

## The Evolution of Friedrich Engels's View of Religion

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**Abstract:** In *Anti-Dühring*, Friedrich Engels criticizes Turin Airport's view of religion from the angle of historical materialism, but does not explain it in detail. In his later years, Friedrich Engels further enriched the Marxist outlook on religion on the basis of a full study and absorption of Ludwig Feuerbach's religious views and a great deal of experience in social practice and revolutionary activities, it provides a guide for socialist countries to deal with religious issues.

**Keywords:** Friedrich Engels; *Anti-Dühring*; Religion

### 1. Friedrich Engels believed that religion was an illusion and a reflection of the human mind

In his *Anti-Dühring*, Friedrich Engels gives a clear definition of religion. In Friedrich Engels's view, "All religions are nothing but illusions and reflections in the minds of men of the external forces which govern their daily lives. Friedrich Engels argues that this reflection exists in such a way that human power takes the form of a power that transcends man himself. Friedrich Engels then goes on to discuss how different nations, in different historical periods and in different ways, externalize their national personalities, so that they ultimately reflect their essential power in reality and become the rudiments of religion. What they have in common is that they externalize the essential power of man, that is, the power of society as a more powerful force, like the power of nature, through the externalization of personal fantasies and thoughts, to create an "Object" that the subject is not aware of. Therefore, religion is further romanced by social forces from the externalization of pure natural forces in the early stage of society, and the elements of religion begin to become complex and diverse. On another level, into the socialization, by social forces of religion and the most primitive religion has been far from the original, has become a new form of social structure independent of the existence of society. In the creation myth of many nations, the early worship is "System religion" represented by polytheism. From this point of view, the power system structure of human society is the imitation and reflection of the system structure of the mythological world.

Friedrich Engels further combines Marxism's theory of alienation with religious change to explain exactly what social forces are involved, "But we have seen more than once that in the present bourgeois society man is at the mercy of some alien force, just as he is at the mercy of the economic relations which he has created, and of the means of production which he has produced, Friedrich Engels added, he lived in an era when religion had become a slave to alienated economic relations and means of production. Religion in the 19th century has become the antithesis of society, and to a certain extent also exacerbated the rule of man and slavery. At the same time, Friedrich Engels argues that because certain economic relations and means of production participate in the "Creation" of religion in a way that alienates the essence of man, so as long as economic relations and means of production exist, the religion they "Created" will always be there. And this kind of existence does not disappear along with the people to this kind of phenomenon essential understanding. At the heart of the development of religion in the 19th century was a shift from traditional natural domination to what is clearly seen as the means of production and economic influence. Further clarifying the reasons for promoting religious development and

change is only the first step in the completion of the liberation of people, or the cleansing of religion. Economic Relations and the existence of means of production constitute the cause of human alienation, and this alienation is further manifested in religion. Thus Friedrich Engels, in the *Anti-Dühring*, argues that “Even if bourgeois economics were to have some knowledge of the causality of the domination of this dissident force, nothing would have changed.”

## **2. Economic power is an important reason for the emergence of religion**

Ludwig Feuerbach’s view of religion is very different from that of previous philosophers from the standpoint of the materialism. So it’s called a “Milestone” of progress. And it was in the nature of Christianity, published at the 1841, that Ludwig Feuerbach turned the illusory spirit of religion into a material force and social foundation. After reading this book, Friedrich Engels highly praised Ludwig Feuerbach’s position and his objective and concrete religious view, and gave affirmation and approval to Ludwig Feuerbach’s religious view. Friedrich Engels once said, “We were all Ludwig Feuerbach for a while.” Friedrich Engels’s definition of the nature of religion borrows somewhat from Ludwig Feuerbach’s study of the nature of religion, which in Ludwig Feuerbach’s view, holds the key to the nature of religion to be the belief in the one true God, namely God, and “God himself is nothing but an imaginary or imaginary entity, an entity of the human mind.” God is an entity, but the essence of this entity is created by man, not by the entity itself. In other words, in Ludwig Feuerbach’s view, there is no so-called “God” beyond the power of man himself, the so-called “God” is only a conceptual content, to maintain the main body of the fantasy and sustenance. When the subject’s desires and ideas in the real world can’t be satisfied, he will rely on external forces. As this expectation spread through the population, the urgent need for a “Product”, the so-called religious god was born.

Having gained insight into the unreality of god, Ludwig Feuerbach constructed a theoretical system for the production of religion from the psychological level of man, he believed that: “Human’s sense of trust is the foundation of Religion.” He first took the natural religion as his research object. He thought that the reason of the natural religion and the initial human survival and development are inseparable. In the early days of human development, man had a close relationship with nature, and all his behaviors depended on nature. Human beings need to get material means of production from nature, to use nature through labor to achieve their own survival. On the one hand, the forces of nature are unpredictable and difficult to control. Any natural phenomenon beyond human endurance would have had a devastating impact on the early man. So the relationship between man and nature is tenuous. On the one hand, people can’t leave nature; On the other hand, people fear nature. It is because of the dual nature of the early people to seek a once-for-all way to avoid the natural forces of attack, in order to maintain their own survival and development of the long-term. Under such conditions, early human beings began to worship and personify the natural things, reducing the objects to have the same emotions as themselves, but the power is far beyond their own objects. But because Ludwig Feuerbach reduced the nature of religion to the nature of man. Its progressive theoretical framework was endorsed and praised by Friedrich Engels, and its materialism position won room to build on it. But Friedrich Engels also realized that Ludwig Feuerbach was only analyzing the background and causes of religion from the perspective of the forces of nature, simply attributing the root causes of religion to the domination and fear of the forces of nature. But from Friedrich Engels’s point of view. Man “Lives not only in nature, but also in human society.” It is precisely because Ludwig Feuerbach did not see this, or put man in a natural society, that he came to a relatively one-sided conclusion, and eventually rejoin the Idealism.

“Friedrich Engels goes beyond Ludwig Feuerbach’s point of view, emphasizing that man is a concrete person in the process of historical change and a unity of natural and social attributes”. Therefore, people in the state of nature have to submit to the nature because of the limitation of their level of knowledge and production, and the natural forces play a major role in the birth of early religion. But with the development of society, the people of production and living standard have formed a stable and reliable social organization under complete and solid conditions, that is, the society itself. The further refinement of the social division of labor liberates some people who once participated in natural labor, and makes them turn to social labor. Therefore, the image of god in religion also began to change from the original “Natural god” to “Social god”. Early myths and legends of the

gods for the creation of god. Early Man believed that he was created, that he knew the world in his own way, and that his worship of god was not blind. It's about orderly religious activity. The early religious activities not only did not stop social progress, but also indoctrinated the people and taught them to live in order and have a sense of awe. At the same time, the sacrificial offering activities also filled the spiritual emptiness of early human beings and satisfied the spiritual world of human beings. However, after the appearance of this form of society, it changed from "God created man" to "Artificial God". Therefore, regarding the religion and the human relations, actually should divide into two levels to see. In his later years, Friedrich Engels made up for the shortcomings of Ludwig Feuerbach's theoretical system, and further improved and perfected it.

Another enrichment of Friedrich Engels's religious outlook in his later years is that he finally settled his religious criticism in the real world. Ludwig Feuerbach's view of religion began with the analysis and criticism of natural forces, so the influence of religion to be resolved will naturally return to the rational use of natural forces. Ludwig Feuerbach's starting point determined that his return to the movement could only start from his own starting point. So Friedrich Engels said of Ludwig Feuerbach, "Thought eliminates thought, and consciousness solves consciousness." From this point of view, Friedrich Engels pointed out the limitations of Ludwig Feuerbach's religious views and the reasons for his return to idealism. Ludwig Feuerbach thinks. "What men desire is what their God is," says Ludwig Feuerbach, while accurately describing the relationship between the causes of religion and man's expectations, ascribes that desire to natural forces. Friedrich Engels, on the other hand, rightly argues that the factors that influence people's desires have shifted from natural forces to social ones. It is the various kinds of social existence that determine people's own and produce various kinds of wishes. And the existence of society is due to the production of labor alienation, so ultimately it should be attributed to the productive forces above.

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