosophers who conceived a continuous change and motion in things. He recognized the pinner contradiction of things as a source of motion and change. From this, therefore, one can say that dialectics at least in its crude form was developed by the thoughts of ancient Greeks.

In modern philosophical discourse, Hegel was the first and most ardent philosopher who worked out the basic laws of dialectics which govern the movement of thought and knowledge. Marx was substantially influenced by the thoughts of Hegel, especially by his dialectics. Though Marx concedes the importance of Hegel’s conception of dialectics, he shattered his idealism all together.

Everything in the world is in a continuous interaction and change. The world is in a state of perpetual interaction and exhibits inner contradiction as a result of which new entities and phenomena come into being. Hegel recognized the inner contradiction of the world as a source of change and development. Nothing stands still; things are in a continuous interaction, connection and processes. These perpetual interaction, connection and processes give rise to new developments and new forms. Marx and Engels acknowledged the revolutionary character of Hegel’s philosophy, for it challenged the previous philosophers who had conceived the world as a totality of “ready-made” objects and concepts (Booth, 1976: 18). “Every historical stage is necessary and reasonable for a given epoch, but it is also transient and must give way to another stage, which in its turn must also pass away” (*Ibid.*).

In light of this dialectical philosophy, Engels notes “nothing is definitive, absolute, and sacred; it reveals the transient nature of everything and in everything. Nothing can stand up before it paves the uninterrupted process of becoming and passing away” (quoted in Blooth, 1976: 18). But Hegel sees this historical movement in idealist terms. “The subject of historical movement is the Absolute Spirit. History is the process of the Spirit’s self-knowledge. Men, in a mass, are the material for this movement of the spirit. The Absolute Spirit finds adequate expression only in philosophy which knows and perceives this movement” (*Ibid.*).

Although Marx appreciated Hegel’s effort to come up with the basic laws of dialectics, Hegel’s thought was not taken up completely by Marx due to Hegel’s emphasis on idealism. Marx and Engels see a contradiction in Hegel’s work which contains two contradictory views that Hegel’s emphasis on the idea of dialectics in the one hand and his view which conceive his philosophical system as the final and all-embracing knowledge which depicts the attainment of absolute truth (Waddington, 1974: 38).

Though Hegel believes in infinity of development, the Absolute Spirit in his philosophical system comes into its final development where knowledge cannot develop any

further. Hegel should have endorsed either his dialectics or abandoned the idea that the culmination of the development of the Absolute Spirit. Marx and Engels have claimed that Hegel should have endorsed either one of the two, for both are incompatible. If the dialectic is to be maintained, it must be forgone beyond the Hegelian scheme. In short, “Hegel considered his philosophy to be final, all-embracing knowledge, while he considered the society in which it was evolved to be the crowning stage of mankind. But a system of natural and historical knowledge, embracing everything, and final for all time, is contradictory” (Ilitskaya, 197: 68-69).

Similarly, Booth maintained that:

If mankind has arrived at the point where it knows the Absolute Spirit (i.e., Hegelian philosophy), then this philosophy becomes absolute Truth. Therefore, knowledge cannot develop any further: once the Absolute Spirit knows itself, the movement of history ceases. But this, of course, means that the dialectics must be eliminated. If the dialectics is to be maintained, it must therefore, be taken beyond the Hegelian system. The Hegelian system itself turns out to have been a necessary but merely temporary stage which must in its turn be surmounted (1976: 17).

The second inconsistency that Marx and Engels discerned in Hegel’s work is about Hegel’s conception of philosophy. The fact that Hegel conceives philosophy as the organ through which the Absolute Spirit knows itself breaks the dialectical unity between theory and practice, knowledge and change (Booth, 1976: 19). The ability of philosophers to influence and direct the movement of history is very limited even null in the Hegelian idealist scheme, for the real movement of history is accompanied by the Absolute Spirit unconsciously. That is why it is said that the Hegelian philosophical scheme shatters the dialectical unity between theory and practice, knowledge and change. Hegel puts philosophy out of history, for he fails to appreciate the active contribution of knowledge for natural and social transformation (*Ibid.*). History, as Hegel conceives, is the process of the spirit’s self-knowledge through the medium of philosophy. As such, the philosopher is simply an outside passive spectator of the self-realization of the Absolute Spirit without taking active part and influencing the movement of history. Thus, Hegel overlooked the dialectical unity between knowledge and change, theory and practice. In this connection, Marx states:

The philosopher is simply the organ through which the creator of history, The Absolute Spirit arrives at self-consciousness in retrospect, after the movement has ended. His participation in history is reduced to retrospective consciousness, for the real movement is accompanied by the Absolute Spirit unconsciously, so that the philosopher appears post festum...For as the Absolute Spirit only becomes conscious of itself as the creative world spirit post festum in the philosopher, so it’s making of history only exists in the consciousness, in the opinion and conception of the philosopher, i.e., only in the speculative imagination (quoted in Booth, 1976: 19).

Hegel’s idealist philosophy overlooked the active side of men in influencing and changing the natural and social environment they live in. by this Hegel undermined the place of philosophy (knowledge) in influencing and changing the movement of thought (history). “He thus locates philosophy outside history, instead of seeing it as a part of history” (*Ibid.*). This is, in fact, the point where Marx tries to reconstruct the bridge that Hegel disconnects between knowledge and change, theory and practice. “He [Hegel] fails to point out that knowledge is a factor in history, that knowledge is not purely contemplative but has also a transformative function” (*Ibid.*).

Knowledge has contribution in the making of history. Hegel’s view that men have little ability in directing and changing the natural and social environment in which they live is flawed. Man is not simply being influenced and directed by the natural and social environment, but he has also the capacity to transform and direct environment in a dialectical sense. Thus, knowledge and change are closely intertwined in a dialectical way. Consequently, Marx abandoned the Hegelian

idealism owing to the fact that it creates a loophole to deny the dialectical unity between theory and practice, knowledge and change.

7. Feuerbach’s influence on Marx

The work of Feuerbach was as important as Hegel in shaping the thoughts of Marx and Engels. As Feuerbach puts himself in a distance from the materialism of his predecessors and his strong criticism towards Hegelian idealism and theology (religion), makes him to be warmly welcomed by Marx and Engels. Although Feuerbach shattered Hegelian idealism, for the reason that it is a “philosophical apology of theology”, he failed to integrate the important aspect of Hegel’s philosophy-dialectics into his work. It is, in fact, this failure of Feuerbach to take up the idea of dialectics that was identified as a shortcoming of Feuerbach’s materialism by Marx and Engels.

Feuerbach’s critique towards idealism and theology uncovers the mystical elements embedded in the works of Hegel’s Absolute Spirit. Amounts to this fact, Feuerbach says, “modern philosophy is simply theology resolved into philosophy” (quoted in Booth, 1976: 32). For Feuerbach, the essences attached with the concept of ‘God’ are merely abstractions of the human essence. As a result, Feuerbach moves contrary to idealism. He claims that it is not thought that determines being, instead he stresses the primacy of being, that is thought is simply the product of the concretely existing individual (Ilitskaya, 1978: 65-66).

For Marx, however, did not want to endorse Feuerbach’s characterization of human essence. Marx made a critique of Feuerbach on Theses on Feuerbach in which he provided a couple of fundamental objections which could be taken as Marx’s divergence from Feuerbachian materialism. In fact, Marx acknowledged the steps that had been taken by Feuerbach as important to criticize Hegelian idealism, he did not take over Feuerbach’s materialism altogether. With this regard, Marx draws a point which could possibly be said contradictory to Feuerbach regarding the essence of man.

Unlike Feuerbach, Marx has a very different conception of the essence of man. This essence shows that man as a social being, being subjected to both natural and social laws. “Feuerbach’s concept of man was abstractly philosophical: Marx drew his from real life and made the concept concrete” (Booth, 1976: 24). On the 6th thesis on Feuerbach Marx says,

Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations. Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence, is obliged:

- (1) To abstract from the historical process and to define the religious sentiment regarded by itself, and to presuppose an abstract isolated human individual
- (2) The essence, therefore can by him only be regarded as “species”, as an inner “dumb” generality which unites many individuals only in a natural way.

In the 7th thesis Marx also strengthens this point. He says, “Feuerbach consequently does not see that the ‘religious sentiment’ is itself a social product and that the abstract individual that he analyses belongs in reality to a particular social form”.

There is no abstract human essence to which we appeal as the ultimate basis for knowing man. Feuerbach regarded the human essence “as the being of an isolated man, dominated exclusively by natural laws” (Booth, 1976: 24). Marx, on the other hand, makes the point clear that the idea to define the essence of man in isolation with the real historical process is bound to be easily swayed into the break of the dialectical unity between theory and practice. In other words, For Marx, the essence of man cannot be established simply by estrangement from the social production of life that people enter into aiming at their sustenance. Man is a social being subject

to both natural and social laws. In this regard, Marx's rejection of a definite human essence is stated as follows:

Man is no abstract essence perched somewhere outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, and society.... The individual is the social being. His life, even if it may not appear in the direct form of a communal life carried out together with others, is therefore an expression and confirmation of social life (quoted in Booth, 1976: 25).

For Marx, when people enter into social production of life, they are not only producing their means of sustenance but the process also defines who they are. Marx says, "...world history is simply the production of man through their labor" (*Ibid.*). Marx regards man not merely as the product of nature but as the product of social, human labor.

Feuerbach was also criticized of taking reality simply being an object of contemplation, instead of taking it as a form of conscious human activity. Marx considers Feuerbach's materialism as something which conceives human beings simply as passive beings determined by circumstances. This denies the active side of men in changing the circumstances they live in. Feuerbach by taking reality simply as an object of contemplation ignores human's ability to transform and change their natural and social environment. Marx did not like Feuerbach's materialism which estranged theory from practice. Men are not only the product of their environment; they can in turn influence the circumstances they live in. In the 3rd thesis Marx says:

The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated. Hence this doctrine is bound to divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. The coincidence of the or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice (Marx, 1845: 156).

Marx recognizes the active side of development in idealism, though formulated abstractly. This is, in fact, a point where Marx gave a high regard for the conception of revolutionary practice. Man is not so helpless to be fatalistically determined and influenced by natural laws, instead, men are said to be active beings who could alter and influence their natural and social condition.

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism ... is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity. Practice not subjectively. Hence in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was developed abstractly by idealism- which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity... (*Ibid.*).

Human beings are not simply mechanically determined beings who merely act in accordance with the mechanical laws operating in the universe. Rather they can modify and change their circumstance by their conscious activity. Thus, reality is not only an object of contemplation as it is being changed and modified through human conscious activity. Men are not merely passive being fatalistically determined by circumstances, rather they are active in changing and modifying the circumstances that condition them. Cognizant of this fact, Marx stepped ahead from his predecessors, and emphasized the importance of praxis in bringing natural and social development. This is why Marx says, "... philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it" (*Ibid.*).

8. Conclusion

Consistent with the materialist interpretation of history, Marx’s ruthless objection of any form of abstraction is evident in his works. It is due to his objection towards any form of abstraction that Marx gave emphasis to the concretely existing individuals in their particular circumstances. This should be, according to Marx, a departure points for any philosophical as well as scientific inquiry. He denounced any attempt to discern men in abstraction, apart from their particular social role, status and class position. Marx’s insistence on the concretely existing individuals has implication on his concept of human nature. For him, man has no fixed and enduring essence which transcend historical and economic horizon in which men live in. This is to say that man is not always the product of his own choice nor wholly determined by the external world. Rather man’s essence is continually changing as a result of his dialectical interaction with the environment.

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