

A study of Marx's religious views from the perspective of realistic man

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Abstract. This academic paper explores Marx's view of religion from the perspective of "realistic man". It objectively discusses the historical background and main contents of the formation of Marx's religious view as well as the contents of religious criticism which cannot be ignored in the Marxist theoretical system. In the process of studying Marxism, people always used to combine religion with the words such as ignorance and unwisdom. This paper returns to the original work of Marx, puts forward the realistic value of the existence of religion under the historical background, and holds that religion should be discussed with realistic people based on the real society.

Keywords: Marxism, religion, realistic man.

1. Introduction

Marx did not publish his systematic explanation of religious thought, which left a large gap for the academic circle to sort out his religious view accurately. From reading Marx's own works, we can at least conclude that Hegelian philosophy played a particularly important role in Marx's transformation from theism to atheism. In the process of Marx's religious view from maturity to depth, Feuerbach's "alienation" of human nature has exerted a great influence. Marx's analysis of religion is to pull religion from heaven back to earth, from the social reality into the root of society, in such a vivid thinking movement, human self-alienation became the theoretical core of his criticism of religion, "realistic man" became an important basis for Marx's religious discourse.

2. The historical background of Marx's religious view

2.1 Theoretical background

The theoretical background of Marx's religious view is mainly Hegel's dialectic thought and Feuerbach's humanistic thought, both of which played an important role in the course of Marx's religious study and also played a reference role in the overall development of Marxism.

2.2 Hegel's dialectic thought

In Hegel's philosophical system, dialectics occupies a very important position. By explaining the dialectical development process of concepts, Hegel created the alienation formula such as "absolute spirit-nature-subjective spirit". He first described the natural history and spiritual world as a process of constant movement, change and development, and opened up a way to understand the reality of human society. In Hegel's thinking, everything in the world is the external expression of the absolute spirit. Meanwhile, art, religion and philosophy are all concrete forms of the absolute spirit.

It can be said that Hegel had actually realized that those concepts had the concreteness of historical movement, but he chose to introduce abstract concepts such as "absolute spirit" and tried to explain the movement that should exist in the level of social practice with a set of conceptual logic. On the level of religious view, Hegel used one kind of "god" to define another kind of "God". The absolute spirit he believed was also divine to some extent. It was still objective idealism, which could not completely realize the connection between theory and reality. Marx criticized and occupied the viewpoint of social and historical reality in Hegel's dialectics, and reversed Hegel's "concept externalization into reality" to "concept generation in reality", realizing the transcendence under social and historical logic.

2.3 Feuerbach's humanistic thought

Feuerbach clarified the characteristics of Hegel's objective idealism and pointed out that Hegel's philosophy is the "last refuge" and "pillar" of theology. He attributed the nature of religion to the nature of human beings, fully affirmed the role of realistic man in emotional connection and other aspects, emphasized the perceptual existence of human nature, and discussed the reason, will and love of human beings, which are different from animals.

Feuerbach's humanism thought regards man as the highest object and the starting point and foothold of the whole philosophy. He proposes that the central problem of philosophy is the problem of man. He thinks that only the humanized philosophy is the real philosophy, which opens a new way to investigate the nature of man from the perspective of social relations. But Feuerbach's theory of "man" looked at man from himself more. What he saw was an isolated individual or the communication between two people, and he didn't understand the nature of man from the process of history. His investigation of the nature of class was also superficial, and he didn't understand it from the perspective of human perceptual activities.

2.4 Social background

The social background of the formation of Marx's religious view is mainly the phenomenon of human alienation and people's value pursuit for comfort in the dark society. It is in the social context that Marx's view of religion seems so persuasive.

2.5 Self-alienation of people as social subjects

Marx examined human beings from the suffering world, so he most intuitively and fully saw the self-alienation of human beings as social subjects. In the German society of the mid-19th century, "Man became something humiliated, enslaved, abandoned and scorned."^[1] The kingdom of Prussia, swept by the Industrial Revolution, ushered in a period of rapid and brilliant economic development, but a large number of farmers lived on the brink of bankruptcy. At the same time, the enactment of the Forest Theft Law made Marx see the evil of the authorities. The poor lost the freedom to pick up dead branches to keep warm and wild fruits to feed themselves. This law made a large number of unemployed farmers deliberately violate the regulations, cut down and poached, so that they could be put into prison and get a free lunch.

In such a miserable world, the common people work but lose the fruits of labor, crime instead of labor became the way to make a living, and only indifferent oppression between classes. In such a context, the products of human labor are alienated from human beings, the activities of human labor are alienated from human beings, and the nature of human beings is alienated from human beings.

2.6 People's value appeal

Society is the way of human existence and development conditions. Under the background of German society at that time, a large number of ordinary people were deeply oppressed and could not endure self-loss and real suffering in such a society. They could only seek solace in the heartless world and seek a spirit under the shadow of the spiritless system, so people found religion. Religion expresses people's "unbearable" with its own logic. People can get rid of the fear of death in the context of religion. Religion comforts and paralyzes people's injured hearts in real life, which is similar to the effect of "opium" to some extent and has an analgesic effect. People's dependence on religion reflects people's dependence on the community. People create dreams by creating gods, and regulate their behavior by these sacred images. Religion not only abstracts man himself, but also the essence of man, that is, "the sum of all social relations". All of these show that in the suffering world, people's demand for value is unprecedentedly high.

3. The formation logic of Marx's religious view

3.1 Limitations of the Religious Reform by Martin Luther

In *The Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (later called *the Introduction*), Marx clearly affirmed the theoretical value of the German Reformation, but he also pointed out that the Reformation "freed the body from the chains because it put chains on the mind."^[1] Although Martin Luther's religious reform broke the autocratic rule of Catholic theology and advocated freedom of belief, enabling many monks to get rid of the autocratic rule of the church and obtain certain freedom, it also introduced religious belief into secular life, making many non-believers become spiritual "monks", but did not free people from religious chains.

On the premise of this fact, the religious reform did not actually make people become free people. On the contrary, it put chains on people in the field of secular life and suppressed the free and comprehensive development of people. Therefore, Marx believed that the criticism of religion only removed the unreal flowers decorated on the chain, which still could not make people gain real happiness and become real social subjects. Only by breaking down the reality foundation on which religion is attached, can the society truly care for "real people".

3.2 Religious criticism is the premise of all other criticisms

Marx mentioned in *Theses on Feuerbach* that Feuerbach analyzed religion from the perspective of self-alienation, but he did not pay attention to another extremely important work -- understanding from the contradictions of the secular foundation itself, and using the method of eliminating contradictions to actively change in practice, and did not touch the social reality and system that really bound people. So it cannot make people get freedom and all-round development of the real flower.

"The task of history is to establish the truth of this shore world after the truth of this shore world has passed away."^[1] Thus, Marx directed the criticism of religion to criticism of the world, criticism of law and criticism of politics. Marx always started from the perspective of people as social subjects, and believed that social existence determined social consciousness. The existence of religion was not the cause of the existence of suffering in the world, but its result. Marx shifted the focus of criticism in religious view to criticizing capitalist society and capitalist mode of production. This was particularly evident in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.

4. The Breakthrough of Marx's Religious View: Based on the consideration of "realistic man"

4.1 Study human beings in social community and practice

Hegel fails to research man in social community. Although Feuerbach had placed man in an important position and realized that man exists in relations, his investigation of human social relations was too shallow and he failed to base himself on practice, taking man as a man of practice and as the subject of social and historical development. The transcendence of Marx over Hegel and Feuerbach lies in the fact that he realized that the process of social development is the activity process of "realistic man", and that the study of society must start from "realistic man". Such a "realistic man" is a man who is in a certain real social relationship and engaged in concrete practice, rather than a man in an ideal state.

In the context of social community and practice, the study of religion is deeply complicated, and it is impossible to generalize whether it is good or bad. It is unscientific for some contemporary people to completely deny any function of religion in any era, so it is even more foolish to deny the value of religious study. In his works, Marx argued more than once that religion serves as a function of world outlook, outlook on life, values, as well as a function of psychological consolation and political justification. It is precisely because of examining people in the social community and practice that

Marx's religious view is not superficial, but complex and has multiple connotations, and is not simply understood from a shallow perspective like praise or criticism.

4.2 Marx criticizes religion based on the reality of human existence

Religion is not only a game of god and God-ordained rules, but also shows the complexity of people and society. Marx's religious view not only embodies humanistic concern everywhere, but also keeps the concern for human beings from being in an illusionary awkward situation. This is because he went to the grassroots level for a long time, carefully observed the sufferings of ordinary people's lives, understood the realistic factors that human beings dissimilated from the essence of humanity in production practice and many other links, so as to find the root of religion and the scientific logic of religious criticism.

Based on the reality of human existence is the inevitable requirement of studying the activities of social historical subjects. Only by understanding the existence of "realistic people", can we understand the activities of "realistic people", and then understand the role that "realistic people" really play in the historical process. This is not only a breakthrough of Marx's religious criticism, but also an important inspiration for social science researchers.

5. Summary

The greatest charm of Marx's religious view lies in his precise connection of a mysterious and unfathomable concept with reality. All the techniques to cover up the dark world are just childish tricks in Marx's eyes. At the same time, he was not satisfied with the superficial criticism of religion, but went deep into human nature, mercilessly pointed at the secrets of capital exploitation, the interests of the ruling class, ruthlessly revealed their attempts to enslave people, extracted the calluses, and deeply explored and interpreted the self-alienation of people. To study religion is to study the real society, to study the people who constitute the society and the surrounding environment. The greatest value of the existence of religions today is to guide human beings to constantly reflect on the real world they live in and the institutional structure they have built.

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