Towards History Itself: On the Production of Marx's Concept of Perceptual Consciousness

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Abstract. Towards history itself is the basic spirit of Marx's philosophy of history. The process of Marx's restoration of human history is both a process of continual sublation and transcendence of traditional philosophy and a process of continual return to the realistic sensual life. The work of historical restoration that Marx accomplished created the core of its philosophy of history, perceptual consciousness. Perceptual consciousness is not simply equivalent to the relevant concepts of Feuerbach's philosophy, but always corresponds to human perceptual activity and forms an organic unity with it. It overcomes the grasp of human conceptualisation and absoluteness and has a certain phenomenological character with a strong orientation towards history itself. Marx's spiritual effort to restore history has roughly gone through the following three steps:Firstly, the reduction from self-consciousness to perceptual object. Secondly, the reduction from perceptual object to perceptual practice. Thirdly, the comprehensive development of perceptual consciousness. Through the generation of the concept of perceptual consciousness, Marx blazed a trail of reality to a state of historical clarity and completed the clarification of the original meaning of history.

Keywords: Marx, history itself, perceptual consciousness, Powell, Feuerbach, Max Stirner.

1. Introduction

Since Plato, the task of traditional Western philosophy has been to seek truth with ultimate certainty. An attempt is made to grasp history itself as a whole and to search for a timeless and universal principle of a priori history in a rational and speculative way. In the speculative philosophy of history, human existence is prescribed by the activity of theoretical cognition, and reason has the supreme position of ruler and prescriber. As Heidegger puts it, 'In the history of Western thought, from its inception, the being of beings has indeed been thought, but the truth of being as being remains unthought; not only is such truth denied as a possible experience for thinking, but Western thought, as metaphysics, expressly though unwittingly conceals the occurrence of this refusal.' [1]In response to the fact that metaphysics obscures the historical existence of human beings and falls into a rupture with reality, Marx argued that history itself is not an a priori reflection of the real world within consciousness, but a human history based on real-life and society and created by the vivid sensual activities of human beings. Therefore, Marx's interpretation of history is essentially a way of approaching and grasping historical reality; in other words, in Marx, history itself is a process of the generation of human creative activity.

From the genealogy of modern German philosophy, from Kant to Hegel to the Young Hegelians, and even to Feuerbach's intuitive materialism and Max Stirner's isolated, self-interested egoist, all of them essentially never left the base of philosophy, and all of them are abstract, logical, critical thinking in the field of ideas. From a conceptual point of view, theoretical activities that construct pure metaphysical systems in a non-historical and non-realistic manner. On this basis, Marx brought philosophy back from the 'kingdom of abstraction' to the 'world of reality', and created the core idea of his philosophy of history -- perceptual consciousness. However, the Marxian concept of perceptual consciousness has long been read within the paradigm of modern philosophy. Perceptual consciousness, understood in this way, is undoubtedly still within the hedge of modern metaphysics. Perceptual consciousness is not simply equivalent to the related concepts of Feuerbach's philosophy. It is inseparable from human perceptual activities. It is pre-rational awareness, just as perceptual activities are pre-rational activities. Perceptual consciousness overcomes the grasp of human

conceptualisation and absoluteness and has a certain phenomenological character with a strong orientation towards history itself. In this paper, it is argued that moving towards history itself is a logical necessity for the development of Marx's thought, and that the process of forming Marx's philosophical thought is a continuous process of returning to real life. Any philosophical doctrine has its historical process of gestation, creation, and development. Marx's spiritual effort to restore history has roughly gone through the following three steps: first, the reduction from self-consciousness to perceptual object, second, the reduction from perceptual object to perceptual practice, and third, the comprehensive development of perceptual consciousness. Accordingly to this, this article attempts to reproduce the process of the emergence, development and formation of Marx's perceptual consciousness from the perspective of historical phenomenology, and seeks its particularity and value towards history itself.

2. Reduction from self-consciousness to perceptual object

The concept of Marx's perceptual consciousness was not achieved overnight. It was a dual unity process of separation and construction, which included the criticism and absorption of young Hegelian philosophical thoughts such as Powell, Feuerbach and Max Stirner. Powell, Feuerbach and Max Stirner have played the role of important founders, debaters and inspirers in the history of Marx's thought. The generative process of Marx's concept of perceptual consciousness is the result of absorbing the positive elements of Powell's, Feuerbach's and Max Stirner's philosophy and overcoming the negative elements of their metaphysics. Marx's first historical reduction was from self-consciousness to perceptual object; this process began in 1843 with the *German-French Annals*, and culminated in *Economics and Philosophy Manuscripts of 1844* and *The Holy Family*.

2.1. Self-consciousness: Marx's initial inquiry into the realisation of conceptual philosophy

The development of Young Marx's thought is a discontinuous process with an inner continuity. As far as continuity is concerned, there is a clear theme of thought running through the texts of Young Marx: the question of the relationship between philosophy and reality, and the question of how to achieve human freedom and emancipation. The development of Young Marx's thought is a process of moving away from and constructing one's philosophy under the influence of the Young Hegelians, Hegelian philosophy, Feuerbachian philosophy, and other schools of thought and in comparison to reality.

Hegel deliberately ignored the role of human self-consciousness in history. He believed that human beings were nothing but a means of historical progress. According to Hegel, the Absolute Spirit, which is the factor that forms the ultimate of history and is also an alias for God. It is the unity of the entity as a symbol of nature and the self-consciousness as a symbol of man and resides in the position of dominating them. After Hegel's death, the Hegelian philosophical system rapidly disintegrated. Among them, the Young Hegelians launched a critique of religion and politics based on the revolutionary spirit of Hegel's theory, which became the mainstream of German philosophical discourse in the 1840s. During the period when the Young Hegelians were in full bloom, the bourgeoisie was growing rapidly, and the French Enlightenment promoted ideas of freedom, democracy, and equality so much, and people took back their faith from religious privilege and placed it in their own. This shift led to a natural debate about religion and its nature, and about man and nature. Hegel, as the official philosopher of the King of Prussia, still has compromising elements of religious theology in his philosophy, and both religion and philosophy are stages in the realisation of the Absolute Spirit itself, and Hegel's entire philosophical system also transmits the color of such theological doctrines as the Incarnation and the Creation of Christ. The Young Hegelians opposed Hegel's tendency toward religious and political conservatism, and Strauss was the first to criticise the gospels in *The Story of Jesus*, arguing for the credibility of the mythical theory of Jesus and pointing out that Jesus as a model of Christ was not a miracle, but a historical figure with the common name of 'Jesus'. The 'Jesus' preachers and the *Gospels* are nothing more than unconscious group narratives

of the multitudes. Powell, soon afterward, joined in this thrilling controversy more militantly; he began by arguing against Strauss, that what was written in the *Gospels* was not historical fact at all, that the stories in the *Gospels* were nothing but the conscious creation of some individual genius, and that Christianity was no more than the alien ways of self-consciousness. In Powell's view, it was religion that fettered man's freedom, and believers were egoists who gave up human freedom, human life, art and history, and were concerned only with the salvation of the soul and the fate of the afterlife. In Powell's view, the essence of man is freedom. Religion makes people depend on alien, external, and divine power. Believers see themselves as unfortunate and weak animals.

It can be seen that the social reality of the time demanded revolution, and philosophy, as the spiritual essence of the age, should act as its vanguard. It is for this reason that the young Hegelians of Marx's early years attached great importance to the philosophy of self-consciousness. In 1837, Marx joined the Doctor's Club with Powell as the main lecturer. Marx's doctoral thesis was completed under Powell's guidance and instruction, in which he made extensive use of the conceptual categories of the philosophy of self-consciousness, paying special attention to the relationship between conceptual philosophy and the real world. In his doctoral dissertation, Marx attached great importance to Epicurus' atomic swerve because it symbolised the freedom of the human will, while also denying Democritus' fatalism that relegated everything to fate and providence. Marx spoke highly of self-conscious subjectivity and freedom, stating in the preface of his treatise that the aim of philosophy is the conquest of the world and absolute freedom, as Prometheus said, 'In a word, I hate all gods.' Not only that, Marx has shown great interest in religious criticism since he studied philosophy. Marx's classic statement on the relationship between religion and opium: 'Religion is the opium of the people', is also a direct adoption of Powell's view. As can be seen, Marx's early attention to the Young Hegelians was due to the fact that the Young Hegelians, in their struggle against religion and feudalism, 'abandoned their philosophically detached attitude to the pressing problems of the day'and turned to a concern with social reality. It also shows that Marx was not satisfied from the beginning with how to interpreted the world as Hegel or even some earlier philosophers did, but interpreted it in such a way that it was possible to change it. The notes to *'The Doctoral Theses'* contain this passage: 'The result is that as the world becomes philosophical, philosophy also becomes worldly, that its realisation is also its loss.' [2] It can be said that in the early years, Marx devoted himself to the philosophy of self-consciousness, and initially laid a logical path for the philosophy of ideas to return to reality.

2.2. The germ of perceptual consciousness: Marx's acceptance of Feuerbach's philosophy of sensibility

The young Marx took a philosophical standpoint of self-consciousness, which was mainly restricted to the speculative activities in his study during his studies, lacking insight into the real life world. However, once it enters the real life of society, the problem is no longer illusory and macroscopic. After graduating in 1842, Dr. Marx went to work for the Rheinische Zeitung, where he was exposed to a large number of social realities and found himself helpless to confront material interests with Hegelian philosophy. In the midst of his anguish and uncertainty, Feuerbach published *The Essence of Christianity*. As soon as this article came out, it caused an uproar in philosophical and religious circles. In the autumn of 1843, Marx, under the influence of Feuerbach's philosophy of sensibility, sublate the self-consciousness of the Kingdom of Heaven and made the transition from idealism to general materialism, moving further towards clarity. This ideological change began in the period of *The German-French Annals* and culminated in *Economics and Philosophy Manuscripts of 1844* and *The Holy Family*.

Firstly, it started in the period of the *The German-French Annals*, which was an important period in the formation and development of Marx's thought. Influenced by Feuerbach's philosophy of sensibility, Marx launched his first critique of Powell's philosophy of self-consciousness, which marked a new beginning of Marx's philosophy. In 1842, just as Marx was discovering that real problems could not be solved by idealist philosophy, Feuerbach sent out an article denouncing

Powell's criticism of the theory based on self-consciousness: 'The identity of subject and object – in self-consciousness only an abstract thought – has the character of truth and reality only in man's sensuous perception of man.' [3] Feuerbach further added that Powell took the self-consciousness as the starting point and regarded people as abstract existences, which is nothing but rationalism. Feuerbach sonorously articulated his new philosophy as 'a sensuous philosophy with an open heart.' The reality of sensuous and particular being is 'a truth that carries the seal of our blood'. With regard to the nature of man, Feuerbach disagrees that thinking or self-consciousness cannot be used to prescribe the nature of man or the reason why man is different from animals. Feuerbach argues that man is a species-being of society and that genus- existence is the essence of man. In short, with metaphysics in such a murky atmosphere, Feuerbach made sensibility the supreme rule of his philosophy, rejected all speculative, abstract metaphysics, and achieved an important turn that returned philosophy to sensibility.

In the period of the *The German-French Annals*, Marx inherited the religious outlook of Feuerbach: 'Man is the highest essence of man', 'species-life', 'Man is the world of man', 'species-being' and so on, undoubtedly borrowing directly from the resources of Feuerbach's academic discourse. During the period of *The German-French Annals*, Marx and Powell differed in their views on the critique of religion and political emancipation: Powell took as his theoretical premise the overcoming of spiritual alienation and regarded religion as the alienation of man's self-consciousness; Marx denied Powell's speculative liberalism philosophy, went deep into the reality of German capitalist society, and penetrated into the social relations of Jewish real life. And pointed out that the actual revolution and practice is the fundamental path for the Jews to emancipate and freedom. It can be seen that during this period, Marx had shifted from praising Powell's philosophy of self-consciousness to criticising his philosophy, and gradually stepped out of the 'Powellisation' of thought towards the 'Marxisation' of thought, which opened the germ of historical restoration.

Here, it must be mentioned that, if we dig deeper into the articles published by Marx in *The German-French Annals*, we can find that, although Marx was influenced by Feuerbach's anthropology, he was never a pure 'Feuerbachian' from the very beginning. Feuerbach had always confined himself to religious and philosophical criticism, whereas in this period Marx had already realised that true philosophy must return to reality and concern itself with the emancipation of man; and implicitly ran through a path of inquiry into the realisation of philosophy and thought: As philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its intellectual weapons in philosophy, and as soon as the lightning of thought has struck deep into the mass of the common people, the emancipation of the Germans into human beings will take place. Philosophy cannot be realised without the liquidation of the proletariat, the proletariat cannot liquidate itself without realising philosophy. [4] This classic exposition of philosophy and thought widely regarded by the academic circles as realised has already contained the seeds of Marx's later concept of perceptual consciousness.

Secondly, it culminated in *Economics and Philosophy Manuscripts of 1844* and *The Holy Family*. If Marx's reduction from a philosophy of self-consciousness to a philosophy of humanistic sensibility was not yet evident in the period of *The German-French Annals*, then in the *Economics and Philosophy Manuscripts of 1844* it can be found that Marx's admiration for Feuerbach was overwhelmingly evident, and it has completely realised the transformation from the young Hegelian school to Feuerbach's perceptual philosophy. In the *Economics and Philosophy Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx's admiration for Feuerbach reaches its zenith: The critique of political economics, and of empirical criticism as a whole, owes its true foundation to Feuerbach's discoveries. It is only with Feuerbach that positive, humanistic and naturalistic criticism begins. Feuerbach's writings is the only writings containing a real theoretical revolution after Hegel's *Phenomenology* and *Logic*.[4] Furthermore, Marx argued that Feuerbach saw man as a kind of social existence, transcending the old materialism of abstract material categories, and thus creating true materialism and positive science. Engels wrote of the influence of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* on Marx and him in his later years: The liberating effect of this book can only be imagined by those who have experienced it

for themselves. We were all very excited then, and we all became Feuerbachians for a moment. How warmly Marx had welcomed this new view, and how it influenced him (in spite of critical reservations), can be seen in *The Holy Family*. [5]

The Holy Family was the work of the Young Hegelians, led by Powell, immediately after Marx's completion of the *Economics and Philosophy Manuscripts of 1844* and his polemical collaboration with Engels. In *The Holy Family*, Based on humanistic materialism, Marx opposed Powell's equating people as self-consciousness and the objectification of people as the externalisation of self-consciousness. Marx argued that Powell, after denying that Hegelian philosophy established a transcendent, independent absolute spirit outside of man, gives self-consciousness a transcendental creative power, turning it into a metaphysical monster, such that self-consciousness was nothing more than a synonym for absolute spirit. Marx pointedly states in *The Holy Family*: 'Herr Bauer, who in all domains carries through his opposition to Substance, his philosophy of self-consciousness or of the Spirit, must therefore in all domains have only the figments of his own brain to deal with.' [4] At this time, Marx had fully realised that self-consciousness could only point to thinking itself, and Powell had given was only the power of mind or spirit. With the help of Feuerbach's perceptual philosophy, Marx realised the improvement of the philosophy of self-consciousness and moved further towards social reality.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that the concept of perceptual consciousness is already mentioned in the *Economics and Philosophy Manuscripts of 1844*: All history is the preparation for 'man' to become the object of sperceptual consciousness, and for the needs of 'man as man' to become [natural, sensuous] needs. [4] Influenced by Feuerbach, here Marx still attributed perceptual consciousness to the highest essence of 'man as man'. At the same time, in another part of the *Economics and Philosophy Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx bluntly refered to perceptual consciousness as language: 'The element of thought itself—the element of thought's living expression—language—is of a sensuous nature.' [4] In other words, perceptual consciousness is the original expression of the origin of human thought and is preserved in language. Moreover, Marx made a crude distinction between perceptual consciousness and abstract pure consciousness: Perceptual consciousness is not abstract perceptual consciousness, but human perceptual consciousness [4]. In summary, Marx in this period started from conforming to the highest essence of human beings, but simply stated the perceptual consciousness as the original thought, distinguished from the pure consciousness, and did not further elaborate the sperceptual consciousness as the emotional communication between people. The new situation has not yet fully unfolded, and Marx's concept of perceptual consciousness has not yet been liberated from Feuerbach's shadow.

3. Reduction from perceptual objects to perceptual practices

If we say that the reduction from self-consciousness to perceptual object has the dual value of ending rationalism and opening up perceptual philosophy, then the reduction from perceptual object to perceptual practice is an extremely modern step towards history itself. The second step of the restoration of Marx's philosophical thought is the ontological revolution of Marx's philosophy, which realizes the transformation from general materialism to practical materialism, and confirms the archstone of his existentialism - perceptual consciousness. This ideological change took place mainly in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, completed in *The German Ideology*, i.e., from 1845 to 1846. In the autumn of 1844, after Marx had completed the *Economics and Philosophy Manuscripts of 1844*, there was also a highly resonant scholarly event in German philosophy, and that was the emergence of Max Stirner's *The Ego and His Own*. In the landmark document of the birth of historical materialism, *The German Ideology*, Marx even exhausted his efforts in examining and criticising Max Stirner's *The Ego and His Own* in great detail, occupying almost seven-tenths of the entire book *The German Ideology*, and the Chinese version is more than 400 pages long, even more tedious and lengthy than the original text of *The Ego and His Own*, This shows that Marx attaches great importance to the targeting status of Max Stirner's theory.

3.1. The development of perceptual consciousness: Max Stirner's promotion of Marx's thought

In *The Ego and His Own*, Max Stirner's fierce criticism of 'man', the core of Feuerbach's philosophy of humanism, played an active and important role in pushing Marx away from Feuerbach's philosophy of humanism towards historical materialism. For Max Stirner, Feuerbach's concept of 'man' was even more frightening than the abstract subject of previous speculative philosophy, and by bringing the concept of 'man' back to earth from heaven, Feuerbach made the essence of metaphysics even more hidden: 'Consequently, by the transformation of the predicate into the subject, the Christian essence (and it is the predicate that contains the essence, you know) would only be fixed yet more oppressively. God and the divine would entwine themselves all the more inextricably with me.'[6] Likewise, Max Stirner criticised by name Marx's suspension of the value of 'real species-being' in the period of *The German-French Annals*, and judged Marx to be a follower of a 'genus philosophy'. Max Stirner further pointed out that in all past philosophies, there was no concept consistent with 'real individuals'. The 'man' of Christianity is the 'man' of the false superman, the 'man' of liberalism is only the concept of 'non-human', and Feuerbach's 'man' is the 'man of divinity'. In particular, Max Stirner testified that in Feuerbach, people have just stripped their religious cloak and put on a new one; that the 'highest essence' preached by Feuerbach, which, in the name of revolutionary holiness, maimed human dynamism in even greater extremes, was nothing more than the 'ghost of the possessed'. In short, Max Stirner radically denounces that what Feuerbach accomplished was nothing more than an abstract transformation, that the liberation he supposedly gave us was purely theological, and that man is still bound and enslaved by the conceptual categories he created even more radically and covertly.

Max Stirner believed that the 'I' was the unique one, that the 'I' was the full possessor of my possessions, my rights, my self-pleasure; he preached the individual against the community, the singular against the universal, the individual interest against the universal ... Suffice it to say, Max Stirner was due to the same level of 'non- ... ' or 'anti- ... ' in the simple opposite manner. It made him ferry out ideas, and in turn confirmed each other's solidified forms in extreme opposition, falling into the same metaphysical cliches. Divorced from reality and focused on the purely spiritual realm, Max Stirner's thoroughly egoistic the unique one was doomed to failure from the outset, and he even fell into the metaphysical framework more quickly and thoroughly than Feuerbach. In *The German Ideology*, Marx analyzed and criticised the tricks of Max Stirner's phantom phenomenology from the perspective of historical phenomenology, and argued that Max Stirner did not understand the fact that real people create new history under certain historical conditions. Like Powell and Feuerbach, Max Stirner fell into the cliches of metaphysics, thinking in the kingdom of pure spirit. Max Stirner's *The Ego and His Own* is like a shooting star across the sky, and it stops abruptly after a moment of prominence and is lost in the night sky.

But insofar as Max Stirner sought to reveal Feuerbach's more insidiously deformed 'man', Max Stirner's efforts were both laudable and profound, and the critique forced Marx to revise his view of Feuerbach, for the first time launching a principled complaint against him. A few months later in the *Theses on Feuerbach* , Marx fully implemented his harsh criticism of Feuerbach. Max Stirner's effect on Marx's freedom from the influence of Feuerbach's thought in the following ways: firstly, that Marx at the time of *Economics and Philosophy Manuscripts of 1844* was (and is openly considered to be) a disciple of Feuerbach, and that in *The Holy Family*, which was completed at almost the same time as *The Ego and His Own*, Marx moved away from speculative philosophy to materialistic philosophy, clearly lagging behind Max Stirner; secondly, the genus-essence and the idealised labor suspended over alienated labor in Marx's *Economics and Philosophy Manuscripts of 1844* are somewhat in the shadow of Feuerbach; again, Max Stirner's book had a pivotal influence on the critique of Feuerbach in the German intellectual circles of the time, where 'Feuerbach' was rife; finally, *The German Ideology* was written against the background of this polemic, and most of the book was devoted to the liquidation of Feuerbach and Max Stirner. There was no doubt that *The Ego and His Own* laid an important theoretical foundation for Marx's creation of perceptual consciousness,

and even in Marx's original text, there were many famous descriptions that mimic and appropriate Max Stirner. For example, Max Stirner talked about, 'When, for example, a branch of industry is ruined and thousands of labourers become breadless, people think reasonably enough to acknowledge that it is not the individual who must bear the blame, but that the evil lies in the situation. Let us change the situation then, but let us change it thoroughly, and so that its fortuity becomes powerless!'[6] Was there not a similarity between this and the 'change the world' proposed in the eleventh article of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*? Or, speaking of centuries past when mankind struggled bitterly and painfully in the Kingdom of Heaven, Max Stirner yelled that earthly activities were condescendingly surveyed and scorned![6] In the German theoretical circles, where everyone had become a Feuerbachian, Max Stirner was not only the first person to stand up against Feuerbach, but he had also realised the importance of 'earthly activity'. Was this not a precursor of Marx's 'perceptual activity'? A few short months later, Marx launched an existential revolution centered on perceptual activity.

For Max Stirner, who defined man as the unique one, Feuerbach's reversal was simply a substitution of categories, replacing the category of god with the category of 'man', and the category of 'consciousness' with the category of 'perception'. Max Stirner's unique ego thought can be said to have been critically accepted by Marx. In *The German Ideology*, Marx replaced the basis and starting point of his philosophy from the idealistic labor in *Economics and Philosophy Manuscripts of 1844* with social production under certain historical conditions, from the 'species-being' with the 'real individual', and severely criticised self-consciousness and the isolated abstract man on the basis of the 'real individual'. All in all, Max Stirner's powerful critique made Feuerbach's false revolution completely visible, and played a non-negligible catalytic role in Marx's eventual critique and transcendence of Feuerbach's humanistic philosophy, and his eventual reduction to history itself and the full creation of perceptual consciousness.

3.2. The generation of perceptual consciousness: a comprehensive critique of the Young Hegelians by Marx

The young Hegelians started by opposing the theology in the Hegelian system. But replaced God with concepts such as 'substance', 'self-consciousness', 'species-being' and 'the unique one', reducing the history of the Christian religion to the history of human reason, still without leaving the philosophical base of metaphysics. The idealist view of history created by the Young Hegelians using a number of a priori theories and concepts was far removed from history itself: Powell implements religious criticism and political criticism by restoring the freedom of self-consciousness, and his philosophy of self-consciousness is only the return of the subjectivity philosophy of modern conceptualism. Feuerbach's philosophy of being, based on an abstract, ideal 'species-being' was just another distortion of theology; Max Stirner's radical implementation of individual freedom to the uttermost, and the unique one descent into the essentialism of the absolute self. In the face of all the strange and irrelevant ideas and ravings of German philosophers about history, Marx said: 'It is well known that the Germans have never done this, and they have never, therefore, had an earthly basis for history and consequently never an historian.'[4] Marx's central task in *The German Ideology*, founded by the materialist view of history, was to criticise the metaphysicians, represented by the Young Hegelians, and Marx made clear his understanding of the nature of history: 'It shows that history does not end by being resolved into self-consciousness as spirit of the spirit, but that in it at each stage there is found a material result: a sum of productive forces.'[4] and it is 'the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding generations, and thus, on the one hand, continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity.'[4] This told us that, in Marx's view, history must be the history of real human beings, the perceptual activity of humans pursuing their own goals.

At the same time, in *The German Ideology*, there was already a historical phenomenological formulation of perceptual consciousness: 'Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally

as well; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men.'[4] The 'consciousness' Marx said here were perceptual consciousness. Marx equated perceptual consciousness with language, and language was not a set of established, abstract, logical words, language was the perceptual communication and perceptual activity between people. An animal would had no language, because it can only feel its individuality, it did not relate to anything, and there was no relationship at all.[4] However, man was in the midst of objective relations, and the relationship between people and others was not only self-contained, but also self-directed, thus giving rise to perceptual communications and perceptual consciousness. It can be seen that Marx at this time was based on perceptual communication and productive labor to understand human perceptual consciousness. And had gone beyond Feuerbach's mere perceptual intuition. In this way, Marx placed perceptual consciousness truly on the ground of reality, that's to say, truly toward history itself.

In short, Hegel's absolute spirit, Powell's self-consciousness, Feuerbach's perceptual intuition or Max Stirner's the unique one and so on, all used some transcendental rationality and ideas as human beings to enter history mark. This was also a persistent problem of traditional Western philosophy: the use of a priori principles and models to construct and understand history, the fact that man was not the creator of his own history and that his activities and creations were merely the result of the 'the scheme of reason'. The task of the philosopher was to use reason to obtain a priori principles of universal necessity about the external world of reality. They took the results of all the spiritual efforts of nature, society and human civilisation into the framework of rational metaphysics and endeavour to construct an all-embracing and logically rigorous rational metaphysical system about the external real world. This kind of philosophy, with its strong logic of thought, was completely detached from people's real life and took the rational capacity of the subject as the foundation, basis and supreme principle of the philosophical way of thinking. As Hegel, the grand master of rational metaphysics, said:Philosophy, as an idea about the world, did not appear until after reality had finished its process of formation and completed itself ... The owl of Minerva did not take off until dusk comes.[7] People's real life was placed in the innate laws of rational metaphysics, philosophy had lost its future orientation, and the future was nothing but an object of fear and hope. The perceptual consciousness that Marx referred to was the historical way of human existence, the perceptual power that led to the understanding of historical truth, which had no logical and theoretical presuppositions. Marx put an end to thinking, returning from the 'abstract individuals' to the 'real individuals', the essence of man was no longer defined through the previous metaphysical interpretation, and the existence of man was oriented to the infinite possibilities of the future. In short, Marx confronted young Hegelian thoughts such as Powell, Feuerbach, and Max Stirner, and experienced the inheritance, break and forging of thoughts. Constructing a historical phenomenology rooted in perceptual activity step by step towards history itself and opening a history of perceptual consciousness practice.

4. Towards history itself: the full unfolding of perceptual consciousness

When Marx restored history itself to perceptual practice and perceptual consciousness, the next step is to carry out the content of perceptual consciousness and perceptual activities in a comprehensive way. Just as when Heidegger returned to the roots of the theory of existence, the next step was to analyze the states of being here, that was the 'authenticity' and the 'Inauthenticity'. In *The German Ideology*, Marx said that 'Where speculation ends – in real life – there real, positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men.'[4] This was the same as Husserl's phenomenology of suspending judgment and facing the thing itself. By terminating the speculative philosophy, Marx returned to real life itself, to the perceptual activities and perceptual consciousness of man, which had direct reality. Thus, once the metaphysical mask of the philosophy of the conceptual subjectivity of pure speculation was removed, history was not a collection of dead facts grasped by the old materialism with its present, ready-made perceptual intuitions, nor was it the imaginative activity of imaginary subjects, as the idealists believed , but it is a dynamic history of emotional consciousness practice. In this way, we get to impute to history, as

phenomenology demands, the spiritual effort of phenomenology towards the thing itself , that was, towards history itself.

With regard to perceptual consciousness, there was a passage in *The German Ideology* that made it clear: 'The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life.'[4] The perceptual consciousness expressed in this concise and straightforward exposition had already bid farewell to Feuerbach's perceptual intuitive materialism. It is the vivid expression of the perceptual activity of the 'real individual', which was always outside, not in the mind. Marx's concept of perceptual consciousness and 'real individual' and perceptual activity must be inseparable, it presents the following three aspects of the basic connotation and characteristics.

4.1. Perceptual consciousness penetrates the inner nature of consciousness and removes the fog of historical concepts

Once the path of epistemology was opened, it fundamentally dominated the entire traditional Western philosophy, and finally reached its own glorious peak in modern philosophy, especially Hegelian philosophy. The epistemology path led to a philosophy that 'interpreted the world' is only about existing existence, but not towards human history and a real relation to existence. The ultimate task of modern speculative philosophy is to pursue the question of the truth of category-theoretic knowledge, that is, the question of the legitimacy and certainty of the knowledge of human experience of the external real world. For modern philosophy, the essence of truth is metaphysical and truth can only exist in the objective form of thinking. However, the path of modern speculative philosophy is the dual division of mind and matter, subject and object, consciousness and object, under which speculative philosophy faces the most serious problems in seeking truth, as Husserl says: 'How can consciousness reach out beyond itself and "make contact" with an object wholly external to it ? How can knowledge be sure that it corresponds to things as they exist in themselves, that it "makes contact" with them? ' [8] In other words, it is understandable that the subject would want to know itself, but how to transcend the free world beyond 'making contact' itself? Once the absurdity of the 'transcendental' is exposed, the speculative philosophy can only end in dogmatism and skepticism, so that the history of abstract thought is nothing more than the imaginative activity of the subject. At the impoverishment of the old philosophy of the intellectual path, Marx's philosophy creates a rational and scientific consciousness--perceptual consciousness, that is, perceptual, external, and practical consciousness. As Marx said in *The German Ideology*: 'Consciousness [das Bewuβtsein] can at all times only be conscious existence [das Bewuβte Sein], and people's existence is the process of their real life.'[4] That is to say, the reason why we are able to 'transcend' the so-called 'objects' outside of consciousness is because these 'objects' are not self-existent objects that are external to human beings. Rather, it is originally constructed in the field of practice of man. Likewise, the origin of 'consciousness' is also practical and perceptual. At this point, the truth is no longer as an epistemological category in accordance with the authenticity of people's experience and common sense, but in the sense of existentialism, it is related to the existence of human beings, that is, the historical dispelling and revealing of human existence. Marx's work towards history itself, the creation of the concept of perceptual consciousness, is what makes truth possible. In fact, perceptual consciousness has penetrated the inner nature of the basic organisational consciousness of metaphysics, overcomes the dysentery of speculative philosophy 'transcendence', and removes the fog of abstract speculative philosophy and historical concepts.

4.2. Perceptual consciousness is rooted in perceptual activity and reveals the historical existence of man

Marx emphasised the significance of human perceptual activities to history and believed that history is the process of human self-generation. And that history is the process of generation by man through practice,that is, human creative activity. 'All social life is essentially practical.' [4] In this phrase, Marx makes it clear that what he means by practice is the perceptual activity of the whole of

human social life. Therefore, the perceptual activity mentioned by Marx is pre-logical, pre-conceptual, and pre-reflective, and cannot be simply added to the terms 'perception' and 'activity' in the perspective of modern philosophy. It is pre-logical, pre-conceptual, and pre-rational. Perceptual activity is the breakthrough of Marx's philosophical revolution, and it reveals the existential realm where man and nature are one and indivisible: through perceptual activity, man constantly creates and transforms nature. We can understand Marx better through Heidegger. Heidegger's 'Dasein' refers to the being who is to be in the world, who transcends itself at every moment and presents the value and meaning of its life in the process of development. Heidegger says: Dasein let the world happen, with the world to show a certain source of the scene ... The present Dasein is in itself part of all open beings.[9] Thus, the Dasein manifests itself in the face of the world's future possibilities and transcendence. Needless to say, Marx's perceptual activity and perceptual consciousness are of similar interest to Heidegger's Dasein. As Marx points out in the outline: all consciousness must be grounded in human perceptual activity. This is another proof of Marx's attitude towards the phenomenology of history itself. In Marx's context, perceptual activity does not mean that the isolated and insulated subject moves in the ready-made, objective material world, but that people have always been in the world. Man is both the 'playwright' and the 'play character' of history. Perceptual consciousness is the constant recognition of existence by human beings in perceptual communication and material production, which takes reality, generativity and transcendence as fundamental qualities and reveals the historical existence of human beings.

4.3. Perceptual consciousness starts from the 'real individual' and opens a history of perceptual consciousness practice

In *The German Ideology*, Marx states: Our point of departure is the person engaged in actual activity ... In the first method (meaning philosophy from heaven to earth--quoted)of approach the starting-point is consciousness taken as the living individua; in the second method, which conforms to real life, it is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as their consciousness.[4] Here, Marx outlines two starting points for understanding history: the 'abstract individual' and the 'real individual'. The former is the logical premise of self-consciousness, a priori self, absolute spirit and Feuerbach's genus in modern philosophy, while the latter is the starting point of Marx's philosophy of history. Marx's 'real individual' is neither Powell's abstract logical self-consciousness, nor Feuerbach's concept of 'man' with its immutable essence, nor Max Stirner's solitary, egoistical and detached the unique one. According to Marx, the 'real individuals' are the product of their own practical activities and the sum of their material conditions of life, and it is in the meaning of existentialism of 'real individual' that we can understand the material conditions of life as a historical world. As Marx put it: to understand the perceptual world as the entirety of living perceptual activities that constitute this world.[4] 'Real individuals' inherit and create history under certain material living conditions, and they are the sum of all social relations. Wherever 'relations' exist, that is, where the existence of perceptual consciousness and the history of the practice of perceptual consciousness begin.

5. Concluding remarks

It can be seen from the above that by understanding history in a rational and speculative way, history becomes a transcendental and mysterious existence. When the reality of history disappears, history ceases to be a process by which man creates his own, and falls into the dilemma of being lifeless. Needless to say, Powell could not change the existing things and achieve human emancipation through the emancipation of thought alone; Feuerbach's perceptual intuition could not correctly understand human history and the perceptual world; and Max Stirner's the unique one could not help change social reality. The perceptual activities and perceptual consciousness of real people are the sensibility in the original sense. Only by returning to the reality of human life can we completely eradicate the persistent problem of the detachment of speculative philosophy from the

reality of life, break away from the shackles of traditional metaphysics, and find the realistic way to the historical clarity. In *The German Ideology*, Marx, in his critique of the speculative philosophy, suggests that 'conceiving things as they really are and as they happen, every profound philosophical problem is resolved, as will be seen even more clearly later, quite simply into an empirical fact'.[4] That is to say, Marx rejected all speculative philosophy's method system and conceptual framework with phenomenological attitude, traced back to the source, cleared the original, completed the backtracking of the original meaning of history, and thus liberated philosophy from the path of traditional epistemology.

It is well known that Husserl is the founder of phenomenology, and that his slogan 'towards the thing itself' has been adopted by almost all schools of phenomenology. However, by grasping the real living world through a priori projection, Husserl deviates from his own statement that phenomenology: Must exclude all hypotheses of transcendence; thus, he once again falls into a priori abstract thinking, without really touching the essence of real life. As Heidegger questioned: what kind of actuality itself we are moving towards, Husserl does not address. But when it comes to Marx, Heidegger speaks highly of Marx: 'Because Marx by experiencing estrangement attains an essential dimension of history, the marxist view of history is superior to that of other historical accounts. But since neither Husserl nor--so far as I have seen till now--Sartre recognises the essential importance of the historical in Being, neither phenomenology nor existentialism enters that dimension within which a productive dialogue with Marxism first becomes possible.'[10] Here, Heidegger refers to the 'essential dimension of history' as the real life process in which people themselves are involved, self-generated and historically practiced, which is the same as Marx's concept of perceptual practice.

Acknowledgments

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