

Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach

Education

Feuerbach matriculated in the University of Heidelberg with the intention of pursuing a career in the Church. Through the influence of Prof. Karl Daub he was led to an interest in the then predominant philosophy of Hegel and, in spite of his father's opposition, enrolled in the University of Berlin, in order to study under the master himself. After twenty two years, the Hegelian influence began to slacken. Feuerbach became associated with a group known as the Young Hegelians, alternately known as the Left Hegelians, who synthesized a radical offshoot of Hegelian philosophy, interpreting Hegel's dialectic march of spirit through history to mean that existing Western culture and institutional forms—and, in particular, Christianity—would be superseded. "Theology," he wrote to a friend, "I can bring myself to study no more. I long to take nature to my heart, that nature before whose depth the faint-hearted theologian shrinks back; and with nature man, man in his entire quality." These words are a key to Feuerbach's development. He completed his education at Erlangen, at the Friedrich-Alexander-University, Erlangen-Nuremberg with the study of natural science.

Das Wesen des Christentums (The Essence of Christianity)

In part I of his book Feuerbach developed what he calls the "true or anthropological essence of religion." Treating of God in his various aspects "as a being of the understanding," "as a moral being or law," "as love" and so on. Feuerbach talks of how man is equally a conscious being, more so than God because man has placed upon God the ability of understanding. Man contemplates many things and in doing so he becomes acquainted with himself. Feuerbach shows that in every aspect God corresponds to some feature or need of human nature. "If man is to find contentment in God," he claims, "he must find himself in God."

Thus God is nothing else than man: he is, so to speak, the outward projection of man's inward nature. This projection is dubbed as a chimaera by Feuerbach, that God and the idea of a higher being is dependent upon the aspect of benevolence. Feuerbach states that, "a God who is not benevolent, not just, not wise, is no God," and continues to say that qualities are not suddenly denoted as divine because of their godly association. The qualities themselves are divine therefore making God divine, indicating that man is capable of understanding and applying meanings of divinity to religion and not that religion makes a man divine.

The force of this attraction to religion though, giving divinity to a figure like God, is explained by Feuerbach as God is a being that acts throughout man in all forms. God, "is the principle of [man's] salvation, of [man's] good dispositions and actions, consequently [man's] own good principle and nature." It appeals to man to give qualities to the idol of their religion because without these qualities a figure such as God would become merely an object, its importance would become obsolete, there would no longer be a feeling of an existence for God. Therefore, Feuerbach says, when man removes all qualities from God, "God is no longer anything more to him than a negative being." Additionally, because man is imaginative, God is given traits and there holds the appeal. God is a part of man through the invention of a God. Equally though, man is repulsed by God because, "God alone is the being who acts of himself."

In part 2 he discusses the "false or theological essence of religion," i.e. the view which regards God as having a separate existence over against man. Hence arise various mistaken beliefs, such as the belief in revelation which he believes not only injures the moral sense, but also "poisons, nay destroys, the divinest feeling in man, the sense of truth," and the belief in sacraments such as the

Lord's Supper, which is to him a piece of religious materialism of which "the necessary consequences are superstition and immorality."

Part 2 comes to a crux though by seemingly retracting previous statements. Feuerbach claims that God's only action is, "the moral and eternal salvation of man: thus man has in fact no other aim than himself," because man's actions are placed upon God. Feuerbach also contradicts himself by claiming that man gives up his personality and places it upon God who in turn is a selfish being. This selfishness turns onto man and projects man to be wicked and corrupt, that they are, "incapable of good," and it is only God that is good, "the Good Being." In this way Feuerbach detracts from many of his earlier assertions while showing the alienation that takes place in man by worshipping God. Feuerbach affirms that goodness is, "personified as God," turning God into an object because if God was anything but an object nothing would need to be personified on him. The aspect of objects having previously been discussed; in that man contemplates objects and that objects themselves give conception of what externalizes man. Therefore if God is good so then should be man because God is merely an externalization of man because God is an object. However religion would show that man is inherently corrupt. Feuerbach tries to lessen his inconsistency by asking if it was possible if, "I could perceive the beauty of a fine picture if my mind were aesthetically an absolute piece of perversion?" Through Feuerbach's reasoning it would not be possible but it is possible and he later states that man is capable of finding beauty.

The "New" Philosophy

there are certain fundamental themes that occur again and again in the later Feuerbach, even though, as we shall see, commentators have differed among themselves concerning the interpretation of these themes, differences occasioned in part by Feuerbach's own ambiguities and sometimes by his changing views. Chief among these themes are: (1) that the human organism is related to the world through its body and the senses (Sensuousness); (2) that the species-being (essence) of man is contained only in community which, however, "rests on the reality of the distinction between I and thou" (GW IX: 339; PPF 91); (3) that mind and body are just two aspects of one material organism; (4) that this organism is animated by an overwhelming drive for fulfillment (*Glückseligkeitstrieb*) which, in turn, manifests itself in needs and desires. Of these needs, the need for human community is fundamental as are also certain biological needs. Given these themes, the two dominant philosophical problems that emerge are (a) how to delineate the relationship between perception and thought in order to give an intelligible account of knowing and (b) how, after basing human nature on a drive to fulfillment, he can reconcile this with his ethics of altruism.

Many of the themes are, of course, formulated in antithesis to idealism and, hence, an affirmation of some mode of materialism. The argument is that modern philosophy in its search for something immediately certain founded itself on self-consciousness, that is, the thinking ego. But this self-consciousness was only a being conceived and mediated through abstraction. The new philosophy claims that "certainty and immediately are only given by the senses, perception, and feeling" (GW IX: 320; PPF 55). Only the sensuous is clear and certain. Hence, "the secret of immediate knowledge is sensuousness" (GW IX: 321; PPF 55).

Whereas the old philosophy started by saying, "I am an abstract and merely a thinking being to whose essence the body does not belong," the new philosophy, on the other hand, begins by saying, "I am a real, sensuous being and indeed, the body in its totality is my ego, my essence (*Wesen*) itself." (GW IX: 320; PPF 54)

What Feuerbach ultimately proposes is a thorough examination of human nature, its needs, successes and desires. It is only then, he argues, that we will have a complete “philosophy of the future”

He expressed in an eager, disjointed, but condensed and laboured fashion, certain deep-lying convictions -- that philosophy must come back from unsubstantial metaphysics to the solid facts of human nature and natural science, that the human body was no less important than the human spirit ("Der Mensch ist was er isst", "Man is what he eats") and that Christianity was utterly out of harmony with the age. His convictions gained weight from the simplicity, uprightness and diligence of his character; but they need a more effective justification than he was able to give them.

secondo Feuerbach invece, è nel finito che deve essere ritrovato l'infinito, non viceversa; l'infinito stesso è pensabile soltanto attraverso il finito e la negazione del finito. L'inizio della filosofia non è dunque Dio o l'Assoluto, ma ciò che è finito, determinato e reale. La filosofia dell'avvenire, in quanto antropologia, riconoscendo il finito come infinito, deve partire, non da come aveva fatto Hegel, dal pensiero autosufficiente, inteso come soggetto capace di costruirsi con le sue proprie forze, bensì dal vero soggetto, di il cui pensiero è soltanto un predicato. Esso è l'uomo in carne e ossa, mortale dotato di sensibilità e bisogni: in questo consiste l'umanesimo di Feuerbach. Occorre dunque partire da ciò che dà valore al pensiero stesso, ossia dall'intuizione sensibile perché veramente reale è soltanto ciò che è sensibile. Solo attraverso i sensi un oggetto è dato come immediatamente certo: il sensibile infatti non ha bisogno di dimostrazione, perché costringe subito a riconoscere la sua esistenza. In questa prospettiva, la natura non si trova più ridotta a semplice forma estraniata dello spirito, come avveniva in Hegel, ma diventa la base reale della vita dell'uomo. Si apre così la possibilità di una nuova filosofia, il sensualismo, che è la risoluzione compiuta della teologia in antropologia: in essa è superata ogni scissione tra uomo e mondo, corpo e spirito.

La filosofia dell'avvenire. La filosofia di Feuerbach vuole essere un completo rovesciamento della filosofia religiosa e dell'idealismo hegeliano. L'inizio della filosofia non deve più essere Dio o l'Assoluto bensì l'uomo, e l'uomo determinato, concreto. L'uomo è un essere naturale, reale, sensibile, e come tale deve essere considerato dalla filosofia che non può ridurlo ad un concetto o a puro pensiero o a sola razionalità ma deve considerarlo integralmente, "dalla testa al calcagno". La nuova filosofia, la filosofia del futuro sarà la "risoluzione completa della teologia (hegeliana) nella antropologia". La nuova filosofia di Feuerbach vuole essere un umanesimo: è l'uomo l'unico vero oggetto della filosofia, e l'uomo nella sua concretezza, nella sua corporeità, nella sua fisicità (Feuerbach giunge a dire, in modo un po' paradossale ma che indica bene la sua esigenza di concretezza, che "l'uomo è ciò che mangia": si noti che in tedesco è un gioco di parole che suona così: *Mann ist wa isst*). "*La vera dialettica* – sostiene Feuerbach – *è un dialogo tra l'io e il tu*". Non ha nulla a che vedere con assoluto, essenze e simili. Se poi l'uomo è un essere sociale, allora l'amore è la passione dominante dell'uomo stesso. Dunque l'amore per l'uomo, la filantropia, dev'essere lo scopo principale della filosofia: