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# Critique of Feuerbach's Philosophical & Theological Concepts of God & Man

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CRITIQUE OF FEUERBACH'S PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL  
CONCEPTS OF GOD AND MAN

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty  
of the Department of Philosophy and Religion  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Humanities

by  
David M. Draper

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CRITIQUE OF FEUERBACH'S PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL  
CONCEPTS OF GOD AND MAN

Recommended April 26, 1977  
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CRITIQUE OF FEUERBACH'S PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL  
CONCEPTS OF GOD AND MAN

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May 1977

122 pages

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In the critique of Ludwig Feuerbach's identification of the nature of man and of the nature of God, it is seen that his ideas stem from some aspects of Hegelian philosophy. Feuerbach's thought revolves around his conception of man. He believed, after much study, that he perceived in Hegelian philosophy a portrait of man that was veiled by Hegel's mystical concept of Absolute Mind. If, Feuerbach thought, one could strip away the idealistic tendencies of Hegelianism, then one would be left with a true picture of man. He reversed Hegelian thought and re-postulated man in his "Towards a Critique of Hegelian Philosophy." He concluded that man was a being that possessed the qualities of Reason, Will, and Affection.

Although Feuerbach believed that Hegelianism was a serious cause of man's alienation from himself and other men, he felt even more strongly that Christianity was the most prominent cause of this alienation. Therefore, he proceeded to criticize Christianity. In 1842 he published his greatest work, The Essence of Christianity. In that work Feuerbach attempted to illustrate the essence of the Christian religion. He sought to save those parts of religion that he

considered to be true. These parts were the human qualities--Reason, Will, and Affection--which men had predicated to God. He also tried to demonstrate that if man considered the predicates of God and of man as separated, he would become entangled in contradiction. Feuerbach concluded that God was a man-made projection of the essence of the human species.

Feuerbach made his claims because he misunderstood the nature of man. If one seriously studies twentieth century man, one is forced to deny Feuerbach his presuppositions. Once Feuerbach's view of man is shown to be false, his conception of the existence of God and of man as the same being is also invalidated.



## INTRODUCTION

Ludwig Feuerbach was a nineteenth century German philosopher educated in Berlin under the celebrated philosopher Hegel. For a brief period in the 1840s he was on the center stage of German philosophy. This study is an attempt to take a close look at the philosophical work of Feuerbach and to evaluate it's strengths and weaknesses.

Why even bother with Ludwig Feuerbach? Why be concerned with his place in the history of philosophy? His influence on Karl Marx surely is one reason, but there is more to the substance of Feuerbach's work than just his influence on Marx and the other young revolutionaries of the mid-nineteenth century. He can also be studied in connection with the rise of existentialism in Germany as well as with the development of the field of the psychology of religion.<sup>1</sup> Feuerbach's importance, moreover, is not limited to his historical contribution. One can see a remnant of Feuerbach's concept of man in the social humanists and existential

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<sup>1</sup>Sidney Hook, From Hegel to Marx: Studies in the Intellectual Development of Karl Marx (New York: The Humanities Press, 1950; reprint ed., 1958), p. 221.

Marxists of today's bourgeoisie revolutionaries.<sup>2</sup> One can see Feuerbach's 'man' in the "Humanist Manifesto II," which was authored by Paul Kurtz and was signed by over one hundred scientists, philosophers, and religious leaders.<sup>3</sup> However, before one can look at Feuerbach's influence on Marxism, existentialism, psychology of religion or today's bourgeoisie revolutionaries, I believe one must look at Feuerbach himself. It is only fair to Feuerbach for one to make an effort to evaluate him on what he was attempting to do, and on what he succeeded in doing to the philosophy of his time.

Feuerbach spent most of his adult life attempting to return man to man. Hegelian philosophy, according to Feuerbach, alienated man from himself. The same was also true, he believed, of Christian religion and theology. Feuerbach attempted to eliminate all doctrines and ideologies that sought, consciously or unconsciously, to divinize or diabolize natural or human things.<sup>4</sup> He attempted to eliminate these doctrines and ideologies, not by building a positive system of philosophy, but rather, negatively by trying to enlighten mankind to the mistake it

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<sup>2</sup>Eugene Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), p. 151.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Kurtz, ed., "Humanist Manifesto II," The Humanist 33:5 (September/October 1973): 4-8.

<sup>4</sup>William B. Chamberlain, Heaven Wasn't His Destination: The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1941), p. 24.



had made in understanding what its real essence was.

In order to understand Feuerbach one must realize what was taking place in the discipline of philosophy prior to his own writings. As Feuerbach himself believed, philosophical systems and thought were products of their times. Philosophies grew out of an already existing thought level.<sup>5</sup> The period which immediately preceded Feuerbach can be viewed from two different perspectives: the religious and philosophical ideas of the late eighteenth century, and the religious and philosophical thought of the first two decades of the nineteenth century. All that is possible at this point is a brief and somewhat simplified overlook, but such an assessment will nevertheless prove helpful.

Although it was in the sixteenth century that Copernicus made his proclamation that the planets revolved around the sun, it was not until the eighteenth century that man realized the full extent of what this concept meant in regard to man's view of himself. Man began to realize that he was not the center of the universe, but rather a small part of an extremely large whole. How did eighteenth century man react to and deal with the implications of the Copernican revolution? According to Karl Barth, man overcame the initial humiliation of his situation

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<sup>5</sup>Ludwig Feuerbach, The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach, trans. and introduction by Zawar Hanfi (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1972), p. 59.

by making himself, in a completely different way, the center of the universe once again. Because man was capable of discovering that the earth revolved around the sun and not the sun around the earth, he felt that this insight entitled him to consider himself the intellectual center of the universe. He replaced the geocentric picture he had of the world with an anthropocentric view of the world. This viewpoint led to the rise of modern science, the era of mechanical invention, and the exploration of the earth. It also led to the creation of such philosophical systems as rationalism, empiricism, and scepticism.<sup>6</sup>

Eighteenth century man approached his life and world with belief in the omnipotence of his own rational capabilities. He also approached Christianity in the same way. He felt as if he were getting closer to the essence of Christianity when he treated it as a statement on the omnipotence of human beings' own capacities.<sup>7</sup> The late eighteenth century man would not adhere to atheism, but he felt that the universal power of man reflected the universal power of God. In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century there was, especially in Germany, a move toward Prometheanism, that is, equating man with God, or at least making man as significant as God.

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<sup>6</sup>Karl Barth, Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1972), p. 38.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 83.



This movement developed from eighteenth century man's view of the essence of Christianity as reflecting his own omnipotence. Although this movement was incomplete, the young German philosophers of the early nineteenth century recognized it in Goethe and Kant.<sup>8</sup> Goethe's character Faust represented this move toward humanism when he discovered, before he died, that he was only satisfied if he were at the service of mankind.<sup>9</sup> Goethe also perceived and, through his studies and writings, promoted the idea that man should move away from a Christianity of word and faith, and move toward a Christianity of works and deeds that would be beneficial to mankind.<sup>10</sup> Kant suggested this Prometheanism when he made the claim that the knower must impose something onto percepts or experiences before there was knowledge. Kant also took this stand in his Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, where practical religion depended upon--in fact, was founded by--reason. Reason dictated the boundaries of mankind, i.e., moral laws, and God was only necessary for granting rewards to those who had acted morally.

As eighteenth century man humanized his approach to Christian theology he incorporated a similar approach

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<sup>8</sup>Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup>Karl Löwith, From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought, trans. by David E. Green (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 20.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.



toward the state, morality, science and philosophy.<sup>11</sup> The social, political, moral, and scientific man became important to the eighteenth century intellectual population. This can be seen in Kant's approach to reason in The Critique of Pure Reason, where a scientific use of reason was the only valid use of reason for gaining knowledge, and in his Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, where the moral laws were far more important than Biblical stories or the Scriptures.

Turning to philosophical developments in the early nineteenth century, one finds that the idealism of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel developed from two different needs. First, there was the direct challenge of the French revolution to restructure the state and society so that it would have a rational base.<sup>12</sup> Second, an attempt was made to eliminate the dualism between phenomena and noumena basic to Kant's philosophy.<sup>13</sup> It is the latter viewpoint which is of interest to us here. Fichte accepted Kantian philosophy as the true philosophy and tried to give it scientific objectivity. In order to achieve this purpose he had to eliminate Kant's dichotomy between the phenomena and the noumena. He accomplished his goal by deriving the

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<sup>11</sup>Barth, Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century, p. 85.

<sup>12</sup>Herbert Marcuse, Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory, 2nd ed., supp. (New York: Humanities Press, 1963), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, p. 7.

phenomena and noumena from the same concept, i.e., mind.<sup>14</sup>  
 In Kant's philosophy the mind presented the phenomenal world by organizing the percepts. The knower could never know the percepts, as such, but only as the mind organized them and then presented them. What Fichte did was make the individual mind, to which Kant referred, into the universal mind. Fichte's dialectic can be seen as follows:

The mind [universal mind] is first unconsciously active; it then finds that in this unconscious spontaneous activity it is limited by the laws of its being; it thus comes to objectify and project these limitations and call them an external world....Only after the mind had posited such an external world could it come to the consciousness of itself as a mind, since it could only recognize its qualities by first contrasting itself with something it takes to be non-mind....Therefore, but only slowly, the mind comes to recognize that the experiences it has must be read as its, that the mind alone is the sphere of its operations, that it is at once subject and object, the sole and absolute starting point and the ultimate content of all knowledge which can claim to be scientific....<sup>15</sup>

The dialectic's true base had to be, however, logical. It had to be a principle that contained its truth in itself without any outside help. Since Fichte wanted to derive the phenomena and noumena from the same concept he had to look for this logically true principle. Therefore he began his philosophy with the proposition of identity, i.e.,  $x=x$  when  $x$  represented the same thing in both cases. However, it was important to know whether or not  $x$  actually existed. What could one be sure existed, asked Fichte? Ego! Mind.

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<sup>14</sup>Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, p. 73.

<sup>15</sup>Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, p. 8.



Therefore Fichte based his philosophy on "Ego=Ego."<sup>16</sup> Out of this principle of identity, Ego=Ego, Fichte developed two related ideas: one, the principle of negative, i.e., non-Ego is not equal to Ego or more generally non-x is not equal to x; and two, the principle of limitation. The principle of limitation was a deduction from his previous principles. It said that x is limited by non-x, and non-x is limited by x.<sup>17</sup> Fichte's three principles could be seen as corresponding to Kant's three types of judgements: affirmation, negation, and limitation. There was also a close connection between them and Hegel's idea of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.<sup>18</sup>

The importance of Fichte's dialectic to this study is that Hegel developed it in the Phenomenology of Mind. Moreover, it was this part of Hegel's philosophy that he borrowed from Fichte, and Feuerbach saw so clearly and criticized so much. Feuerbach felt that Fichte and Hegel tried to solve merely verbally the problems that Kant tackled with full force. With this frame of mind Feuerbach could see Fichte and Hegel's attempts only as self-destructive.<sup>19</sup> Hegel's move from pure Being to the Absolute had to fail, from Feuerbach's point of view, for Hegel accepted the Absolute as true before he posited pure Being. This

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.      <sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 8-9.      <sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

presupposition rendered his philosophy a circular system.

Feuerbach's foremost interest was the welfare of mankind. He saw speculative philosophy, with its two major currents being Hegelian philosophy and Christianity, as that which kept man alienated from himself. Thus, in chapter one I shall discuss Feuerbach's "Towards a Critique of Hegelian Philosophy," as well as Feuerbach's criticism of speculative philosophy in general. I shall begin here for Feuerbach's discussion of Hegel's philosophy is fundamental to his critique of Christian religion and theology.

Chapter two and three will be devoted to Feuerbach's criticism of Christian religion and theology, as well as of religion in general. It came out of his criticism of Hegel and of speculative philosophy. Feuerbach saw Hegelian philosophy as the highest form of philosophy and Christian religion as the highest form of religion. When he talked about speculative philosophy and religion in general he seemed to apply the specific criticisms he had already made concerning Hegelianism and Christianity. By moving from the particular to the general in these chapters, I hope to capture some of Feuerbach's own movement. Later chapters will be devoted to putting forth critiques of Feuerbach's views concerning man, religion, and philosophy.

Feuerbach's view of man is basic to all of his philosophical writings. To eliminate all the illusions and falsehoods in speculative philosophy, whether Hegelian thought or Christian theology, would, he felt, be a great

service to mankind. It would return the thoughts of man to man. Man would once again become conscious of himself as a full and complete human being. This ideal was the goal he sought.



## CHAPTER I

### CRITIQUE OF HEGELIAN PHILOSOPHY

Feuerbach was, in his early intellectual career, a disciple of Hegel. However, as early as 1828, when he submitted his dissertation, one could see the beginning of a break with Hegelian thought. Although Feuerbach wrote his dissertation in Hegelian terms, he began to stress in that work his thoughts about sensuousness. He felt that ideas should not be considered above or separated from that which was sensuous in nature. When these ideas were separated from the sensuous, they were placed in the realm of the universal and therefore sense perception would not participate in them. If one returned to the sensuous one would then see ideas as a definite part of the phenomena.<sup>1</sup> As Feuerbach understood sense perception, it could not be left out of the knowledge gaining process. Treating sense perception as he did also meant that Feuerbach recognized the phenomenon as real being.

According to Hegel the universal reached the status of Being through the particulars.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lowith, Hegel to Nietzsche, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup>Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy, vol. 1: Greece and Rome; vol. 2: Mediaeval Philosophy,

Thus, the particulars were below the universal and were considered only in the process in which the universal reached Being. The particulars were not independent of the universal and thus had no reality of their own. As one can see, Hegel was primarily concerned with the universal while Feuerbach was primarily concerned with the concrete. Here one can perceive a definite break between the two thinkers.

Key questions that Feuerbach asked about Hegelian philosophy were reflected in his writings entitled "Philosophical Fragments." He expressed his doubt as to whether or not Hegel's move from ideas to nature was legitimate.<sup>3</sup> The major objection that Feuerbach communicated in his "Philosophical Fragments" was simply this: "A philosophy that begins with mind, spirit, thought and treats only these as real, or necessary, or self-evident, can never get to Nature, to the non-mental, non-spiritual, to that which is experienced and not experiencing."<sup>4</sup> Basic elements of this critique can be seen in Feuerbach's differences with Hegel over the place of sense perception in philosophical knowledge. Also this critique continues

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Augustine to Scotus; vol. 3: Ockham to Suarez; vol. 4: Descartes to Leibniz; vol. 5: Hobbes to Hume; vol. 6: Wolff to Kant; vol. 7: Fichte to Nietzsche; vol. 8: Bentham to Russell; 8 vols. (London: Burns and Oates Limited, 1965; also in paperback edition, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc. 1962), 7:197.

<sup>3</sup>Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



to prove important in Feuerbach's later works, particularly "Towards a Critique of Hegelian Philosophy."

Hegelian philosophy, like all idealism, came under heavy fire from other areas of philosophy even while Hegel was still alive. Why did Hegel's philosophy become isolated and abandoned so rapidly? Germany of Hegel's time was ready to have some of its socio-economical problems solved. These were problems with which idealism could not deal, but problems that had potential materialistic solutions. Feuerbach, for one, perceived some of these solutions. He attacked Hegelian philosophy and by positing the negation of Hegelianism developed his own philosophy.<sup>5</sup> Feuerbach, in his work and studies, inverted Hegelian philosophy by claiming that the idealist's move from the abstract to the concrete, from the ideal to the real, was the opposite of what was really the case. The only path to the true objective reality was to start with what was real, i.e., sensuous nature.<sup>6</sup> Feuerbach was sure that the truth of man would be revealed if Hegelian philosophy were inverted.

Feuerbach recognized the problem in Hegelian philosophy but he had to demonstrate it. He began his criticism of Hegelianism by asking and then answering two interrelated questions. First, was the starting place in Hegel's Logic

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<sup>5</sup>Marcuse, Reason and Revolution, p. 268.

<sup>6</sup>Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, p. 161.

the correct starting place for philosophy? In other words, did Hegel start with the proper thesis and antithesis? Second, was it true, as Hegelians claimed, that Hegelian philosophy had no presuppositions?<sup>7</sup> If he could answer these questions, and show that Hegel was wrong, then he would be in a position to produce his own philosophy out of his Hegelian critique. His philosophy would stand to Hegel's thought in the same relation as the antithesis stands to the thesis.

I shall begin with the second question first. Hegel, according to Feuerbach, had two major presuppositions at work. First the starting point for his philosophical system was determined by Fichte's idealism. Hegel's Logic was set up in much the same way as Fichte's Theory of Science. Hegel was interested in developing a formal system, i.e., a system that would return to itself. He felt that the beginning had to be present in the end, and that the end had to be present in the beginning. His philosophy was a circular philosophy.<sup>8</sup> Because of this movement, Hegel's philosophy became self-determining and self-presenting thought. As the Absolute proceeded through history it became aware of itself. It gained knowledge of itself. Hegel saw his philosophy as encompassing all of the history of philosophy, history of art, and history of religion. In other words, Hegel saw his philosophy as the end point and

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 59.      <sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 60-61.



his Absolute as the Absolute that knew itself completely. What Hegel did not realize but Feuerbach did, however, was that as long as the Absolute became aware of itself, the entire philosophy of the Absolute became a system that could potentially be true only within itself. The propositions within it could all logically follow one another, but it was possible that they did not explain reality as well as Hegel thought they did.

Let one consider, for example, that there is a computer program A, and that any problem that is presented to A from within A, can be solved by A. Let one also consider that there is a computer program B. If a problem is presented in terms of B and put into A to solve, A will not be able to solve it. Now let this analogy be carried over into the discussion. Any problem that arises within a formal system, that system can deal with and solve, but if a problem is put into that system from outside of it, from sensuous nature, for example, then the formal system cannot deal with it. Feuerbach perceived Hegelianism as such a formal system. Within itself it was coherent, but once outside its boundaries it proved inadequate.

The second presupposition Feuerbach believed he recognized was a direct result of Hegel's system. This presupposition was Hegel's end point, the Absolute Idea. Hegel's proof of the Absolute, his Logic, was a formal proof according to Feuerbach. Hegel began his Logic with pure Being, but even before he began he already considered



the Absolute Idea to be true. Therefore, he was forced by necessity to prove that the Absolute was true. The proof was a formal one because the Idea did not create or prove itself through sense perceptions of the intellect, i.e., touch, hearing, sight, etc., but it proved itself by working backwards and pretending to deduce itself from pure Being.<sup>9</sup> In other words, Hegel thought the Absolute, but said pure Being. Then he moved from pure Being, via his thesis-antithesis dialectic, to the Absolute. His real movement could be seen, however, as follows: Absolute--pure Being--Absolute. The Absolute with the underline represents his underlying presupposition. Due to this circular motion Hegelian philosophy's purported proof of the Absolute was in reality an indefensible break with sense perception.

Feuerbach was not the only one who realized that Hegel's method of proving the Absolute, his dialectic, had many problems. Goethe recognized this problem and felt uneasy when the dialectic was being used. He warned that the dialectic could be used to turn falsehoods into apparent truths.<sup>10</sup> Since Hegel's dialectic could be used to prove falsehoods, it was possible that Hegel had committed that very error, thought Feuerbach, and had proved a false Absolute.

It is now possible to return to the first question. Was Hegel's starting place the correct starting place for

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 74-76.

<sup>10</sup>Löwith, Hegel to Nietzsche, p. 11.

philosophy? Hegel formally began his Logic with pure Being, which was an abstraction, and he was never able to do away with the abstract when he reached the Absolute. He was never able to proceed from the abstract to the concrete and therefore ended up with an infinite Absolute. Philosophy could not start, according to Feuerbach, with an infinite or a predicate of an infinite; that is, philosophy could not start with the Absolute or God or predicates of these. It needed to begin with finite real being. If one said that something had a quality, or if one attempted to define a quality, one had to be able, asserted Feuerbach, to point to something real so that one could see and understand the quality that was being defined.<sup>11</sup> For example, if one said that there was a quality of 'hardness', one would have to be able to attribute the same quality to all things that were categorized under the title of 'hardness'. One would have to be able to point out to oneself just what that something was that was common to all the objects one categorized. The same could be said of quantity also. If one, such as Hegel, began philosophy with the Absolute, then all categories that were used to describe the world were chosen arbitrarily. The only way to escape this dilemma would be to begin philosophy with no presuppositions, for then one would only attribute to the world what actually did belong to the world. However, one would recognize one's assumptions only if he were to begin

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<sup>11</sup> Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, p. 160.



philosophy with its own antithesis, for then he would become critical of his own starting place and be able to eliminate any presuppositions that might have been present. If philosophy would begin with its own antithesis, it would not be left in the realm of subjectivity, i. e., under the ego's control.<sup>12</sup> It would be able to step out of the mist of abstraction and set itself down on concrete ground.

Most modern philosophers were guilty of not criticizing their own works, according to Feuerbach. Kant criticized the earlier metaphysicians, but he left his own critical philosophy alone. Fichte accepted Kant's philosophy as the truth. Schelling, likewise, accepted Fichte's philosophy and tried to elaborate on it. Hegel criticized Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, but left his own thought alone.<sup>13</sup> To approximate the right beginning these men should have started with the antithesis of their own philosophy, that which would be critical of their thought. In particular, the correct place to start, according to Feuerbach, was the antithesis of Hegel's philosophy.

Why did Feuerbach decide that the antithesis of Hegel's philosophy was the correct starting place? Why did he not choose the antithesis of Kant's philosophy or Fichte's thought? Feuerbach accepted Hegel's idea that the truth in philosophy depended upon the whole of the history of philosophy. He saw Hegel's philosophy as the highest

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 138.    <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 72.



form of speculative philosophy, and therefore realized that to advance the truth he had to begin with Hegel. If Hegel had started with his real antithesis, he would have been on the right path, and he would not have ended with idealism. He would have produced Feuerbach's type of materialism. To have a correct philosophy, beginning with his thesis, Hegel would have had to demonstrate that his pure Being was not an abstract being. However, he could not lose the abstraction. Therefore, he left himself in the realm of subjectivity.<sup>14</sup>

Even if Hegel had begun with this antithesis, however, Feuerbach would have criticized him for Hegel proposed non-Being, not concrete being, as pure Being's antithesis. Why did Feuerbach perceive concrete being as the real antithesis of Hegel's philosophy instead of Hegel's antithesis, non-Being? The only native faculties for learning which any man had were his senses. These senses were a priori to all human beings and with them the human could distinguish himself from nature. By use of his senses, man would know that he was not a tree or some other object in nature. His senses told him that a tree stood independent of himself and that it excluded him from the space it occupied. The senses made man realize that the tree denied him the right to be a tree, and thus he realized that he was separated from it. This distinction, that the sense perceived, was necessary for

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

man so that he could recognize himself as a man, and as an individual man different from others. Thus, Feuerbach asserted, man had to first be able to recognize nature so that he could recognize himself.<sup>15</sup>

At this point in his argument, Feuerbach took a halfhearted detour in order to illustrate why Hegel's pure Being was not the correct starting place for philosophy. He suggested that philosophers, including Hegel, tried too hard to find a beginning, whether a particular place, thing or idea. Why even bother with this search, asked Feuerbach? Why not start with reason? To start with reason would be to start without any presupposition because reason could stand alone, without a beginning. To abstract from reason or to doubt reason had to be done by an act of reason. To say that reason had a presupposition, such as the negation of reason, was once again to assert that reason had no presuppositions. To eliminate any contradictions with his earlier statements about beginning with real being, Feuerbach said that real being referred the thinker directly to reason, because as one came into contact with a real being, one would attempt to look at it and categorize it through an act of reason.<sup>16</sup> Such a line of argument actually defeated Feuerbach's purpose. For if philosophy could start with such a general idea as reason, anywhere along the entire scale of reason, if reason were to

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<sup>15</sup> Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, p. 72.

<sup>16</sup> Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, pp. 59-60.



be looked at on a scale, then Hegel's beginning could be eventually traced to reason. In fact, any philosophy could eventually be traced to reason because everything would refer itself to reason in the same way that Feuerbach's real being had done. The beginning Feuerbach should have stressed was real being or nature. It was the concrete, in fact, that was the major emphasis in his argument. He stressed it because concrete being was that which was discovered by the senses.

However, Feuerbach may have had other reasons for choosing concrete being as his antithesis. Feuerbach may have been guilty, as he thought Hegel was, of assuming his conclusions to be true before he started. Feuerbach claimed that Hegel was guilty of basing his philosophy on a concept that he already accepted as true, namely the Absolute Idea. As one can see, Feuerbach began his philosophy with what he called real, concrete being and he justified his beginning by saying that it was discovered by what was a priori in man, i.e., senses. My question is this: was it possible that Feuerbach perceived some of the materialistic solutions to Germany's problems and based his philosophy on these solutions? If so, then it would seem that he presupposed his own ends before he began. This action was just what he accused Hegel of doing.

There is evidence from Feuerbach's own writings that this procedure might indeed have been the case. In a letter he sent to Hegel, along with his dissertation, he expressed



some of his ideas. He told Hegel that he felt that philosophy should get away from schools and return to man.<sup>17</sup> Philosophy should make an attempt to reach the common man so that the common man could learn from it to help himself. I am sure Hegel would have agreed with this program, but Feuerbach's implications were overwhelmingly pro-humanistic, i.e., his goal was that mankind should become a being that recognized that he, man, was really the object of all of his prayers and deeds that he reserved for God. Therefore, it would seem that Feuerbach created a philosophy to meet his own ends.

In Phenomenology of Mind, Hegel attacked the senses or sense-certainty. The question that Hegel was attempting to answer was simply whether or not the sense perceptions were as trustworthy as they first appeared to be. He said that there was a 'this', such as this house, this tree, etc., and that the 'this' could be divided into the 'here' and 'now' in the following manner. Take a proposition such as 'now it is raining'. One knows that this statement is true if one goes to the window, looks out and sees that it is raining. If it stops raining at a later time, then the proposition 'now it is raining' becomes false. The same can be said of the 'here'. 'Here is a tree', but later the 'here' is 'here is a house'. The 'here' and 'now' of sense-certainty

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<sup>17</sup>Nathan Rotenstreich, "Anthropology and Sensibility, Revue Internationale de Philosophie 26 (1972); 340.

or Adolphness" was real.<sup>20</sup>

Feuerbach also refuted Hegel by approaching the matter from a different angle. 'Here is a tree', but if the observer then turns around the tree is no longer the 'here' but 'here is a house'. Does the removal of the tree from the observer's visual field mean that the tree was not real, or that sense-certainty of the tree a few seconds earlier was false? If the observer backs up toward the tree, the house still being the 'here', he will bump into the tree. The tree asserts its own reality by excluding others from the same space that it occupies.<sup>21</sup> Although Hegel believed that he was refuting the sensuous consciousness by refuting the 'here' and 'now' he was really only refuting the 'here' and 'now' of a logical language.<sup>22</sup>

The only 'thisness' that Hegel experienced or explored was the universal. He avoided the particulars by looking at the universal within the consciousness. Thus he saw the universal 'thisness' within the consciousness, and not the particular tree, house, etc. However, according to Feuerbach, there could be no real tree in the consciousness if there were no real tree existing.<sup>23</sup> The real tree was necessary for reason to refer to or grasp, so that it could be entered into the consciousness as real. If a thing did not exist, or was not so that the senses could experience it, then it could only be entered into the consciousness as imagination. Such was Hegel's Absolute Idea.

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 77.      <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 78.      <sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, p. 75.



Hegel claimed that his Logic followed nature or was patterned after it, although according to Feuerbach, Hegelian philosophy was merely an imitation of nature and not a good one at that. At the end of Hegel's Logic one finds art, religion, philosophy, and the Absolute. If one were to consider religion, it would be seen as all that art encompassed plus a little more, and if one were to look at philosophy, it would be seen as all that religion encompassed, thus art, plus a little more. If one were to consider the Absolute, one would see that it encompassed all. As soon as religion was introduced, then art no longer existed as art *per se*, but became a part of religion. The same happened to religion as soon as philosophy was introduced. Everything that is, in Hegel's Logic, was merely a moment or process on the way to the Absolute.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, anything that was to be considered real had to be a moment in the life of the Absolute. Thus the Absolute was the totality of truth. This position, however, presented a problem to Hegel when he considered nature. He had to consider nature as real, but in doing so he forced a dualism on himself, a dualism that made nature and the Absolute both real and separate. To avoid this dichotomy Hegel accepted the rational structure found within nature as real, making it a moment in the life of the Absolute, and called that which was in nature but outside the rational structure unreal and

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<sup>24</sup> Copleston, A History of Philosophy: Fichte to Nietzsche, p. 200.



irrational.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, Hegel's Logic allowed only for subordination and succession but not coordination and co-existence. Nature, however, does allow for these. There is the possibility of independent existence in nature whereas everything in Hegel's system is interconnected. Since all is connected, it is possible that all could come to a head in a particular individual or messiah. Within nature, Feuerbach claimed, this total coherence in one man was impossible. Could, he asked, an entire species recognize itself in one individual of that species? No! Could, for example, all art be represented by one artist, or all philosophy by one philosopher? According to Hegel the answer would be yes, but according to nature it would have to be no. As Goethe said, "only all men taken together cognize nature, and only all men taken together live human nature."<sup>26</sup>

One could reduce Feuerbach's major criticism to the following: Hegel's dialectic did not prove or establish anything that it did not originally assume to be true, and Hegel could only maintain his idealism by distorting sense perception and the concept of sense-certainty.<sup>27</sup> Feuerbach also believed he had detected another minor criticism of Hegel's dialectic. Feuerbach did not feel that the dialectic could be adequately applied to nature. Hegel expressed his dialectic by comparing it to a fruit tree. He said that first

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, pp. 55-56.

<sup>27</sup>Hook, Hegel to Marx, p. 226.

there was the bud and then the flower appeared. When the flower appeared the bud disappeared, i.e., the flower negated the bud. Next came the fruit, and once again, when the fruit appeared the flower disappeared.<sup>28</sup> In this manner they were all interconnected and not independent of each other. If the bud never appeared, the flower would never appear and so on. However, let us consider the leaves. Regardless of how the bud was or the flower or fruit, the leaves would still exist. The leaves and other aspects of the tree were in this sense independent of each other.<sup>29</sup> Hegel's dialectic did not adequately explain nature and therefore had to be abandoned by Feuerbach. If Hegel had accepted the primacy of the senses, he would have copied and explained nature much more accurately. Because Hegel did not accept the senses, Feuerbach could only assert that Hegel's dialectic movement through nature and his attitude toward nature were wrong.

Feuerbach, on reaching this point, found himself in a strange position. He did not accept Hegel's Absolute Mind, but he also wanted to avoid being accused of holding a philosophy such as the one of Hume. He did not want to arrive at the same conclusion as Hume, namely that one could not know anything outside his own mind, and he had to explain why. He also wanted to avoid the accusation that if senses

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<sup>28</sup>Hegel, Phenomenology of Mind, p. 68.

<sup>29</sup>Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, p. 54.



were all that one had with which to know things, then one would basically be no different than animals. To avoid both of these problems, Feuerbach added a Kantian idea to his philosophy. He began with the senses and then said that our ego took part in experiencing the objects that were originally discovered with the senses.<sup>30</sup> Feuerbach was, unfortunately, vague about this position in his philosophy. He did not expand it or develop it so that one could readily understand what the ego actually did. It may be that Feuerbach found himself in a dilemma, but did not concern himself unduly because his main objective was to improve the lot of mankind. A problem, such as what is the role of the ego in the knowledge gaining process, was not as important to solve as the social problems he thought his philosophy would alleviate.

Since Hegel placed in his philosophy that which was primary as secondary, he ignored the senses and what was discovered through them. He obtained this result because he did not use the "genetico-critical" method of inquiry. In fact his philosophy rendered this method impossible. The "genetico-critical" method was the process of inquiry upon which Feuerbach concentrated and developed his philosophy. The "genetico-critical" method went back to the source and needs of an idea or concept, i.e., to its point of generation ("genetico"), and then considered it critically.<sup>31</sup> As one

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 140-141.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 86.



will see in the next chapter, this method played a very important part in Feuerbach's critique of theology.

Feuerbach cannot be accused of having a shallow understanding of Hegel. In 1834 Feuerbach answered Bachmann's Antihegel in terms that would cause one to believe that Hegel himself had written it.<sup>32</sup> Feuerbach did understand Hegel and realized what Hegel was doing. It may seem strange and rather inconsistent, therefore, that Feuerbach later used the same basic arguments against Hegel that he had originally attacked in Bachmann's work. This inconsistency was explained by Feuerbach as a maturation of his thought. Although his abandonment of Hegel's philosophy was a process of maturation for Feuerbach, one must wonder if his high social goals did not lead him into self-deception. His attack on Hegel might have been effective in undermining his former mentor, but it led him into many problems that he did not adequately try to resolve, chief of which was the ego's place in the knowledge gaining process.

From a discussion of Feuerbach's criticism of Hegel's speculative philosophy, we now turn to an analysis of his broader critique of all speculative philosophy. This discussion is of necessity brief, however, because of Feuerbach's own use of language. Feuerbach did not hesitate, in many of his writings, to interchangeably use the terms theology, speculative philosophy, and speculative theology.

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<sup>32</sup>Löwith, Hegel to Nietzsche, p. 73.

He felt that theology was the secret of speculative philosophy and that speculative philosophy was the secret of speculative theology.<sup>33</sup> Since speculative philosophy was used instead of theology and visa versa, much of what Feuerbach had to say about speculative philosophy is reserved for the next chapter. In this section on speculative philosophy there is an effort to show Feuerbach's transition from the criticism of Hegelianism to the criticism of Christian theology and religion.

If one were to disregard sense perception, one could choose three possible paths of explanation. First, one could possibly rationalize the universe and thus give the forces of nature a mode of reason; second, one might posit a dualism where public and objective truths of reason are held in the absence of understanding by the senses; and third, one might pass the sensuous world off as an illusion and talk of reason in terms of spirit.<sup>34</sup> When Feuerbach attacked Hegel, he knowingly attacked all European philosophy from Spinoza to Descartes.<sup>35</sup> In other words, in attacking Hegel he attacked all speculative philosophy. The underlying implication of his critique of Hegel was that, for Feuerbach, all of the speculative philosophies were merely different forms of rationalized theology, because the secret of speculative philosophy was theology and visa versa. Hegel's

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<sup>33</sup>Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, p. 153.

<sup>34</sup>Hook, Hegel to Marx, p. 232. <sup>35</sup>Ibid.



philosophy provided a clue for Feuerbach to the truth of all speculative philosophy and theology, thus Christianity.

To be more specific, Feuerbach felt that Hegel's philosophy was a rationalized form of Christianity. The Idea was a rational expression for the theological doctrine that nature and material being were all created by God.

In the preface to The Essence of Christianity, Feuerbach expressed briefly how his ideas stood in relation to those of the speculative philosophers. He said that his thought repudiated absolute, immaterial speculation, speculation that drew its objects and its materials from within itself. Since he required senses for thought, he subsequently generated the thought from the object and not the object from the thought as the speculative philosophers did.<sup>36</sup> As Feuerbach said himself of his philosophy in the preface mentioned above:

It does not, as I have already said elsewhere, regard the pen as the only fit organ for the revelation of truth, but the eye and ear, the hand and foot; it does not identify the idea of the fact with the fact itself, so as to reduce real existence to an existence on paper, but it separates the two, and precisely by this separation attains to the fact itself;....<sup>37</sup>

Feuerbach, therefore, accused the speculative philosophers of ignoring the senses and of mixing up the idea of the thing, with the thing itself. The speculative philosophers

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<sup>36</sup>Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. by George Eliot and with Introductory Essay by Karl Barth and a Forward by H. Richard Niebuhr (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), p. xxxiv.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. xxxv.



might have retorted that the fact as a thing did not exist but was generated from the Idea. As shown in the preceding section, Feuerbach would have countered that accusation by saying that the thing was real because, by denying others the right to occupy the same space it occupied, it asserted its own reality.

Feuerbach would say of speculative philosophies, and especially of Hegelianism, that because they were abstract philosophies they placed the "essence of nature outside of nature, the essence of man outside of man and the essence of thought outside thought."<sup>38</sup> In other words, they alienated man from himself.

Hegel had sought to bring man together through the mediating figure of "God-man." "God-man" represented the coming together of the spiritual and material elements of man. This reunion was necessary before all of man, as an individual, could be reunited with his essence in the form of spirit. Feuerbach rejected the "God-man" idea and felt that only if the speculative philosophies were negated would man be directly brought back together with his essence.<sup>39</sup> Feuerbach attempted this reversal in his philosophy by starting with what he called the negation of Hegelian philosophy, the real Hegelian antithesis, concrete realbeing. All one needed to do, said Feuerbach, was to take the predicate of speculative philosophy and make it the subject, and

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<sup>38</sup>Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, pp. 156-57.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

make the subject the object. The result could be achieved by reversing speculative philosophy, i.e., using its negation as the beginning of philosophy, and this process would bring one to the real truth.<sup>40</sup>

Feuerbach's work with speculative philosophies consisted of his attempts to retool them into a philosophy of man. He did not concern himself with setting up directly a positive system, but rather attempted to 'extract' man from his "idealistic veil."<sup>41</sup> Therefore, he attempted to derive from speculative philosophy (theology) the philosophy of man (anthropology).

The speculative philosophers, when attempting to derive the finite from the infinite, found themselves in the center of a contradiction, Feuerbach claimed. Since the finite and determinable came from the infinite and undeterminable, the infinite and undeterminable were really determined by the finite and determinable. The infinite and undeterminable would be worthless without the finite and determinable. Since the finite was determined by the infinite it in turn negated the infinite and determined it.

This relationship between the finite and infinite, Feuerbach said, was the same relationship one could find between God and man. Man as the finite negated God the infinite. God was a pointless idea without man's being

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>41</sup>Löwith, Hegel to Nietzsche, p. 310.

around to give him value.<sup>42</sup>

One can see that Feuerbach felt that he had returned the essence of man to man in philosophy. However, since Hegelianism was merely rational Christianity, Feuerbach felt that his next step would have to be to return man's essence to man in the Christian theology of the everyday population. Negating Hegel's philosophy had no effect on the common man. Thus his next attempt, he felt, must aim at giving truth to man. In this way the wider population could see that its prayers to God were wasted energy, energy that could be best spent on the betterment of the human condition.

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<sup>42</sup>Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, p. 159.



## CHAPTER II

### CRITIQUE OF CHRISTIANITY

In the last chapter, I took a close look at Feuerbach's critique of Hegelianism, and tried to demonstrate how Feuerbach's critique of Christianity followed naturally from it. Feuerbach realized that the speculative philosophies, including that of Hegel, were in reality particular types of worship. Speculative philosophers treated the philosophy of history as a type of religious history. They treated the state as divine heaven brought to earth, and they represented God as absolute logic, i.e., as pure thought.<sup>1</sup> Feuerbach attacked all forms of a "conceptual" knowledge of God. To have a "conceptual" knowledge of God was to have knowledge of the human elements in God.<sup>2</sup> Some theologians that Feuerbach attacked, because of their views of how man knew God, were Schleiermacher, Wegscheide, De Witte, and the Hegelians. All of these theologians had a "conceptual" knowledge of God, and Karl Barth felt Feuerbach's act of stripping them of their superhuman elements was an act of intellectual honesty. To view God conceptually

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<sup>1</sup>Löwith, Hegel to Nietzsche, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup>Richard R. Niebuhr, Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), pp. 178-179.

meant that man could reach or reveal God through his own efforts. If God were to be approached through human effort, according to Barth, Feuerbach was correct in his theological conclusions.<sup>3</sup>

Feuerbach was not the only philosopher of that period who recognized that Hegelian philosophy, if followed to its logical end, would take one to an anthropological theology. In 1835 David Strauss published his Life of Jesus and in that book he reduced the figure of Jesus and the entire Gospel to the status of a mythical work. However, he said that one could discover some truths about mankind in the myths. A short time later Bruno Bauer approached the figure of Jesus even more critically than Strauss. Not only did Bauer deny the reality of Christ as a historical figure, but he also asserted that no truth could be found in the Gospel at all. What both of these men had in common with Feuerbach was a belief that Hegelian philosophy made it evident that Christianity had to be evaluated.<sup>4</sup>

Feuerbach, however, perceived a difference between his objectives and the objectives of Bauer and Strauss. He said that while Bauer and Strauss were interested in evaluating and criticizing dogmatic Christianity or institutionalized Christianity, he was interested in looking

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<sup>3</sup>Barth, Theology and Church, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), p. 213.

<sup>4</sup>Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, p. 14.



at Christianity in general, i.e., the Christian religion.<sup>5</sup> The difference between the thoughts of these men was as follows. Strauss and Bauer criticized an actual institution because they felt that the institution was wrong. Feuerbach attacked a religion and its accompanying theology because he felt that it contained a contradiction. It placed the essence of man outside of man much like Hegelian philosophy placed the thought of man outside of man. In Hegelian philosophy the thought of man was eventually returned to man. This return was completed indirectly by asserting that the totality of God's thought was the totality of man's thought.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Christianity eventually returned the essence of man to man, but it was unaware of the fact that it was doing so. It accomplished this act by attributing human predicates to God. When one used religious language to talk about God one was really using religious language to talk about man. Religion wrapped man up in its own mystical language. Feuerbach explained this movement in the following way: "...it is not I, an insignificant individual, but religion itself that says: God is man, man is God..."<sup>7</sup> Religion confused the subject and the object, but at the same time it hid this very fact. It deceived itself into believing something else, that is, the opposite of what it really meant. Feuerbach felt that

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<sup>5</sup>Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, p. xiii.

<sup>6</sup>See p. 32.

<sup>7</sup>Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, p. xxxvi.



upon close analysis one would see that this deception was taking place in religion. Once one discovered the illusion of religion, the contradiction between the content and meaning in religion would be eliminated and man would know where he really stood in relation to God. In other words, once man realized that the meaning placed on God as the content of religion was meant for man, then man would no longer allow God to be the content. As it was, according to Feuerbach, the meaning which was man's was in God and thus contradicted itself.

Feuerbach's major work, The Essence of Christianity, published in 1842, was an attempt to point out these contradictions and eliminate them. The book dealt with the Christian religion and therefore went beyond anything that Strauss or Bauer accomplished. Feuerbach felt that religion and theology were a necessary part of man's existence whereas Strauss and Bauer did not believe that such was the case. Feuerbach felt that one had to look at the reasons why some phenomena were held to be divine, or were divinized beings, before he could understand religion's real essence. Feuerbach could not simply pass off religion as a total misconception. He did not want to deny the reality of religious feeling, but he asked why these feelings had to be divine. He thought that they could be attributed to the elements of the natural world.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Kai Nielsen, "Is God So Powerful That He Doesn't Even Have to Exist?" in Religious Experience and Truth, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: New York University Press, 1961), pp. 274-275.

Feuerbach's critique of religion can be divided into two parts, first a specific critique of Christianity and second, a more general critique of religion. This chapter will deal with Feuerbach's specific critique of Christianity, and the next chapter will deal with his critique of religion in general. Feuerbach's criticism of Christian religion can also be divided into two parts. The first part of his thesis, what Feuerbach called positive, was a demonstration that the predicates that were used to describe God were really only human predicates, i.e., predicates used to describe human things. In the first part he showed that the true essence of Christianity was anthropology, and in the second part he attempted to show that distinctions made between the human and divine predicates were absurd.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the work was an attempt to reduce theology to anthropology and raise anthropology to theology. Feuerbach called the first part positive because he tried to illuminate the truth of religion. This truth constituted the fact that man expressed his intimate wishes and desires to himself. The negative part of his critique was an attempt to display the absurdity of addressing and attributing these wishes and desires to a superhuman and supernatural being. Since religion really worshipped man, Feuerbach felt, it would be better

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<sup>9</sup> Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, p. xxxvii.



if it were done directly and not indirectly through God.<sup>10</sup>

The main source that will be used in this chapter will be Feuerbach's The Essence of Christianity, but I shall also use Lectures on the Essence of Religion, and other articles and essays that Feuerbach wrote. I stated briefly at the end of chapter one, why Feuerbach felt that the study of religion was so important and why he felt it was necessary to criticize it in the manner that he did. Before I begin his actual criticism, I would like to expand on some of the reasons that were behind his actual criticism.

Feuerbach began his Principles of the Philosophy of the Future with a short statement that expressed his general thesis. "The task of the modern era was the realization and humanization of God--the transformation and dissolution of theology into anthropology."<sup>11</sup> Why was this task to be placed on the modern era? What was to be gained by it? As Feuerbach understood historical epochs, their change was reflected and caused by religious change.<sup>12</sup> The nineteenth century was a century of change. The effects of the Enlightenment were colliding with Romanticism, urban population was expanding, industry was on the rise. Everything that had been stable in the eighteenth century was now changing. The social aspects of man's existence came under great strain.

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<sup>10</sup>Feuerbach, The Essence of Faith According to Luther, trans. and Introduction by Melvin Chernob (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967), pp. 12-13.

<sup>11</sup>Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, p. 167.      <sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 146.



Religion was also changing but the change was on the whole unconscious. Feuerbach felt that if religion recognized its change, then much of the social strain would be alleviated. There existed in the nineteenth century, according to Feuerbach, a theoretical belief in God, but there was at the same time a practical denial of God taking place in the social order of the century.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the religious people would say they believed in God and in their worship even act as if they did, but in everyday life, in their everyday dealing with other humans, there was a practical denial of God's existence. Feuerbach felt that if man would recognize the true object of his worship, then this practical denial would not take place. Within society man would not be able to deny himself if he realized that it was his essence that he worshipped in God.

One could also see, according to Feuerbach, evidence for this denial of God in the Protestant religion. It was reflected by the role of the Virgin in religion. Protestants believed in the Virgin birth but they did not give the Virgin the same status that was placed on her in the Catholic Church. Why, asked Feuerbach? Protestant church leaders could get married. Protestants had turned away from the heavenly Virgin bride to the earthly woman. Since the Catholics still held celibacy as good, they devoted themselves to the Holy

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 146-147.

Virgin and not to the earthly female.<sup>14</sup> Thus the Protestants had, in practice and unconsciously, reaffirmed the real essence of womanhood by denying the Virgin as a divine object.

According to Feuerbach the Protestants were closer to realizing the true object of religion than the Catholics. This idea was reflected not only by the fact that the Protestants did turn away from the Holy Virgin, but also because the object of Protestant religion was a God much different than the Catholic's God. The Catholics were still very much theocentric. Their God was a God that could only be reached through man's self-denial, i.e., the denial of all material things to monks, and nuns. The Protestant's God was much more anthropocentric. He existed for man and for man's welfare.<sup>15</sup>

Not only did Feuerbach perceive the difficulty that individuals would have with the contradiction within religion, but he also sensed some of the effects that misdirected religion would have on society. Because man got the object of religion confused in Christianity, Christianity would not help keep the state together. Men theoretically felt they were dependent upon God and not upon each other. If they had felt they were dependent on each other, there would have been little use for God. However,

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<sup>14</sup>Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, pp. 72-73.

<sup>15</sup>Jacob Taubes, "The Copernican Turn of Theology," in Religious Experience and Truth, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: New York University Press, 1961), p. 71.



in practice men really were dependent on other men. If this situation had not existed, men would never have begun any form of social institutions. In theory, religion separated the people from the state. The dependency on God was enough to interfere with the smooth operations of the state.<sup>16</sup> Instead of being loyal to man or to the state, man would be, superficially and practically, loyal to God.<sup>17</sup>

One can see that Feuerbach's passionate attacks against Christianity were caused by his love for what he felt was the truth. Karl Barth, in his introductory essay to The Essence of Christianity, said of Feuerbach that "he felt compelled by a kind of prophetic enthusiasm to say it,"<sup>18</sup> i.e., what the real essence of Christianity was. Most assuredly Barth was correct. Feuerbach attacked his subject with passion, like a man with something so important to say that he had to express it in every possible way. One will find in The Essence of Christianity that Feuerbach repeated himself a number of times. He approached ideas from many different directions. Feuerbach felt that it was for the good of man that man realized his real essence. Although Feuerbach's attempts may seem misdirected to some theologians and philosophers, to Feuerbach, and to one who reads him with a sympathetic eye, his charges and criticisms

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<sup>16</sup>Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, p. 149.   <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>18</sup>Barth, Introduction to The Essence of Christianity, by Ludwig Feuerbach (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), p. x.



are sincere and somewhat valuable.

I shall reserve criticism of his ideas until a later chapter because the flow of his argument would be lost if one were to insert criticism into the work. After this brief statement of the reasons for his work, I shall now begin with his actual criticism of Christianity.

Ludwig Feuerbach began The Essence of Christianity with an introduction that is divided into two parts: "The Essential Nature of Man," and "The Essence of Religion Considered Generally." Both of these discussions by Feuerbach were general statements of what would be found later in more detail in the major part of the work. However, several interesting things from these sections must be discussed before I can proceed.

The first thing one must look at is the difference between man and animals because Feuerbach felt that it was just this difference that led to the rise of religion in man.<sup>19</sup> The essential difference between man and animals, said Feuerbach was consciousness, but consciousness of a certain type. Feuerbach asked, for example, did a brute have consciousness, and if so what kind? After reflecting upon it he said yes a brute did have consciousness, but a limited one. "Hence the brute has only a simple, man a twofold life: in the brute, the inner life is one with the outer; man has both inner and outer life."<sup>20</sup> What Feuerbach meant was simply that the brute

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<sup>19</sup>Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

had only consciousness of itself. The brute could not do anything with regard to its species without another of its species present. Because the brute had only a simple life it did not have consciousness of its species. Man, on the other hand, was aware of his species. He showed this awareness by functioning, when alone, as if in a relation to his species. Man could talk to himself and recognize himself as both subject and object. He could put himself in an "I and thou" relationship with himself.<sup>21</sup> Because man was aware of his species, his species could become an object of worship, thus eventually religious.

The second thing I want to point out is Feuerbach's notion of how objects affected man and how man affected objects. He asked, for example, what was the feeling that one had when a melody was experienced. That feeling was the power of the melody, therefore the power of melody was merely the power of feeling.<sup>22</sup> Music was, in other words, objectified human feeling. If music were nothing but objectified human feeling, then it followed, for Feuerbach, that all objects were, in how man experienced them, merely man's own projected nature. Furthermore, man needed an object so that he could define his own character.<sup>23</sup> To illustrate this point Feuerbach used the planets and the sun. Let us consider the planets as members of the same species and the sun as their mutual object. Is the sun the same object for all of

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.,      <sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 4.      <sup>23</sup>Ibid.



them? No, the sun that the Earth experiences is not the same sun that Mars experiences, nor Venus; i.e., it is not the same for any of the planets. What is the difference in the object, the sun, that they experience? The difference lies in the relationship of each planet to the sun. The sun that each planet experienced depended upon the nature of the planet itself. "Therefore, each planet has in its sun the mirror of its own nature."<sup>24</sup>

Feuerbach was not denying the existence of the object; he was saying that one's feelings about it, one's thoughts about it, one's anything that had to do with the object depended upon one's relationship to that object. This idea, as we shall see, played a big part in Feuerbach's study of religion.

The third and last point I want to make comes from the second part of his introduction, "The Essence of Religion Considered Generally." Feuerbach claimed that as one looked at ancient religions one would see that the identity of the subject and the predicate was the same. What he meant was that the predicates used by the ancients to describe their gods were predicates that represented the ancients' environment. For example, a savage in the state of nature had a "nature-god," whereas a civilized community, a community that lived in houses, had a god that was worshipped in a house-like structure, i.e., the temple.<sup>25</sup> (This method of study

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 5.      <sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 20.



of ancient religions is an example of the "genetic-critical" method of analysis that Feuerbach used.) Feuerbach felt that this relationship between man and God represented the idea that God and man were one. As man advanced, God advanced with him. A savage man had a savage God and a civilized man had a civilized God.

Feuerbach felt that the nineteenth century theologians could choose to believe one of two things in hopes of avoiding criticism against "conceptualized" knowledge of God. However, both of them really did not answer the objection as far as Feuerbach was concerned. First, one could assert that God was unknowable, undefinable; but Feuerbach claimed that an unknowable God was no God whatsoever. To assign no predicates to a thing was to assert that the thing did not exist. Thus Feuerbach could not accept the skeptics' position about the impossibility of knowledge of God. If predicates were attached to God, as Feuerbach believed they had to be, they would be human predicates.<sup>26</sup> The second thing one could say was that the predicates attached to God had no objective validity. But, asked Feuerbach, what could God be, other than what he was for me? God would have only predicates that were considered divine. Predicates could only be considered divine if they were first divinized in man, thus man could be no less divine

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

than God.<sup>27</sup> The predicates that man attached to God had to possess objective validity for man or he would not bother to attach them to God, and man had to attach some sort of predicate to God if he wanted to assert that God even existed.

With this brief discussion of his introduction, we are now ready to look at the major section of The Essence of Christianity. Part one of the book looks quite unorganized at first. It consists of twenty-seven short chapters, each dealing with a different theme in Christianity. However, when looked at closely each chapter follows naturally from the previous one. In this way Feuerbach systematically worked his way through the essence of Christianity. I am not going to deal with each specific chapter because many of them are restatements of the previous chapter. If one looks at selected chapters, one can understand Feuerbach's movement as he analyzes and discusses Christianity.

One must begin the study with Feuerbach's ideas about the role of sacrifice, miracle, and prayer in religion because his views about these lay at the center of his thought.<sup>28</sup> Along with those three categories I shall also discuss faith, The Virgin birth, the omnipotence of God, and the resurrection. These are discussed with the above because they reflect man's use of his imagination. Imagination was important to Feuerbach because it reduced suffering, and helped man gain what he wanted. Feuerbach said in The Essence of Christianity that the ultimate essence of religion

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>28</sup>Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, p. 39.



could be seen in the simplest religious act, prayer.<sup>29</sup> He was not referring to the ritual prayers of people before dinner and before they go to bed, but he was referring to prayers that are full of sorrow and wanting. These prayers are full of man's desires. Why are these prayers so important? Why, in Feuerbach's system, are they accepted as useful? One will see much of Feuerbach's thought in the answer to those two questions.

In prayer man made his heart objectified.<sup>30</sup> His heart became free and he could confess himself to another; to an imagined other, but still in a sense another. In prayer man's heart spoke to him. Because his feelings got out in the open, because he had spoken them, he no longer carried the burden alone. He became relieved and satisfied. By praying man had God to share the burden with. However, for Feuerbach, this God was not separated from man. Man did not share his feelings with God, as a different being, but he split himself into two beings. Man became the 'I and the thou'. He trusted his feelings of the heart, and he trusted God to be a forgiving Being.<sup>31</sup> He was trusting the goodness of his own heart to be able to forgive. Then the power of prayer lay within the prayer itself. The actual speaking of the prayer affirmed to man that he was essentially good because he could ask God's forgiveness for his wrong. "The

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<sup>29</sup>Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, p. 122.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 123.      <sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 124.



omnipotence to which man turns in prayer is nothing but the omnipotence of Goodness...."<sup>32</sup> Omnipotence is the power of feeling. Man turns to his own feeling of goodness in prayer and he comes out feeling satisfied.

The power of faith, for Feuerbach, was intertwined with the power of prayer. "Faith alone prays; the prayer of faith is alone effectual."<sup>33</sup> Faith, because it represents the power of the subjective over nature was one with miracle. Miracle, however, was external and faith was internal. One must have faith to have a miracle. A miracle reflected the immediate granting of a wish, and man's view of his subjective unlimitedness.

The act of sacrifice was not overly stressed by Feuerbach in The Essence of Christianity. He dealt with it in respect to religion in general. However, in Christianity, sacrifice reflected man's imagined closeness to God.<sup>34</sup> Man felt at odds with God, i. e., man's own nature, and thus gave gifts to God to bring man and God together again. This feeling of division and the attempt to eliminate it, once again, reflected the false separation of man from God.

Before I proceed, there are several things that must be discussed in some detail. One must have faith before one can have effective prayer. Before one can understand this

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 125.      <sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>34</sup>Feuerbach, Lectures on the Essence of Religion, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967), p. 67.

idea one must understand Feuerbach's definition of faith as man's affirmation of his subjective power over nature. Christianity developed from Judaism and that, according to Feuerbach, was an egotistical religion.<sup>35</sup> It was egotistical because Yahweh was concerned with only one group of people, the Jews. He would punish them when they were being disobedient, but in the end he always forgave them. He was their God and he was concerned with their welfare. As Christianity developed, Yahweh was no longer a nationalistic God in the sense that as long as one accepted Christ he was then his God also. There was no longer any nation like the Jewish nation, but the egoism was retained. God was no longer the God of one group, but he became one God for all mankind. No one group could have a collective feeling of God's love, so the egoism became individual. National salvation ceased to be important. Personal salvation became important and took national salvation's place in religion. For example, instead of a concern for the continued existence of a religious community, man became concerned with the continuation of his own existence. Man wished to become immortal; therefore he became immortal.<sup>36</sup> This wish for immortality exemplified the essence of faith, man's wish to be what he was not and to do what he could not do. From this process one can see the evolution of miracles. Feuerbach thought miracles reflected and realized two things: first,

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<sup>35</sup>Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, p. 112.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 128.



human wishes were realized immediately and second, because man was an egotist, they reflected his desires for superiority over nature.<sup>37</sup> Where else, but in a miracle, could the laws of nature be ignored?

However, what was really the power of miracle? What really had power over the laws of nature? Imagination was the unlimited power in man. Nothing could stop or prevent it from going on indefinitely, so, according to Feuerbach, a miracle was merely an aspect of imagination.<sup>38</sup>

From this point Feuerbach moved toward the principle of resurrection. Man did not wish to die, but he had to demonstrate to himself in some way that he would not die. Reason could not convince man that he was immortal, but the imagination could. Through the resurrection of Christ, man showed himself that he was indeed immortal.<sup>39</sup> Why was it significant that Christ was resurrected and not an ordinary man? If the resurrection would have been of an ordinary man, it would not have represented the immortality of all men. This representation was the purpose of the resurrection. How could an ordinary man represent universal immortality? He could represent universal immortality by making the one who was crucified special. Christ was born to a virgin, and thus he was separated from man, but the virgin was a human woman so Christ had a mother like all of us. What was different for Christ was the nature of his Father. Christ was the

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 131

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 133.



Son of God, but God was merely objectified human nature so Christ was really the 'Son of Man'. Christ's Father was human nature therefore Christ's resurrection could come to symbolize the resurrection of the father.

One can see that if one begins with prayer he can advance to the resurrection. The fulfillment of prayer is the fulfillment of the heart by the imagination. The resurrection is the ultimate achievement of the imagination. With this discussion presented one can return to the beginning of The Essence of Christianity and begin a somewhat systematic analysis of it. Through this process one must keep in mind at all times the role that is placed on imagination by Feuerbach. If that is lost, then Feuerbach's ideas themselves may become lost.

As stated before, man was different from the brute because he was conscious of his species. In his Principles of the Philosophy of the Future, Feuerbach said that divine knowledge had its ground in the knowledge of the species.<sup>40</sup> That which was central to man's thought was his own species. Man, with a limited consciousness, had in his species the unlimitedness of the human consciousness.<sup>41</sup> What one man did not know another man would, or could know, and what two men did not know another man would and so on. Therefore man could perceive the totality of the human species as unlimited.

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<sup>40</sup>Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, p. 189.

<sup>41</sup>Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, p. 2.

As man thought about his species he would also recognize three things, according to Feuerbach, that were present in all of mankind. These three things made up the humanity of man, or the essence of man. They were Reason, Will, and Affection.<sup>42</sup> Each man was, according to Feuerbach, a thinking being, a wishing, wanting being, and a loving being. Since all three of these things could be found in all men to some degree, they were considered, by mankind, to be divine. However, these could not be perfected in the individual, unless in the imagined Christ, and thus it was only through the totality of man's nature that these three things could become perfected. This method of completing them caused Feuerbach to make man's essence as abstract as he accused Hegel of making man's thought. The essence of man was removed from the individual and applied to the whole, just as in Hegelian philosophy what made up the essence of Mind was not the individual mind but the totality of human mind. Feuerbach attempted to solve this problem in later works but he was not successful. This criticism will be expanded upon in a later chapter.

It was not unusual that Feuerbach had perceived three major predicates in man. He was a disciple of Hegel and thus very well trained in looking at things in a triadic form. However, one must remember that in Christianity, there is the doctrine of the Trinity. Feuerbach treated Reason, Will, and

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 3.



Affection as the three elements of the Trinity. Briefly, God the Father was reason, God the Son was love, and the Holy Ghost was the will or moral law, i.e., the evidence of love between God the Father and God the Son.

By looking at the titles of chapters two and three and four one will see the essence of God as Feuerbach perceived him. They are, in numerical order, "God as a being of the Understanding" (Reason), "God as a Moral Being or Law" (Will), and "The Mystery of Incarnation; or God as Love, as a Being of the Heart" (Affection). The three elements that are attributed to the human species are also attributed to God as his major predicates.<sup>43</sup>

By the time the second edition of The Essence of Christianity had been published Feuerbach had shaken off most of his Hegelian ideas, but one can see the Hegelian dialectic at work in Feuerbach's moves from a God of understanding to a God of moral law, and then to a God of love. As I discuss each of these topics I hope to be able to point out the underlying dialectic movement.

Man and God were, in religion, beings of the opposite extreme, i.e., religion was the separation of man from himself. Feuerbach said: "God is not what man is--man is not

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<sup>43</sup>It is appropriate to remind the reader that Feuerbach did not make the distinction between verstand and vernunft that Hegel made. Hegel defined verstand as understanding and vernunft as reason, implying that reason was a superior method to understanding for the gaining of knowledge. Feuerbach did not make use of this distinction and thus used the terms interchangeably.



what God is. God is the infinite, man the finite being, God is perfect, man is imperfect; God eternal, man temporal: God almighty, man weak: God holy, man sinful."<sup>44</sup> However, God was just man's own nature objectified. The truth of this projection, said Feuerbach, was implied in the division of man from God. If man and God were not originally one there would be no division. Division occurred only where something was divided and could be divided. Further evidence of this forced separation was included with the idea that, if man and God were not one, God's perfection would not concern man or bother him. Man would not care if God was perfect, imperfect or anything else.<sup>45</sup> The division between God and man was the division of something in man. This something, said Feuerbach, was intelligence. "The pure, perfect divine nature is the self-consciousness of the understanding, the consciousness which the understanding has of its own perfection."<sup>46</sup> In man intelligence became divided because it realized perfect intelligence at the same time it realized that the human being was an emotional being and not purely intelligence, or mind. The God of understanding was pure, perfect understanding. Reason could not consider anything superior to itself. Whatever one thought of God, one had to first be able to think of reason; whatever was predicated to God had to be first predicated to reason. Thus God was below reason, God was dependent upon reason.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, p. 33.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.      <sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 34.      <sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

A man's view of God was only as comprehensible as his ability to think, and therefore Feuerbach concluded that man's view of God was really only a view of his own thought. If knowledge of God as a real being was dependent upon man's knowledge of his own ability to think, one could see how Feuerbach would state that man's knowledge of God was really only man's knowledge of himself.

Feuerbach introduced many arguments to support this position but the details of them are essentially unimportant to this paper. What concerns us now is man's relationship to this God of reason. The God of understanding was not the same God as the God worshipped in the Christian religion. According to Feuerbach, the God of understanding was interested in more than just man. Understanding was willing to contemplate nature, understanding was willing to contemplate the universe. A God willing to consider more than man was essentially different than man and man did not want or need this type of God.<sup>48</sup> Feuerbach would assert that man found little comfort in a God that considered all aspects of the universe as favorable as he considered man. Inanimate objects such as rocks, trees, etc., were all equal to reason. For the religious man to be contemplated on an equal level with the brutes would not be satisfactory. God had to be more, he had to be specifically for man.

Man's conflict with a God of reason gave rise to the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 46.



concept of moral perfection. This moral perfection was attributed to God by reason but it also negated the God of reason. This negation was a dialectic process that Feuerbach carried over into his system. Feuerbach saw God as a moral being generating from a God of understanding. This moral God was much more likeable to the Christian. Morality had nothing to do with nature per se. It was something with which only man was involved. Thus, the moral God treated man as its object and not nature. Anthropologically this treatment happened because moral perfection did not depend on nature but depended upon will.<sup>49</sup>

However, man was now presented with a new problem. Since the moral ideas were generated from understanding, the problem was now presented of how man could reconcile himself to a moral God because of his sins. Man was either morally right in a choice or morally wrong, there was no middle of the road, no excuses. Thus man still did not have a God with whom he could feel comfortable. The key to being reconciled for one's sins was forgiveness.<sup>50</sup> Forgiveness was a part of love. God became a Being of love or a Being of the heart. Love was the center point of the Christian religion, and Christ exemplified this love.

The blood of Christ cleanses us from our sins in the eyes of God; it is only his human blood that makes God merciful, allays his anger; that is our sins are forgiven us because we are not abstract beings, but creatures of flesh and blood.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 49.



The crucifixion was a sign of God's love for man. "God so loved man that he gave his only begotten Son." This love of God for man was, according to Feuerbach, a "most irrefragable proof that man in religion contemplates himself as the object of the Divine Being...."<sup>52</sup> It was God's love for man that made man realize his own essence of love. Thus God's love for man was man's love for man. When man realized this love, instead of realizing it in himself, he attributed it to God.

Several interesting things have come to light concerning the implicit dialectic movement in Feuerbach's work. The thesis of understanding generated the antithesis of moral law. As a dialectic, the thesis and antithesis did not stand in direct black and white contradiction but moved or flowed back and forth into each other. In this movement man realized God as love. Therefore the God of Christianity could be seen, following Feuerbach's view, as a synthesis of these three ideas: God as understanding, God as moral Being, and God as love. These three elements, understanding, will, and love, were the three aspects Feuerbach recognized in man as he thought of his species. As he thought of them in individuals he was presented with the problem of limitation, but as he thought of them in the species the limitations were dropped. God was divinized human species, and religion was unconscious worship of the human species.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

These three human predicates, when divinized, could be used to compose the Trinity, and this was what Feuerbach did. The first sentence of the chapter, "The mystery of the Trinity and the Mother of God," reflects this idea. Feuerbach said: "If a God without feeling, without capability of suffering, will not suffice to man as a feeling, suffering being, neither will a God with feeling only, a God without intelligence and Will."<sup>53</sup> For God to be completely satisfying to man he had to contain all that man contained, thus understanding, will, and love. Feuerbach perceived the Trinity as man's total knowledge of himself, and God, as the Trinity, was a projection of man's knowledge of himself. Therefore, the Trinity was man's consciousness of his total self. That which was human made up that which was divine.

The essence of the Trinity could also be seen in the relationship between the Father and Son, and the father and son. Feuerbach asserted that the relationship between the Father and Son in the Christian religion was the same as the relationship between the father on earth and the son on earth. In the doctrine of the Trinity Feuerbach saw the Father as understanding and the Son as love. One must see how the Son arose from the Father to understand how Feuerbach saw them as literal father and son. The Christian religion was essentially a private religion and a religion that demanded that man withdraw from the world. This viewpoint was good for a God of understanding because understanding liked solitude.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 65.



Man, as a communal being, needed more than this solitude. Man created a social life for God. Man created this community by giving God a Son.<sup>54</sup> An other-than-this-world being would have no idea of what it meant to have a family, i.e., how it was to love a son, unless he also had a son. Thus, for Christians, it was possible for God to understand man's problems, passions, and fears only if he, himself, had a Son to worry and care about. A man with no family, for example, does not know what it means to worry about children. Thus the love between the Father and Son was the same as the love between father and son. The essential difference between God and Christ was that one was begotten and the other begot. If this distinction were removed, then Christ would not have any worth to the religious man.<sup>55</sup> In other words, for the man with a family, it was essential that God also have a family. In that way God could understand man better and man would better feel God's love.

One may ask about those men who do not have families, but Feuerbach said that they do have some feelings about community. They all had some sort or sense of family at one time, thus God's family made them feel better understood. God begot the Son through the mother because the earthly son needed the earthly mother. The mother was the first being the son loved. For man, as creator of God the Father, and Christ

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 69.



the Son, the Father had to have a feminine idea to create the Son. If God were a separate real Being, he could have very easily produced the Son out of anything, or nothing. Since the Father was not a separate being he could produce the Son only through the female. The members of the Protestant clergy did not have the Virgin incorporated in religion and consequently they could marry. They did not need, from a practical point of view, a mother in heaven. They had mothers here on earth. For this reason, Feuerbach felt that the Lutheran religion was much closer to the real essence of Christianity than the Catholic religion. However, one must remember that Feuerbach's idea of the true essence of Christianity would leave Christianity totally spiritless and completely worldly.

As one reads the above he may wonder how this position could be called positive by anyone including Feuerbach. The religious ideas discussed above were seen as basically true by Feuerbach. The only problems were the importance placed on the resurrection and immortality of Christ as well as concerns about heaven. Man should have understood what real human immortality was and that heaven could be realized on earth. As mentioned earlier, according to Feuerbach, the power of Reason, Will, and Affection could not be complete in each individual but only in the human species. Thus man would realize that his immortality was the immortality of the human species.

The second part of The Essence of Christianity is

entitled "The False or Theological Essence of Religion." In this section Feuerbach attempted to demonstrate that if one considered the attributes of God and man as separate, then one would be left in a realm of innumerable contradictions. He also attempted to demonstrate that certain elements of religion, or theology, led to many contradictions within the essence of that religion.

The first principle one had to realize was that religion was not, in any sense, an intellectual study. The area that the theologians attempted to reach through the intellect was not suitable area for study with thought. Religion was a practical matter and not a theoretical matter. It was emotional and not intellectual.<sup>56</sup> Evidence for that fact, said Feuerbach, was that everything considered religious or studied as religious, went against thought.<sup>57</sup> Reason could not allow itself to seriously contemplate miracles and it could not let itself study anything that was out of the realm of nature. Theology did seriously study these things. It employed reason to contemplate miracles, etc., and that procedure was what Feuerbach argued against.

The separation between God and man made by religion was essentially harmless, said Feuerbach. However, when that religion took what was an imaginary, distant, indefinite, and nebulous being and made it into something that could

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 195.



theoretically be encountered, then that religion became harmful.<sup>58</sup> It took the separation and made it something real. By accepting this separation theology distorted religion even more than before.

This viewpoint of Christian theology, the aspect that violated reason and humanity, was by no means accidental. It was, in fact, the essence of Christian theology. According to Feuerbach, Luther brought this violation unconsciously into the light. It was apparent that with some study and consideration this violation could be exposed and the mystery would be unravelled. The Catholics, according to Feuerbach, were still able to disguise this fact. They had it wrapped in a veil of mystery that could not be penetrated. The Protestants were so close to the real essence of Christianity that in some cases they possibly saw the truth, but pretended that they did not, or they tried to disguise it.<sup>59</sup> It was likely that this was the practice that Feuerbach perceived Schleiermacher, DeWitte, the Hegelians, and others to be following. They realized the truth, but instead of facing it, as he did, they attempted to re-veil it in mystery. Hegel, for example, attempted to turn the truth into a type of mysticism with the Absolute Mind in the center.

This attempt to study religion with reason brought

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<sup>58</sup>Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, p. 184.

<sup>59</sup>John Glasse, "Why did Feuerbach Concern Himself with Luther?", Revue Internationale de Philosophie 26 (1972): 366.



out a contradiction between man's scientific knowledge of reality, knowledge Feuerbach considered real, and his religious imagery.<sup>60</sup> If this veil were to be dropped, then true divine knowledge would be revealed. Divine knowledge was that knowledge that knew the minutest details, the distant heavens, i.e., scientific knowledge.<sup>61</sup> If the mystery were unveiled, then the theologians would realize that man created God and not the other way around. The actual fact that man did create God did not, according to Feuerbach, take away the usefulness of God to man. It was only when man forgot that he created God and for what reason he was driven to this creation, that he ran into trouble.<sup>62</sup> Then it was that he began to deceive himself and mistreat himself in the name of God and heaven.

By seriously studying this separation of God and man as set forth by the theologians, one became aware, according to Feuerbach, of the contradiction in the nature of God's existence. As he demonstrated in the first half of The Essence of Christianity, for God to be God He had to concern himself with certain things that pertained to man, namely, Reason, Will, and Affection. In other words, God had to be like man or he was not a God to man. However, if he were too much like man, he was not a God to man either. If man made

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<sup>60</sup>H. Frederick Reirz, Jr., "Feuerbach on the Essence of Religion," Journal of Religion 49 (1969): 181.

<sup>61</sup>Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, p. 189.

<sup>62</sup>Hook, Hegel to Marx, p. 225.

God totally supernatural, i.e., with no human attributes, then God was pointless. If God was to have value to man, he had to possess natural qualities. This idea could not be accepted by religious people. Feuerbach perceived that religion was forever caught in the bonds of this contradiction, the contradiction between the natural and the supernatural. God had to be within this world but at the same time out of it, he had to be infinite but at the same time a particular being, capable of understanding human suffering, sin, guilt, etc.<sup>63</sup> God had to be both a personal being and a universal being.

Religion set God up as a contradiction to himself. He was conceived as being non-human, but he was described and known as a Being that was composed of many human parts. He was described in human terms. In theology God was set up against man. The essence of God was the essence of man, but theology separated these divine and human aspects and made God essentially non-human and supernatural.<sup>64</sup> Religion thought of God as a spiritual being, but treated him as a sensuous being. Theology on the other hand thought of him and treated him as a spiritual being. Religion worshipped the correct idea but recognized it in the wrong being. Theology worshipped the wrong idea and saw this wrong idea in the wrong being. Thus, according to Feuerbach, one had to eliminate theology and return religion to where it rightfully

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<sup>63</sup>Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, p. 57.

<sup>64</sup>Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, p. 183.



belonged.

Religion was not pointless or useless if considered properly. It was for this reason that Feuerbach, like Luther, attacked the old religion hoping that a new one would arise in its place. His object was to rid man of theology. He did not attempt to dispose of theology by presenting proofs that God did not exist, and he did not attempt to prove the truthfulness of atheism. He called atheism negative theology, and did not believe it could work. What he tried to do, instead, was to show the uselessness of theology as it currently existed by explaining and setting forth the purpose of the religious experience.<sup>65</sup>

Why did Feuerbach perceive proofs of atheism as negative theology, i.e., as practically useless? The answer revolved around his understanding of the nature of proofs. To use a proof, whether to prove or disprove God's existence, was to presuppose that the object of religion was external. However, according to Feuerbach, the object of religion was not external but internal and emotional.<sup>66</sup> He did not feel he had to disprove God. All he had to do was show that belief in an external God got in the way of the usefulness and purpose of the religious experience.

Theologians wrongly felt that they were obligated to

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<sup>65</sup>Hook, Hegel to Marx, p. 243.

<sup>66</sup>Donald A. Wells, God, Man and Thinkers (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 108.

prove the existence of God. If God were rather left in the mind, in the subjective, then theologians would have to grant Feuerbach's point. An objective proof, Feuerbach asserted could never be found.<sup>67</sup> The proof of God's existence was out of the realm of reason as evident by St. Anselm's proof. St. Anselm's proof rested solely on the power of reason; therefore, it was subjective and was not an adequate proof of the existence of God. If God could not be proven by reason, then one had to look to the senses to illuminate him. Also, as long as God was separated from man, as the theologians claimed, the only way God could be discovered would be through the senses. If he were to be discovered through reason, then he would not be separated from man.

This attempt to discover God through the senses was also an impossibility according to Feuerbach. One did not see God, feel God, or hear God. He was not an object to be discovered as such.<sup>68</sup> God was spiritual existence. However, if his existence were spiritual, then it lay in thought and was not outside of man.<sup>69</sup> Theologians attempted to say that God was spiritual existence separated from man. Thus, "the existence of God is essentially an empirical existence, without having its distinctive marks; it is in itself a matter of experience, and yet in reality no object of experience."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, p. 198.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 200.      <sup>69</sup>Ibid.      <sup>70</sup>Ibid.



All proofs of God's existence (which were necessary if one wanted to establish God as separate from man) that came from reason were subjective; objective proofs, the empirical proofs, had no object to study.

Feuerbach believed that there was really only one way a religious person could hope to know God, that is through revelation.<sup>71</sup> However, he found that revelation also had many contradictions. Revelation was the revealing of God and made God an external object, a fact. However, to Feuerbach, a fact was not something real and separate from man. This view did not mean that a thing did not exist, but it did mean that for a thing to have any value and meaning it had to stand in a certain relation to man. Its value and meaning, therefore, depended upon man.<sup>72</sup> God, as discovered through revelation, was thus a fact relative to the age that was calling him a fact. "A fact is a conception about the truth of which there is no doubt, because it is not an object of theory, but of feeling, which desires that what it wishes, what it believes, should be true."<sup>73</sup>

The essence of the contradiction in revelation was not contained in the above, but in the fact that what God revealed to man was revealed in human terms. God was not revealed to men of one nation in the language of another

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>72</sup>Robert Williams, "Schleiermacher and Feuerbach on the Intentionality of Religious Consciousness," Journal of Religion 53 (1973): 428.

<sup>73</sup>Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, p. 205.

nation. He did not reveal himself to man in the tongue of an animal. God was dependent upon man's intellect for His ability to reveal Himself. In his belief in revelation man did not admit this dependency. He negated his own ability to know so that God's form of knowledge could be supreme. This attitude was man's best attempt to negate himself in any religion.<sup>74</sup> Kant limited knowledge so that there could be room for faith and belief in God.<sup>75</sup> Man was willing to admit he could know nothing about God without God's help. He claimed that divine knowledge was nothing other than human knowledge.<sup>76</sup> All that was revealed to man about God in revelation had human origins. God could not reveal anything that was above the man to whom he was revealing it. God was restricted by human limits. God could not go beyond man because "the contents of the divine revelation are of human origin, for they have proceeded not from God as God, but from God as determined by human reason, human wants, that is, directly from human reason and human wants."<sup>77</sup> Man had only one way to know God, and in that way man knew only what he could comprehend about his species. God had no means of revealing himself to man beyond man's power to understand, because what God revealed came from man himself.

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<sup>74</sup>Claude Welch, Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 1:175.

<sup>75</sup>Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929) p. 29.

<sup>76</sup>Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, p. 206.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 207.



Feuerbach's argument against man's being able to know God can be summed up in three statements. First, if God were totally spiritual, then he could be known through reason. However, if reason were the instrument of knowledge, then God became an element of the subject and could only be known subjectively. Reason was no proof or means of knowing God. Second, to avoid the above objection, one could say God could be known as an external object. However, an external God implied that God could be known empirically. Yet one could see that this condition did not exist. God could not be seen, heard, or felt. Thus he lacked all empirical properties. Third, God could still possibly be known through revelation, but revelation was relative to the man who was receiving it in the period in which he lived. Revelation was a fact that had meaning only in relation to the men that considered it a fact, and it was dependent upon their ability to comprehend. Therefore, it also was not a method of knowing God. Feuerbach elegantly struck down all the ways that theologians could speak of knowing God by demonstrating that in the end all paths led to a contradiction. No matter how one attempted to speak of God, if that attempt was such that God was considered separate from man, he would always find that one side of the definition contradicted the other side. One quality of God would be offset with another quality to save God from the realm of man, but in doing so the definition would invariably contradict itself.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

To know God as distinct from man was an impossibility. Only when one recognized that God was the projected image of the human species could he truly know God.

One other contradiction in Christianity that was considered important by Feuerbach was the contradiction between faith and love. This conflict was important to Feuerbach because he saw faith as responsible for man's practical denial of mankind. Before this discussion can be carried any further, I must expand on Feuerbach's definition of faith. Faith may be defined in many ways. It may be understood as belief,<sup>79</sup> or it may be the feeling of smallness when confronted by God's greatness, or his love or even his anger. Faith is not a concept that can easily be defined. However, Feuerbach defined faith in the second half of The Essence of Christianity in a very narrow and particular manner. He saw faith as essentially an imperative, as Christian dogma. Obedience to the Ten Commandments fell under faith, etc. Faith was, according to Feuerbach, that which made up the conscious form of religion.<sup>80</sup> In other words, faith was that part of religion that was recognized by the religious people as religion. With this view of faith, Feuerbach asserted that it was a product of human vanity and egotism.<sup>81</sup> Man had faith in God because he was

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<sup>79</sup>Gordon D. Kaufman, God the Problem (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 68.

<sup>80</sup>Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, p. 247.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 251.



attempting to buy a place in heaven. Even closer to home faith inspired in each man a feeling of being particular. A man who had faith, according to Feuerbach, felt privileged in the eyes of God, and therefore above other men and above morality.<sup>82</sup> The crimes of the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades and witch trials were all inspired by what Feuerbach called faith. Those people with faith felt strong in the eyes of God because of their faith.

This view of faith was what Feuerbach said contradicted love. Faith tore man and God asunder, it made God a particular being interested in a particular group, i.e., that group with faith. Love brought man and God together, and it brought men together. In the eyes of a God of love all men were equal. He was a universal God. Faith brought disunion to the inner man, it separated him from his species and this disunion was reflected in the external acts of men. Love healed this wound and brought men back together again.<sup>83</sup> Love was an important element to Feuerbach. He felt, however, that theology separated man from his essence, and thus prevented the inherent goodness of man from emerging into social situations. If these theological elements that separated man from himself were dropped, then men would naturally love one another. Feuerbach truly believed in Christian morality and compassion. However, the concept of the Christian God

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

prevented these from growing to their fullest extent in man. God was in the way merely because man spent so much of his time concentrating on God that he forgot about mankind.<sup>84</sup> If man could recognize his real nature, he would be able to transfer his love for 'God' to love for man.

If one did re-examine this love, then he would recognize that divine concepts, such as virtue and morality, would have value in themselves. Feuerbach represented one of those people in the nineteenth century that believed in Christian morality without a Christian God to give it a basis.<sup>85</sup> Feuerbach saw the ground of morality as the natural kinship of man with man rather than of man with an abstract God.<sup>86</sup> If morality was dependent upon God for its goodness, then it would be nothing without God. Feuerbach called for a morality for morality's sake and love for love's sake. Man was good, and if given the chance, would demonstrate that he was indeed good.

By criticizing Christianity Feuerbach hoped to demonstrate two things. First, he wanted to show that the real essence of Christianity was the worship of the human species, and second, he wanted to show that if this essence were realized, then heaven could be achieved here on earth. Feuerbach did not attempt to say that religion was pointless.

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<sup>84</sup> Robert C. Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 92.

<sup>85</sup> Hook, Hegel to Marx, p. 50.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.



He realized that there were aspects even more important than to merely recognize, for instance, that man could love, forgive, and will. He insisted that these attributes of man could not reach the ultimate unless they were incorporated in his idea of religion.<sup>87</sup> However, this religion was not Christianity or any other god-oriented religion. It was Feuerbach's new religion which held man to be the center of all worship. If love, forgiveness, and will, for example, were recognized in that religion, then these characteristics would bloom to their upmost heights. In other words, he recognized certain elements in religion that he considered true and he tried to hold on to these elements. At the same time he hoped to eliminate the false aspects of religion, the attributing of the truths of religion to a being separated from man. Since man really worshipped man, this worship should be direct and not round about.<sup>88</sup> Feuerbach called for human dignity in The Essence of Christianity. By casting off the false aspects of religion and recognizing the truth of its positive aspects, man would no longer find it necessary to humble and degrade himself. He could and would rise to his fullest heights in his love for other men.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works in Two Volumes (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 2:379.

<sup>88</sup> Melvin Chernov, Introduction in The Essence of Faith According to Luther (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967), p. 12.

<sup>89</sup> Michael Gagern, "The Puzzling Pattern of the Marxist Critique of Feuerbach," Studies in Soviet Thought 11 (1971):153.

As love united understanding and will, it united all that faith, creed, and opinion separated. In prayer man expressed his wishes, wants, fears; asked for forgiveness and felt forgiven because the love in his own heart forgave and comforted him. This unalienated man, a logical outcome of Feuerbach's critique of Christianity, would be naturally good.



## CHAPTER III

### CRITIQUE OF RELIGION

After The Essence of Christianity was published Feuerbach was attacked from all sides. Theologians and many philosophers in Germany jumped at him and attempted to tear him apart. The Prussian government disapproved and began to ban his works. Also, with the appearance of The Essence of Christianity, the last hopes that Feuerbach may have had for obtaining a position at a university were quelled. Feuerbach felt that, in many ways, his critics had misunderstood him. Therefore, in the second edition of The Essence of Christianity he tried to be clearer and expand some of his thoughts. He also included many more quotations from Luther in an attempt to show Protestant theologians and the government that what he was saying was essentially the same as Luther had said three hundred years before him.<sup>1</sup> Feuerbach was not so presumptuous as to suggest that Luther had made exactly the same statements as he, but was sure that if one read Luther from his viewpoint, one would indeed see that Luther and he were saying essentially the same thing.

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<sup>1</sup>Glasse, "Why did Feuerbach Concern Himself with Luther?", p. 374.

The second edition of The Essence of Christianity, however, also came under heavy fire from all quarters. According to Engels in his Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, only the young Hegelians praised Feuerbach. Engels pointed out that Feuerbach was accepted with great enthusiasm and that his effect was liberating.<sup>2</sup> Feuerbach demonstrated how to escape the bonds of Hegel's idealism without ignoring it. He cut the chains and swept away the cobwebs.

However, there were some criticisms that Feuerbach must have considered legitimate because he attempted to iron them out. The product of this labor was originally two works: The Essence of Faith According to Luther, and The Essence of Religion. At a later time he expanded The Essence of Religion in a series of lectures. (These are published under the title: Lectures on the Essence of Religion.)

The serious criticisms against Feuerbach came from two different directions. First, one came from those who realized that Feuerbach could be correct in many ways. Their attitude was that Feuerbach had explained to them the essence of Christianity. Even if this idea of Christianity, as explained by Feuerbach, were correct, his critics felt that it was necessary for Feuerbach, to also explain the reasons

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<sup>2</sup>Marx and Engels, Basic Writings on Politics of Philosophy, ed. Lewis S. Feuer (Garden City, N.Y.:Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1959), p. 205.



for the evolution of religion. If Feuerbach were not successful here, then ultimately his critique of Christianity would not be valid. Since Feuerbach started his critique of Christianity with man, his critics felt that he had left himself in the realm of the subject. Because he had no origin for religion, they felt that the possibility of a divine maker was not eliminated. All that was undercut was a divine maker as described by Christian dogma; he could be discarded.<sup>3</sup> According to the critics, Feuerbach was not talking about universal man, but about those men with whom he came in contact. He was dealing with their subjective desires and wishes. He was talking about Europeans prior and during his time and not about other men and other religions. His critics felt that, since he was talking about a small group of select men, he could not assume that all men were the same, and thus there was the possibility of a true religion somewhere, or the possibility of one's arising. If Feuerbach could show a ground for religion, i.e., a ground that all forms of religion shared, regardless of the stage of civilization, then he could avoid this criticism.

In The Essence of Christianity Feuerbach had tried to demonstrate that the roots of the Christian religion lay in the socio-psychological environment of the Christian

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<sup>3</sup>Reirz, Jr., "Feuerbach on the Essence of Religion," p. 182.

people. Religion became an expression of the Christian community's wishes and wants.<sup>4</sup> One can see that this demonstration would not be an adequate explanation for some of the more primitive forms of religion. Feuerbach realized this fact and attempted to find a more adequate explanation that would fit all religions.

The second criticism was one that gave Feuerbach a more difficult time than the first. He really never did solve it adequately. Even those who originally supported him, i.e., Engels, Marx, Hess, etc., detected this problem and attempted to point it out to him. In The Essence of Christianity Feuerbach demonstrated what was the real essence of Christianity. He showed that God was a rational, loving, willing being, and that God was all goodness, the supreme Good. God possessed all these qualities; therefore, the species of man contained them also. How could Feuerbach connect the individual man, who was not all good, rational, willing, and loving, with the essence of his species? Hegel could not connect the individual man with the Absolute Mind, according to Feuerbach, and likewise, according to Feuerbach's critics, Feuerbach could not connect the individual man with the essence of man. Feuerbach recognized this problem and attempted to solve it. However, he finally concluded that it would be forever a source of logical difficulty. If he did not connect the individual with the species

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<sup>4</sup>Hook, Hegel to Marx, p. 113.



adequately, he would make the individual an abstract being- but if he put everything that was in the species into the individual, he would end with an absurdity.<sup>5</sup> It is absurd to think that all the good qualities or all the bad qualities of the species could end up in one individual of the species.<sup>6</sup>

These were the two problems Feuerbach sought to solve in his critique of religion. One can see that the first critique was primarily a theological one and the second critique a philosophical one. He attempted to solve the first one by finding a common ground for all religion, and the second one by stressing the individual wishes, wants, and desires instead of those of the species as he had done in The Essence of Christianity.<sup>7</sup> The Essence of Religion and Lectures on the Essence of Religion primarily stressed the first problem, and The Essence of Faith According to Luther primarily dealt with the second one. Feuerbach, however, never really did deal with the second criticism because he could do nothing with it. He felt that if he could demonstrate that Luther's thought agreed with him, some of his critics would be silenced because eventually

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<sup>5</sup>Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, p. 55.

<sup>6</sup>See Chapter one, page 26 . Feuerbach asked, in reference to Hegel's philosophy, if all philosophy, art, etc., could culminate in one person.

<sup>7</sup>Cherno, Introduction in The Essence of Faith According to Luther, p. 15.

they would be criticizing their religious father. Feuerbach answered both problems in a theological way and he quietly ignored the criticisms of his fellow philosophers.

Feuerbach would have been able to avoid the first criticism in The Essence of Christianity if he had started with what he had said was the beginning of philosophy. In his critique of Hegel he said that one had to begin philosophy with the senses, but in The Essence of Christianity he began with man and left out much of the sensuous world. In Lectures on the Essence of Religion he returned to the completely sensuous, i.e., nature. If man were to be a complete being, then he had to be in direct communion with nature. It was only then that he could rid himself of all supernatural possibilities such as a divine maker outside the realm of dogmatic Christianity.<sup>8</sup> Early in his lectures Feuerbach stated why he ignored nature in The Essence of Christianity, and how he was going to remedy the problem. The Essence of Christianity dealt only with the essence of man because Christianity dealt only with man. The Christian did not recognize nature in regard to his religion. The Christian did not worship the sun, moon, etc. Because the Christian believed in miracles, which were antithetical to nature, the Christian considered himself above nature and he considered his religion as being anti-natural.

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<sup>8</sup>Feuerbach, Lectures on the Essence of Religion, p.4.



One can trace the rise of Christianity through man alone. However, if one wants to trace the rise of religion itself, one must look beyond man. One must look at man's relationship to nature to find the cause of religion.<sup>9</sup> Such was the goal of his lectures and The Essence of Religion. To accomplish this goal he had to discover what was the essence of this relationship between man and nature that caused man to posit a being outside of nature and worship it.

This reason for religion, Feuerbach felt, was based on man's feeling of dependency. He found that feeling of dependency primarily in man's feeling of helplessness. Man was conscious of his helplessness and he realized that in the face of nature he was nothing and could do nothing without help. Feuerbach's idea of dependency was not the same as that of Schleiermacher. He was not interested in man's dependency on a mystical being but rather on an empirical one.<sup>10</sup> What was it, then upon which man first felt a dependence? Man first felt dependent on nature.<sup>11</sup> It was with nature that man first came in contact. It was with nature that he had to live and against which he had to protect himself. The original dependency on nature was, however, not just any kind. It was, according to Feuerbach, a product of fear. Fear was that element in man that caused him to

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20.

<sup>10</sup>Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, p. 41.

<sup>11</sup>Feuerbach, Lectures on the Essence of Religion, p. 25.

posit a supreme or greater-than-man being. An event would take place in nature that the primitive man would not be able to understand. If a boulder fell onto a man and killed him, chance was not given the benefit for the act. It was the act of some supernatural force. Even when the gods became somewhat personalized, the major gods were still those that produced the most fear in man. The gods representing the ocean, thunder, and lightening were the first of the great personalized gods.<sup>12</sup> Thor, the first wide-spread god of the Norsemen, was the god of thunder, and Zeus, the most powerful of the Greek gods, used the lightening bolt as his weapon to assure himself of his position. Feuerbach therefore perceived fear as the first essential reason why man turned to gods. Man feared nature, but tended to personalize some aspects of it because nature was also good to him. Even those gods that man feared were good to him. Did not the rain accompany thunder and lightening? Rain is one of the sources of life. Did not the savages and primitive people ask their gods to intervene for them during wars, etc.? The source of fear, let us say the thunder god, was also the source of joy. Men were joyful when they offered sacrifices to the gods and the gods did not get angry with them. Only when the god was angry did man fear him openly, and when he was no longer angry their joy would rebound doubled and tripled.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-27.      <sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 30-31.



Fear was not the only basis for religion. It was only the beginning, the first form of dependency, since there were also the elements of joy, utility, etc. In other words, man tended to worship that which had the ability to keep him alive and also take his life. For example, let us say, there is a small boy who buys candy everyday, and one day a bully confronts him and demands some of the candy. The boy will give up his candy out of fear. He will sacrifice some of his candy to make the bully pleased. Is not the sacrificing of the candy much like sacrifices in religion? The boy will keep giving the bully candy as long as he feels that the bully has his life in his hands. The bully can either make him happy or unhappy, harm him or help him. Let us say that this bully also obtains candy or other things from five or six of the original boy's friends and one day none of them show up to give him their dues. He goes to look for them and finds that they are involved in a conflict with another group of boys. This second group is attempting to take away from the first boys what the bully considers his, so he intervenes to help his group. Thus, the idea of utility is introduced. The bully helps when he wants to do so and he is justly rewarded. Also, if the bully is well known, these boys may just say, "if you don't leave us alone then we will tell so and so and he will take care of you."

Religion eventually advanced to this stage of utility. The pagans were not the only ones that recognized this necessity. When the Christians ridiculed the pagans they did not

ridicule their method. They attacked only their objects of religion. The pagans were correct in worshipping that which helped them or benefited them but what the pagans failed to see was that it was the Christian God that was the real benefactor. This God was the cause of all causes. Christians could understand and accept this fact because they utilized a thinking process that was much more abstract than the pagans. The pagans were connected to the earth much more closely than were the Christians, so they did not speak of an abstract god.<sup>14</sup> Augustine, in the City of God, declared that if a being dwelled in heaven and did not love man or wished man's happiness, then that being did not deserve man's worship.<sup>15</sup> God had to be able to be utilized for man's own purpose.

One can see animal worship developing from the concept of utility. Man tended to worship those animals which were beneficial to him. In ancient Egypt one was punished by death for killing a cat because there was such a rat problem. Cats were considered sacred.<sup>16</sup> Persians worshipped the dog because he protected them from wild beasts and robbers.<sup>17</sup> Feuerbach felt that all of man's religious ideas were the product of the struggles of both of the species and individuals with nature, as in the case with the Egyptians and the Persians. With this view in mind it is easy to see

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 58-59.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 48.



the rise of nature-gods, animal-gods, and gods in human form.<sup>18</sup> All of them satisfied some need of man in his constant struggle with nature.

Feuerbach, however, used the idea of dependency very loosely. He used it mainly in two ways, in a cognitive sense and in an emotional sense. The emotional way was primarily man's feeling of helplessness, but the cognitive way was much more spontaneous. Man attached himself, according to Feuerbach, to those things that caught his eye. Therefore, there were in some religions, the worship of objects that were harmful to man.<sup>19</sup> This practice arose because these objects still satisfied a need in man, the need to study and to have his curiosity satisfied.

As Feuerbach attempted to show the grounds for religion, he also attempted to show how it evolved. In other words, he wanted to show how man advanced from primitive religion to a complex religion such as Christianity. If he could trace this evolution, then his critique of Christianity would remove all possibility of a divine maker. In The Essence of Christianity Feuerbach attacked the theologizing of religion, and he somewhat repeated this approach in the Lectures on the Essence of Religion. Nature religions were good, as far as Feuerbach was concerned, so long as they

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<sup>18</sup>Dirk J. Struick, ed. annotated Introduction, Birth of the Communist Manifesto (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 40.

<sup>19</sup>Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, pp. 41-42.

recognized man as an integral part of nature. As soon as they took man out of nature and placed him above it or below it, then they were harmful. According to Feuerbach, in the process of making nature greater than or less than man, religion perverted both man and nature.<sup>20</sup> The Hindus worshipped cattle to such a degree that they would starve before they ate beef. This practice, Feuerbach would say, was a very negative aspect of their religion. Man had to respect nature, but he could not neglect himself for the sake of a particular element of nature. Both nature religions and pantheism eventually made too much of nature, and Christianity neglected it completely.<sup>21</sup> One reason why man may have elected one or the other of the above approaches was to avoid a feeling of insignificance. If, to a god, man could sacrifice an object of personal value, then the man, as the sacrificer, felt some personal worth. Also, if he went in the opposite direction, to the belief that he was superior to nature and he believed in a supernatural god, then once again he became significant. God would then be for man alone and above nature.

There was evidence, said Feuerbach, that neither the pagans nor the Christians could deal with the idea of being insignificant.<sup>22</sup> Pantheism could not be accepted because a pantheistic god was an indifferent god, whereas nature

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<sup>20</sup>Feuerbach, Lectures on the Essence of Religion, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 37.      <sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 60-61.



religions that went to the extreme had to be rejected because in these man became so overwhelmed with his worship of nature that the concept of utility was lost. Man, in that case where the concept of utility was lost, would be destroyed by the essence of the being which was the object of his worship. Some religions allowed their members to be eaten by tigers, bitten by snakes, etc., and when a member was destroyed, it was a good and joyful sign.<sup>23</sup>

Religion had its foundation in two origins: nature and man, i.e., the struggle of man with nature. The first bit of evidence for its beginning was fear, but that rapidly gave way to joy and happiness. From joy one moved very easily into the concept of utility. Out of utility, Feuerbach felt the idea of the one god was eventually born. An indifferent god was certainly not a god that had man's happiness in mind for such a god did not consciously do things for man. Man's inability to deal with an indifferent god was a product of man's egotism, according to Feuerbach. Brief periods or moments of egotism might have been alright, but eventually this egotism got out of hand. Thus man's ego allowed him to posit a god that was for him alone and completely supernatural. This god was the Christian god.<sup>24</sup>

Feuerbach also detected and described two different stages in human history. In one stage men were primitive and their religion reflected this condition. These men made

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

physical sacrifices and worshipped physical gods. Their gods, as tangible beings, could be seen, heard, and felt. The primitive people saw lightening, heard thunder, etc. They saw physical evidence that confirmed their gods. In the second stage of history man became socialized. He no longer depended primarily on nature but depended on other men. In his socialized state his dependency became something hidden and secret, that is, in the heart. His god also became something secret and in the heart. He no longer had a physical god, and in most cases he no longer worshipped it with physical sacrifices. In other words, man's religion reflected his development within society.

In the ultimate sense, then, it is always man and his needs that are the ground of religion, the terms in which it is to be understood. As man changes, religion changes. Man ceases to be wild, primitive, determined (as Feuerbach believes) by momentary impressions and feelings and comes to be governed by laws. Religion, following suit, ceases to portray nature-gods as arbitrary, capricious, inexplicable--it makes them exercise understanding and reason and subject their own will to principles.<sup>25</sup>

Monotheism was evidence of man's final liberation from nature, and his move from focusing on the outer world to the inner world.<sup>26</sup>

If one traces the history of sacrifice, one will see that it culminates in Christianity. In pagan religions, sacrifices were an element of the human ego. A man would make a

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<sup>25</sup>Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, p. 44.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 45.



sacrifice so that he could appease the gods. His sacrifice was an attempt to buy a place in heaven or a place with the gods. The pagans had physical gods so they made physical sacrifices. In Christianity the sacrifice was still very real, but its method and means had changed. "Just as Christianity had replaced the visible sensuous corporal gods with an invisible God, so it has replaced visible, tangible human sacrifices with an invisible, nonsensuous but no less real human sacrifice."<sup>27</sup> Feuerbach was referring to sacrifices of the human will or spirit, sacrifices he called psychological sacrifices. He felt that there was no difference between physical sacrifices and psychological ones. According to Feuerbach, psychological sacrifices were as useless as physical sacrifices.<sup>28</sup> St. Francis, Feuerbach would have said was an excellent example of one who made psychological sacrifices.

After Feuerbach felt that he had adequately demonstrated how all religions rose from common grounds, he had to show why certain elements in all of these religions were approximately the same, i.e., he had to consider the idea of good and evil. To answer this question one can return to Feuerbach's actual split from Hegel and the advent of his materialism. In Hegelian philosophy, all that was real was considered a product of the Absolute Mind. After Feuerbach

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<sup>27</sup> Feuerbach, Lectures on the Essence of Religion, p.73.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

turned Hegelian philosophy around everything became merely a form of matter. The mind was considered by Feuerbach as the highest form of matter, but not as something separate from it.<sup>29</sup> Hegel's being and non-being, thus his Absolute Mind, had, according to Feuerbach, only theoretical reality. Feuerbach stressed the fact that thought was a part of man and therefore man could not be derived from it. Likewise man was a part of nature and therefore in turn, nature could not be derived from thought.<sup>30</sup> The body and soul had to be considered together. One could not separate the two as the Hegelians attempted to do.<sup>31</sup>

Feuerbach's materialism was the end of his metaphysical philosophy. He moved out of the realm of idealism by asserting that nature was that which did exist. His thought became much more scientific and he considered scientific knowledge as supreme.<sup>32</sup> Because of this view, the sensuous world was considered first by Feuerbach, not man or God. Since it was first it could not be derived from any other source. Sensibility could not come from human intellect, however the intellect was nothing without the senses. Intellect had nothing to grasp if the senses did not gather

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<sup>29</sup>Marx and Engels, Selected Works, p. 373.

<sup>30</sup>A. A. Mitiushin, "Feuerbach's Philosophy of Man and the Problem of the Subject's Activity," Soviet Studies in Philosophy, 12:21.

<sup>31</sup>Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, p. 285.

<sup>32</sup>Hook, Hegel to Marx, pp. 28-29.



information for it, and God was nothing but the total of all spirit. Therefore God was nothing without the senses. He could only be derived from the senses.<sup>33</sup> Evidence for this belief was the fact that some of the early gods that man worshipped were really reflections of his own natural organs. When man worshipped light he was really worshipping the divinity of his own eyes. The different gods man unconsciously worshipped reflected different organs of his body.<sup>34</sup> God's power was also derived from nature. The destructive power in nature was attributed to Him as His power. God's infiniteness was a reflection of man's intellect and man's intellect was an element of nature. All that God was, or could be, was derived from nature. His goodness was derived from those events that were beneficial to man, those elements that were, in themselves, good for man. If a man had good weather for his crops, then it was because God made it good. Evil was derived in much the same way. Man attributed to the Devil all those things that were, in themselves, harmful to him.<sup>35</sup> All moral concepts were derived in this way, according to Feuerbach.<sup>36</sup>

Feuerbach felt that he had eliminated all confusion about his views of religion and Christianity in The Essence

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<sup>33</sup>Feuerbach, Lectures on the Essence of Religion, pp. 86-87.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 88

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 111.      <sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

of Religion, and The Essence of Faith According to Luther, both works being rather brief. However, by the time he delivered his lectures in 1852 he had to accept the fact that his former works had not silenced the critics. He spent quite a bit of time in Lectures on the Essence of Religion trying to solve this problem, but an equal amount of time was spent on restating the essence of Christianity. The Essence of Christianity was his greatest work and he never seemed to be able to get away from it.

Close to the end of his lectures he stated that a religious man had two roads that he could choose to follow. By one road he could profess God and deny nature or at least natural causes. On this road he would also have to deny man. By the other he could profess nature and man and do away with God.<sup>37</sup> The latter was, according to Feuerbach, the correct view. If the latter method were followed, then man would be able to reconcile religion with the sciences. Nothing would be accepted or believed that violated the scientific mind. If the first road were taken then contradictions between science and religion would be ever present. Any form of abstract science, such as Hegel's phenomenology, according to Feuerbach, was wrong. Only the natural sciences had the ability to restore man to what he should be, i.e., man "with all his powers and senses."<sup>38</sup> Even the pagans understood this

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 161-162.

<sup>38</sup>Feuerbach, Fiery Brook, p. 285.



viewpoint much better than the Christians. They understood and accepted only that which was confirmed by the senses. If something were to be considered true, Feuerbach asserted, then its inner and outer nature had to coincide.<sup>39</sup> In other words, what man believed and what he gathered by his senses had to coincide.

Feuerbach believed in the sensuous world to such an extent that he even thought that the nature of a diet, for instance, could control man's ability to function. He believed that the Revolution of 1848 was lost because of the potato diet of the German workers.<sup>40</sup> Feuerbach declared that man was what he ate.

Feuerbach's critique of religion in general was posited to defend his critique of Christianity. He established the ground of religion but he could not answer the second objection, i.e., that he had left man as an abstract being. As we shall see in the next chapter, that objection haunted him and was the center of most philosophical attacks against him.

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Hook, Hegel to Marx, p. 114.

## CHAPTER IV

### PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUES OF FEUERBACH

Ludwig Feuerbach's works can be treated either as philosophy or theology. He insisted that they be treated as works of philosophy, but at the same time he said that the overall concern in his works was theology. Under these circumstances it seems that it will be valuable to look at his works in both a philosophical and a theological manner. By treating his works in both ways, one will see that they are subject to criticisms from both fields of study. One may insist that if Feuerbach could be destroyed philosophically, then there would be no grounds for his theology, and in some respects this situation might be true. However, the most influential philosophical attacks against him, the ones developed by Marx and Engels, did not accept his philosophy completely, but, in most points concerning his insights into the illusory nature of religion, they agreed with him. Likewise, to demonstrate problems with his theology may leave his philosophy untenable. To really understand the problem with Feuerbach's works, one must take into account both the philosophical and theological critiques and attempt to bring them together.

The object of the criticisms presented in this



chapter will be to demonstrate that Feuerbach's view of man had some serious flaws. The criticisms will be presented in several parts. First, I should like to point out one criticism of my own that I do not believe Feuerbach's critics recognized. Second I should like to point out the criticisms from the left wing Hegelians, i.e., Hess, Stirner, Marx, and Engels, on Feuerbach's view of man. Third, some discussion will be presented on his view of materialism as it affects his ideas of man, i.e., did Feuerbach ever really escape Hegelian philosophy? The last criticism that will be discussed is one pointed out by Nietzsche. In some ways it has common points with the first one.

The first objection was touched on briefly in chapter one. I do not believe Feuerbach's contemporaries recognized the implications of this criticism. It may have been a case where they were just as guilty as Feuerbach. In that event, they would not recognize the existence of a fault at all. Briefly I must allude to Feuerbach's critique of Hegelianism.

Feuerbach insisted that Hegel's system was circular in nature. He insisted that Hegel had presupposed the Absolute Mind and then deduced a proof for it out of that presupposition. Thus, Hegel moved from a disguised Absolute Mind to pure-being, and then to non-being, via the dialectic. Finally, he achieved the fully illuminated Absolute Mind. Hegel's procedure, Feuerbach insisted, left his system in a dubious state. Feuerbach believed that he had avoided this sort of doubt by destroying Hegel's idealism and replacing

it with his materialism. However one must ask, did Feuerbach really begin his philosophy with the abolition of Hegel's idealism? I think not. The disciples of Hegel were becoming more and more aware of Germany's political plight in the nineteenth century. Germany existed not as a nation, but as a group of smaller states. Its social conditions were becoming worse and worse, the aristocracy ruled and the workers felt the aristocracy's heavy hand in all walks of life, especially in their labor.

It seems possible that Feuerbach's philosophy really began with the misery of man. Feuerbach recognized this suffering and it seems that he asked himself what supported this misery, what prevented mankind from eliminating the suffering of human beings? His answer was idealism, especially Hegelianism and Christian theology.

Although his philosophy was not rendered invalid, several presuppositions, which Feuerbach did not realize he held, were brought to light. Just as Hegel began with the Absolute Mind, and thus presupposed it, Feuerbach began with the suffering of man and presupposed that man was not meant to suffer, that is, it was below man's being to suffer,

Feuerbach's efforts throughout his work were directed toward an attempt to show that the real essence of man was that of God. He said he presented the truth of man's essence by merely putting into sensible language what religion made mysterious. If my claim is true, however, then Feuerbach already recognized man as identical with God, and his look at



religion was an attempt to demonstrate this hypothesis as true. Therefore, he no longer let religion speak for itself, but imposed on religion what he believed to be truth.

(Barth's critique of Feuerbach in his Church Dogmatics is similar to this one.) Thus, Feuerbach already believed man and God were the same. He then went about proving the truth of this belief in the same manner that Hegel demonstrated the truth of the Absolute Mind. One can see that Feuerbach's philosophy may not have been as secure and true as he believed it to be, simply because he did not see his own presuppositions. What the matter finally came to was this: did Feuerbach really see Reason, Will, and Affection in all men, or did he place it there because he felt that all men had it? It seems that the latter was the case. Feuerbach saw man as basically good and God-like. He believed that he saw this characteristic in mankind. My contention is that he did not see it in mankind but merely placed it there. Because of his assumptions, Feuerbach enabled himself to posit certain ideas about man that might not, and, as one looks at twentieth century man, do not seem to be valid.

Feuerbach's view of man was also at the center of the criticisms of his fellow philosophers. Feuerbach recognized the alienated human being that Hegel pointed out, but he did not believe that Hegelian philosophy eliminated this alienation. Hegel's idealism merely disguised the alienation by placing its essence in the realm of Mind. Feuerbach believed, however, that by turning Hegel's philosophy around

and exposing its hidden truth, he would have the key to eliminating this alienation.<sup>1</sup> As was demonstrated in The Essence of Christianity, Feuerbach believed he had returned man to man. Two questions in The Essence of Christianity, however, were not answered adequately by Feuerbach, according to his critics. These two questions brought forth the greatest problem Feuerbach had with his philosophy and they lay close to the heart of most of the philosophical criticisms of his work. The first question was how did Feuerbach deal with the infinite when finite man was limited. The second question was how did Feuerbach deal with the problem of death. One will see that these two questions also lay at the heart of most theological critiques of his work. Feuerbach answered both questions with the help of his concept of "Species-being." Man was a species-being; therefore his species was at the center of his thought and essence, according to Feuerbach. Although the individual man was finite, the species itself was infinite, and although the individual man would die, the immortality of man would be realized in the infinite life of the species through history.<sup>2</sup> Feuerbach centered all his thought around the human species, i.e., human nature. Instead of asserting God, Absolute Mind, or Ego as the

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<sup>1</sup>Robert C. Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>A. Robert Caponigri, A History of Western Philosophy, 5 vols. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971), 5:66-68.



abstract element of idealism, he postulated "human nature" as that element. However, and this is the key to the criticisms, he could do nothing with human nature after it was developed.<sup>3</sup> Human nature was as foreign to the individual man as was God, Absolute Mind, etc. George Lukács, who is a contemporary Marxist, said that Feuerbach moved away from alienation with the concept "God" but left man alienated with the concept "species."<sup>4</sup>

Many of the young Hegelians recognized this weak point in Feuerbach's thought and criticized it. However, the outcome of this criticism was very different in most cases. One critique, developed by Max Stirner, presented a view which was much like what is now called existentialism. Many other critiques also developed along Marxian lines.

Stirner suggested that if Feuerbach's species included all men, then it must include not only good but also evil. Feuerbach, however, did not consider evil. Feuerbach believed that if man were no longer estranged from himself, then he would not be evil. Stirner also suggested that if Feuerbach tried to place the essence of man, i.e., that which was worshipped in God, in each individual then he would be involved with so many individual differences that he would have nothing. So, according to Stirner, the key to Feuerbach's problem was simply that he saw only the good in man and not

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 4:145.

<sup>4</sup>Georg Lukács, "Moses Hess and the Problems of the Idealist Dialectic," Telos (1971) 10:23.

the evil, and therefore did not recognize the real man.<sup>5</sup> Stirner solved this problem by going to another extreme. His view was that 'I alone exist'.<sup>6</sup> With this view the question of good and evil did not arise. The individual could not be alienated from his species and did not have to fit with the species because the species itself was an illusion, just as was God. Stirner felt that Feuerbach's worship of the human species was just as supernatural as the worship of those religions that he criticized.<sup>7</sup>

Moses Hess also saw the problem, but he moved in a direction opposite to Stirner. Feuerbach's man was essentially a religious species-oriented being. Because Feuerbach's man was not a social being, Hess felt that he could not and would not exist.<sup>8</sup> As far as Hess was concerned Feuerbach did not recognize the essential element in man that made him a man. Feuerbach recognized only religious consciousness and not social consciousness.

Feuerbach realized that there was essentially no reality but human reality, and thus philosophy was the self-consciousness of mankind. However, Feuerbach did not realize the implications of his own thought and ignored much of what

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<sup>5</sup>Hook, Hegel to Marx, p. 167.

<sup>6</sup>Max Stirner, "Man as Owner," in Nineteenth-Century Philosophy, ed. Patrick L. Gardiner (New York: The Free Press, 1969; London: Collier-Macmillan Limited), p. 260.

<sup>7</sup>Hook, Hegel to Marx, p. 166.

<sup>8</sup>Lukács, "Moses Hess and the Problems of the Idealist Dialectic," p. 17.



was to be considered by others as human reality.<sup>9</sup> The major mode of human reality that Feuerbach realized was religious belief and religious history. He felt that religion was the cause of man's alienation. If man wanted to become a complete human being, he would have to get rid of all religion and ideology that separated man from himself. After this separation was complete social change could take place. Marx felt, that socio-economic history was the cause of both religion and alienation in man.<sup>10</sup> According to Marx, Feuerbach saw only the theological aspects of Hegel's estrangement of man and not the socio-economic or historical aspects.<sup>11</sup> Feuerbach left out those aspects of man and misrepresented man altogether. Feuerbach recognized the fact that philosophy depended upon the age and upon all previous philosophies from which it was developed. However, according to Marx, since Feuerbach's philosophical eyes recognized and compensated for development only through religious history, he did not see the world through the eyes of the real man. Marx's real man was the man that realized that all aspects of history, including philosophical and religious history, were based on man's socio-economic conditions.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Dieter Turck, "Action vs. Contemplation: On Marx's Conception of Philosophy," Southwestern Journal of Philosophy. 3:67.

<sup>10</sup>Gagern, "The puzzling Pattern of the Marxist Critique of Feuerbach," p. 140.

<sup>11</sup>Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx, p. 125.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

Feuerbach therefore does not see that the 'religious sentiment' is itself a social product, and that the abstract individual whom he analyzes belongs to a particular form of society.<sup>13</sup>

Because Feuerbach did not recognize man in his socio-economic history, he did not recognize the real man.<sup>14</sup> Feuerbach also could not explain his man in terms of the infinite. As stated above, he could not place the infinite in the individual. However, Marx felt that he could solve this problem by positing the social man.<sup>15</sup>

The criticism from the Marxian school tends to point to the fact that Feuerbach overlooked the socio-economic historical position of man in his own existence. From this point of view, he was as guilty of what he accused Hegel, as Hegel was himself. Since Feuerbach could not connect the individual man with his species, he was left with man as a being that was isolated from other men.

Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of man. But the essence of man is not an abstraction inherent in each particular individual. The real nature of man is the totality of social relations.

Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real nature, is therefore obliged:

1. to abstract from the historical process, to hypostatize the religious sentiment, and to postulate an abstract--isolated--human individual;

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<sup>13</sup>Marx, "Thesis on Feuerbach," in Nineteenth-Century Philosophy, ed. Patrick L. Gardiner (New York: The Free Press, 1969); London: Collier-Macmillan Limited), p. 282.

<sup>14</sup>Marx and Engels, Basic Writings, p. 386.

<sup>15</sup>Paul Tillich, Perspectives on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Protestant Theology (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967), p. 140.



2. to conceive the nature of man only in terms of 'genus' as an inner and mute universal quality which unites the many individuals in a purely natural (biological) way.<sup>16</sup>

Feuerbach's 'I and thou' was recognition that man was isolated, just as the process of thinking also was a form of this recognition. In thinking, one thought that which could only be confirmed by others. Therefore a thinking being realized he was separated from the rest of reality. At the same time, since he did think, he realized that thinking itself was separated from the rest of reality. Thus Feuerbach ended with a philosophy of contemplation and interpretation.<sup>17</sup> As Marx stated in thesis number six, the only true connection between individuals was the connection between the 'I and thou'. This was primarily the connection between male and female and it could be easily reduced, as Marx did, to biological connections. Feuerbach left man with no other means to be together. Marx hoped and felt that Feuerbach should go further. Feuerbach got preoccupied with religion, according to Marx, and did not advance far enough, i.e., to the concept of praxis. Marx wanted philosophers to change reality and not merely accept it or observe it.<sup>18</sup> "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways the point is to change it."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Marx, "Thesis on Feuerbach," p. 282.

<sup>17</sup>Turck, "Action vs. Contemplation," pp. 64-65.

<sup>18</sup>Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx, p. 101.

<sup>19</sup>Marx, "Thesis on Feuerbach," p. 283.

It may be the case that if Feuerbach had been able to escape all the bonds of Hegelian idealism he would have solved his problem, but to escape Hegelianism would have meant that Feuerbach would have had to present a completely different view of man. Feuerbach's view of the species was essentially on a slightly deflated plain from Hegel's Absolute Mind. Feuerbach's species still floated around in the realm of idealism, but it was close enough to earth that the idealistic tendencies of it were well hidden. However, since Feuerbach's philosophy did grow out of Hegelianism, it naturally showed a "broad structural resemblance" to the Hegelian system.<sup>20</sup> Feuerbach's view of morality which was, based on man's relationship to man, was in reality based on love. This love, man's love for man, however, was not something that could be found in the materialistic world. It was something posited by Feuerbach from outside the world, i.e., from the mind. Since his "love ethic" was an element of idealism, his philosophy could be reduced to that.<sup>21</sup> Feuerbach held a form of idealism, well disguised with materialistic terms and ideas. Feuerbach did not attempt to abolish religion but to create a new religion. This new religion had as its basis the species. The concept of species was as idealistic, with all it constituted, as was the older concept

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<sup>20</sup>Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx, p. 92.

<sup>21</sup>Lukács, "Moses Hess and the Problems of the Idealist Dialectic," p. 17.



of God.<sup>22</sup> In the end one could conclude that Feuerbach was still very much Hegelian and an idealist.<sup>23</sup>

Feuerbach was also indirectly attacked by Nietzsche. Nietzsche attacked all who held to Christian morality without a Christian God including G. Eliot, who made the English translation of Feuerbach's second edition of The Essence of Christianity. "When one gives up the Christian faith, one pulls the right of Christian morality out from under one's feet. This morality is by no means self-evident."<sup>24</sup> Christianity was, according to Nietzsche, a complete system and when one part was taken away it would entirely collapse.<sup>25</sup> This aspect to which Nietzsche referred was essential, I believe. If Nietzsche's criticism was changed slightly, it would take one back to the original criticism that was stated. Feuerbach never attempted to defend his view of man. He never said why man should be as he was, i.e., good, rational, species-being, etc. Feuerbach's claim was that man was simply like that. Because Feuerbach perceived man as being basically good, he could very easily posit a view of morality that was based on man alone. Feuerbach simply posited man as a

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<sup>22</sup>Marx and Engels, Basic Writings, p. 378.

<sup>23</sup>Turck, "Action vs. Contemplation," p. 63.

<sup>24</sup>Frederick Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols," in The Portable Nietzsche, ed. and Introduction by Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p. 515.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

naturally moral being.

As one can see, Feuerbach was justly accused of misrepresenting man. Although he felt that he had shown man how to become unalienated, he did not do this. If Feuerbach's view of man is false, and there seem to be many aspects of twentieth century man that lead one to this conclusion, then Feuerbach's philosophy will fall. His equating of man with God stands empty and silent. All the content that implied this equality has been lost to twentieth century man.



## CHAPTER V

### THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF FEUERBACH

As one can see from the previous chapter, Feuerbach's philosophy stands on a shaky pedestal. Because Feuerbach's view of man was unsteady his theology was also rather dubious. Theologically, one may attack Feuerbach for a variety of reasons such as his use of religious language or his view of man, for instance.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I wish to discuss only two aspects of criticism against him. The key to all of Feuerbach's work, whether theological or philosophical, was his view that human nature and divine nature were identical.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, I would like to concentrate on his view of man and subsequently his view of God. Probably more than any other theologian, Karl Barth, a German, has criticized Feuerbach in a number of ways. This chapter will be based largely on his work.

Barth's criticism can be divided into two parts. First, Barth attacked Feuerbach's view of man, and postulated that man could only know God through God's grace. Second,

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<sup>1</sup>See Lawrence C. Foard, "A Problem in Ludwig Feuerbach's Theory of Religious Language," Religious Studies 9 (1973): 457-461.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Preuss, "Feuerbach on Man and God," Dialogue 11 (1972): 204.

he criticized Feuerbach's view of man's competence to question God. I believe both of Barth's critiques are valid, and show his very good understanding of Feuerbach.

Because Feuerbach believed that man's essence and God's essence were identical, Barth felt that to effectively attack Feuerbach one had to demonstrate that they were not the same. Therefore, he did not try to defend Protestantism, theology or religion, but tried to propose a view of man that would be more compatible with twentieth century man. Feuerbach's view of man was based on a nineteenth century form of thought that portrayed man as basically good. Barth did not attack Feuerbach's reading of Protestant theology because he felt that Feuerbach's interpretation was essentially correct. In fact, he used Feuerbach's thought to attack other theologians that he felt were guilty of misrepresenting God. If a theology began with man, in any sense whatsoever, then it would ascribe predicates of man to God.<sup>3</sup> Feuerbach attempted to eliminate theology completely and to rearrange religion so that it would be compatible with his view of man. Barth, in his critique of Feuerbach, separated religion and theology as Feuerbach did, but then Barth proceeded to attack religion and restate theology. Barth placed his strength and belief in faith, which was an element of theology. To him religion was, and would always be, essentially a lie. Bonhoeffer, who was

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<sup>3</sup>John Glasse, "Barth on Feuerbach," Harvard Theological Review 57 (1964):76.



influenced by Barth, also recognized that religion was essentially wrong. However, he went even further than Barth and attempted to eliminate all forms of ideology in theology. There has been some speculation that much of his Letters and Papers from Prison are an answer to Feuerbach.<sup>4</sup> Because Bonhoeffer wanted to de-ideologize theology, he attacked Barth's position of "take it or leave it" revelation. He did feel, however, that Barth was correct in attacking religion.<sup>5</sup> From the above discussion one can see that there was a basic difference among the approaches to theology of Bonhoeffer, Barth, and Feuerbach. Feuerbach started with man and thus saved the human elements, i. e., religion, whereas Barth and Bonhoeffer initially started with God and retained theology.

Although Barth's procedure might have been a "take it or leave it" position, it seems that he was still essentially correct. If one accepted any view of Christian mysticism, one would see that the mystics had no choice in the matter.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Henry Moltu, "Feuerbach and Bonhoeffer: Criticism of Religion and the Last Period of Bonhoeffer's Thought," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 25 (1960):8-9.

<sup>5</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, ed. Eberhard Bethge and trans. Reginald H. Fuller (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1953), p. 168.

<sup>6</sup>Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, trans. R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1963), p. 218.

Although Barth was not a mystic, this view of mysticism was in no way incompatible with his view.

Barth also used Feuerbach's thought in opposition to Feuerbach, himself. In Feuerbach's account of the 'new' religion, man would no longer deceive himself. He would recognize his real essence and accept it. All religions before his, Feuerbach felt, led man to be false to himself. Man told himself that he was evil, weak, etc., and that God was good, strong, etc. Barth felt that man, even in Feuerbach's new religion, would still be a liar.<sup>7</sup> Man did not know God's essence and would never know it without God's help. In other words, the only time man would stand in an honest relationship with God, with himself, and with other men was when God revealed himself to man and man accepted the revelation as such. (I shall answer Feuerbach's criticism of revelation shortly.)

The key to understanding Feuerbach's man, Barth felt, was the fact that Feuerbach, when positing his man, did not recognize death or evil in man. If one realized that man was evil and that he had to die, then one would not and could not seriously insist that man and God were identical.<sup>8</sup> As one studies or observes twentieth century man, one will recognize that it is absurd to attribute the notion of goodness to man. There is enough evil in man to conclude that the deification of man is, indeed, preposterous.

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<sup>7</sup>Glasse, "Barth on Feuerbach," p. 79.

<sup>8</sup>Barth, Forward in The Essence of Christianity, p. xxvii.



As Bonhoeffer said and Barth agreed, only God could furnish answers to questions about death, guilt, etc.<sup>9</sup> Man was not in the position to answer questions about salvation, immortality, and his place on earth.

When referring to Feuerbach's work, Barth did not explain what he meant by death. However, Feuerbach did recognize death in the individual. "I know further that I am a finite mortal being, that I shall one day cease to be. But I find this very natural and am therefore perfectly reconciled to the thought."<sup>10</sup> Feuerbach explained the immortality of the human species via the infiniteness of the life of the species throughout history. What Feuerbach did not recognize was the possibility of man's extinction. It may be that only in the turbulent and troubled twentieth century does this possibility present itself. Present-day man is decidedly different from the man that Feuerbach described and understood. Feuerbach had no basis for suggesting that the existence of the human species would not be forever. In fact, the immortality of man was important to his philosophy and theology.

As stated in the previous chapters, Feuerbach attacked a conceptualized knowledge of God. His claim was that man did not gain knowledge of God through man's own activity, but merely gained more knowledge of mankind. To

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<sup>9</sup>Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p.195.

<sup>10</sup>Feuerbach, Lectures on the Essence of Religion, p. 36.

a degree Barth re-emphasized this point. Although Barth felt that man did not gain knowledge of God as a conceptualized being, he claimed that there was still a God that could impart knowledge to man. True knowledge of God depended solely on God and not man.<sup>11</sup> Barth said that if one wanted to do away with Feuerbach, one had to admit that in the face of God one was always a liar. One always deceived oneself about the nature and truth of God. However, if one could admit that through religion he cannot know God and that his knowledge of God is only through God's grace, then he could dispense with Feuerbach.

Barth's second criticism arose directly from his first. It was based on his Christology, but it again dealt with Feuerbach's view of man. Feuerbach asked certain questions about God and Christ that Barth tried to answer. He also tried to answer the implications of those questions.

Is this supposed Prophet, who supposedly speaks to us and to whom we supposedly listen, anymore than a speaker fashioned and instituted by ourselves in order that by His imaginary existence we may affirm and strengthen ourselves, yet without His really saying or our hearing anything but what we put on His lips and thus say to ourselves?<sup>12</sup>

Such a question as the above was representative of types asked by Feuerbach. Care had to be exerted in answering

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<sup>11</sup>Niebuhr, Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion, pp. 178-179.

<sup>12</sup>Barth, Church Dogmatics, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1961) 4, 3, 1:72.



such a question, or one would end by agreeing with Feuerbach whether he intended to or not.<sup>13</sup> One could not have begun the answer from the point of view of man but had to start with God. In other words, one had to ask who really posed religious questions, or who had the competence to ask religious questions.

Who is it who asks whether it is really the case that in the witness of the Old and New Testament we have, not merely an example and analogy of the witness which we can give ourselves, but the reproduction and propagation of a self-witness which precedes and transcends all our self-witness and by which all our self-witness must be oriented.<sup>14</sup>

If one believed that man could ask questions like the above, then he would reach the same conclusions as Feuerbach, according to Barth. It would be obvious that one would be attributing to the concept of God only those predicates that one first predicated to himself. Thus, all God's properties would be ascribed to Him. Just as many others had done, Feuerbach defined God in human terms, because he thought man to be equal to God. He did not ask himself if man should ask such questions about God as the one above. If man did have the right, then, according to Barth, God would not be the light. Because man felt that he did have the right to ask questions about God and then answer them, it was obvious that man could only ascribe to God the majesty he had already ascribed to himself.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Man was in no position to think that he could prove the existence of God. If God were the first cause, the Almighty, then it was not necessary that man assert God's existence. If man had the ability to prove or disprove God, then he had raised himself essentially to God's level. God's existence and truth could only be known through His grace and revelation. Revelation, Feuerbach said, was dictated by man because God had to reveal himself to man in human terms. Surely God did impart knowledge to man through man's own intellect, but this act was not a reflection on God. It was a reflection on man. A teacher, if he wishes to be beneficial as a teacher, can only lecture to the students on their own level. Likewise, because man was limited, God chose to reveal himself so that man could understand Him. (Note: In some cases God does seem to illuminate himself in terms that all men do not and can not understand. Is not the mystic, superior to other men, in a situation such as this? God confronts the mystic in terms that other men can not understand. The mystic then has to return to the level of man and attempt to teach what he has learned of and from God.)

It is not man but Christ, as mediator between God and man, who is really asking the questions. Christ asks man if he will accept Him as the revealer of God.<sup>16</sup> Feuerbach, however, seemed to be asking the reverse of that question. It is evident that Feuerbach was asking, should one accept

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 77.



Christ as the revealer of God? Should one accept God as different than man? Feuerbach defined man as a being who was capable of placing God on a throne or taking him off of it. However, he did not show why man had this right. According to Barth, man could not question God.

For Feuerbach to be able to ask his question, he had to deny the truthfulness of both God and Christ. If one accepted God and Christ as given, one would not be able to ask such questions.<sup>17</sup> One can know the truth of divine existence through God's grace.

Grace is the election and action of God which is not to be expected or demanded by man, which cannot be provoked, let alone projected or produced by him, but simply comes to him, which affects and determines him, which is quite undeserved but addressed to him without and in spite of his deserving.<sup>18</sup>

God revealed his grace to man in much the same way as God addressed himself to the Christian mystic. The mystic did not choose or ask God to let him become a mystic. God drew the mystic in and the mystic had no choice in the matter.<sup>19</sup>

Barth's criticism against Feuerbach was effective and, when the common elements between it and some of the philosophical criticism were placed together, Feuerbach could be silenced. Feuerbach did, from the beginning of his philosophy, presuppose a man that was equal to God.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 80-81.      <sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 81-82.

<sup>19</sup> Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, p. 220.

Herein lay the problem with his thought. He had no reason to presuppose such a man, to suppose that all men were equal, good, and identical with God. Because he did accept this position, he could have no God but the one he created.

The gaining of knowledge about God through revelation, divine grace, or mystical experience is a legitimate way of learning to know God. Furthermore, these methods illuminate the fact that God and man are not identical. If, from this argument, man and God are not one, then Feuerbach does not ultimately have anything to say about the nature of God.



## CONCLUSION

The intent of this work has not been an attempt to cover every aspect or every influence of Ludwig Feuerbach's thought. Rather, this study has been, basically, a look at Feuerbach's work in theology and consequently his view of man. Hopefully, it will enable one to have a better understanding of Feuerbach's thought and position.

Although, ultimately, Feuerbach's philosophy and theology must be rejected, his insights into the nature of man and religion are very important. His place in the history of philosophy should not be ignored. Feuerbach's method as a philosopher was not like that of Hegel. Feuerbach was not a system builder and did not attempt to be one. He invited others to open their eyes and see the world, and to study nature and man in a scientific way.<sup>1</sup> Feuerbach proclaimed a "senito ergo sum" instead of a "cogito ergo sum."<sup>2</sup>

Theologically, Feuerbach's influence may still be seen. His thought is reflected, for example, by the radical secularization theologians, the death-of-God theologians

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<sup>1</sup>Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup>Hook, Hegel to Marx, p. 225.

and the writers of the humanist manifestos.<sup>3</sup> In instances such as these, one could say that Feuerbach won. His concerns for humanity, and not God or heaven, are alive in these groups today.

Also, Feuerbach's challenge to theologians still is important. He brought forth several questions that theologians still have difficulty answering. Bonhoeffer said that Feuerbach asked the theologians to prove the truth of their statements, and to dictate how theology would agree with real human life.<sup>4</sup> However, theologians still cannot, in many cases, show how theology will accord with every day life. With this situation, man is even now very much alienated from himself and others.

Along philosophical lines, Feuerbach's influence is much stronger but not always recognized. Many of the existentialists and Marxists, such as Stirner, Kierkegaard, Hess, Marx, and Engels, were all influenced by Feuerbach.<sup>5</sup> He showed them how to advance beyond Hegel by opening holes in Hegel's system that they could grasp and expand in their own directions. Feuerbach's critique of Hegel convinced Marx that he should return to Hegel and de-mythologize him. Marx approached this problem in a Feuerbachian manner.

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<sup>3</sup>Peter Hebblethwaite, "Feuerbach's Letter: Lesek Kolakowski and Iris Murdoch," Hythrope Journal 13 (1972):143.

<sup>4</sup>Moltu, "Feuerbach and Bonheoffer," p. 5.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 2.



Feuerbach's philosophy did not replace Hegel's system. However, in many ways, Feuerbach pointed out the truth of Hegel's system, truth that Hegel himself did not see.<sup>6</sup> Marx saw this truth, returned to Hegel, and applied Feuerbach's method to all of Hegel's thought. Feuerbach's conclusions in themselves did not influence other philosophers. It was his method, i.e., his quick insights into the nature of religion and Hegelianism that did produce an influence. If one wanted to seriously study the evolution of Marx's thought he would have to first study and understand Feuerbach.<sup>7</sup>

Not many of the philosophers, after Feuerbach, saw religion as a projection of man's own nature, but they did, with the help of Feuerbach, see religion in a different light. Marxists saw it as a form of ideology that was used to reinforce class interests, Freud saw it as an illegitimate strategy of human drives and desires, and Nietzsche saw it as a "vampire-like-idol" that drained away all of man's strength.<sup>8</sup>

Without Feuerbach these thoughts might have been presented eventually, but with his philosophy to point the way, it was much easier for others to find the path.

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<sup>6</sup>Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx, pp.97-98.

<sup>7</sup>Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, p.150.

<sup>8</sup>Moltu, "Feuerbach and Bonheoffer," p. 9.

Although, in many cases, nineteenth century philosophers might not have been aware of whom they were following, Feuerbach was an important element in their study of the transition from Hegel to much of modern existentialism and Marxism.

One might say of Feuerbach....that his thought is much like a series of lightening-flashes on a dark night, illuminating for those who already had some conception of the way but only blinding and confusing for those who had not. Those who did see had to find the rest of the way for themselves.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, p. 149.



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