

## JON STEWART ON LUDWIG FEUERBACH'S DOCTRINE OF THE HUMANITY OF THE DIVINE IN *THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY*

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For several decades, Ludwig Feuerbach, who in his young years was known as Hegel's student and follower and later as one of his harshest critics, has for many reasons been a significantly neglected philosopher. However, in recent years, we have been witnesses to a kind of renaissance of Feuerbach's philosophy. Thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas have been discovering the traces of Feuerbach's anthropology and dialogical philosophy in several branches of the contemporary, post-metaphysical thought. One of the researchers whose professional activities have contributed to the revival of an interest in Feuerbach's philosophy is Jon Stewart. In his book, *Hegel's Century: Alienation and Recognition in a Time of Revolution*, in the chapter, "Feuerbach's Doctrine of the Humanity of the Divine in *The Essence of Christianity*," Stewart presents Feuerbach not only in contraposition to Hegel but also accentuates the Hegelian influence in Feuerbach's philosophy. He claims that the aim of Feuerbach's critique of Christianity is not the destruction of religion, but the liberation of humanity from idolatry.

**Keywords:** God – Human – Love – Feeling of absolute dependence – Projection –  
Idolatry – Religion

### I.

Ludwig Feuerbach was known as a student and follower of Hegel in his younger years, but he later became one of his harshest critics. Although he never achieved the fame and admiration enjoyed by his mentor, Feuerbach's anthropologically shaped dialogical philosophy and his philosophy of religion based on the intersubjective relationship between I and Thou was a considerable influence on the development of Western thinking in the modern and postmodern eras; indeed, it is possible that the impact of his work is comparable to that of the precisely elaborated philosophy of law or the process of mutual recognition between two equal subjects which Hegel outlined in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Nonetheless, Feuerbach's reputation waned after his death

and his work failed to attract scholarly attention for many years. There are many reasons why this is the case, one of which may be the lack of an integrated approach to research into Feuerbach's philosophy.

Academics who study Feuerbach are spread throughout the world, and the attempts to create an autonomous research center which would integrate all current research on Feuerbach's legacy have only recently borne fruit with the establishment of *Arbeitsstelle Internationale Feuerbachforschung* at the University in Münster in 2011, an international cooperation which has been involved in, among other activities, organizing the reissuing of a series of Feuerbach's works through Waxman Publishing (Reitemeyer et al. 2023; Tomasoni 2015; Reitemeyer 2019). The *Arbeitsstelle Internationale Feuerbachforschung* was established as the result of the longtime effort of the members of the *Feuerbach Association (Die Internationale Gesellschaft der Feuerbachforscher, Societas ad studia de hominis condicione colenda)*, Francesco Tomasoni and Takayuki Shibata, and its president Ursula Reitemeyer. The *Arbeitsstelle* aims to create a library of research into Feuerbach's philosophy by bringing together researchers from around the world and encouraging them to share their findings on the impact of Feuerbach's thinking on contemporary philosophy. Since its foundation, the *Arbeitsstelle* has hosted several guest researchers from European, American and Latin American universities, organized three scholarly conferences and published eight books, collected volumes or monographs on Feuerbach's philosophical legacy.

Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, Feuerbach's reputation has long suffered due to a general misinterpretation of his critique of religion. His criticism of the more dogmatic aspects of Christianity has been subject to attack by both Marxists and Christians, and this has done much to marginalize Feuerbach and the many scholars who study his philosophy.

However, recent years have seen something of a renaissance in the study of Feuerbach's philosophy. Thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas have identified the traces of Feuerbach's anthropology and dialogical philosophy in several branches of contemporary, post-metaphysical thought. In his recent two-volume reflection on the history of philosophy titled *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie* published in German in 2019 (Habermas 2019; Habermas 2023), Habermas addresses the development of the Western philosophical tradition (*Dritte Zwischenbetrachtung*) through the post-Hegelian tradition of intersubjective communication and recognition (Habermas 2019, 593). Beginning with the young Hegelians, Habermas examines Feuerbach's anthropological turn through his philosophy of communication between living, corporeal subjects (Habermas 2019, 603 – 623). Another scholar whose work has contributed greatly to this ongoing revival of interest in Feuerbach's philosophy is Jon Stewart.

## II.

Jon Stewart's book *Hegel's Century: Alienation and Recognition in a Time of Revolution* is a major work of scholarship which outlines the enormous influence which Hegel's thought exerted not only on the philosophy of the nineteenth century but on its entire society, religion and culture. Stewart turns his attention to Feuerbach in the chapter titled "Feuerbach's Doctrine of the Humanity of the Divine in *The Essence of Christianity*," in which he adopts a more traditional approach to Feuerbach, arguing that he represents a contraposition to Hegel. Feuerbach is described as a thinker who saw himself as a materialist philosopher, "dealing with material things in the real world and not just ideas" (Stewart 2021, 94). Stewart's examination of Feuerbach's philosophy starts by noting his interest in Hegel and with the impact of Hegel's philosophical legacy on subsequent generations of philosophers, including the Young Hegelians, suggesting initially that Feuerbach's perspective might seem slightly more Hegelian, especially in case of his almost exclusively rational explanation of the reasons that had led humanity to establish religion. As the chapter continues, however, Stewart argues that Feuerbach emerges as an autonomous philosophical figure by offering an accurate and independent interpretation of the passages of Feuerbach's work in which the Hegelian legacy is not particularly apparent.

Based at the question that Feuerbach poses about "The Essential Nature of Man" (Stewart 2021, 95; Feuerbach 1989, 1 – 12) at the beginning of *The Essence of Christianity*, Stewart demonstrates that Feuerbach's thinking developed by moving in an opposite direction than that which is foreshadowed by Hegel. Feuerbach shares Hegel's opinion that it is above all the capacity for abstraction, the ability to create ideas, that differentiates humans from animals. But while Hegel takes this idea as a starting point, moving from the immaterial world towards the alienated material of nature and then back to the absolute spirit, Feuerbach does the opposite:

According to Feuerbach, the answer to this lies in the nature of self-consciousness. Animals are immediately aware of themselves as individuals, but they cannot abstract from this to think of themselves more generally as a species. Human beings, by contrast, have this ability (Stewart 2021, 95).

This concept emerges from the so-called double essence of the human, consisting of the natural element that is manifested through his corporal existence and the divine represented by consciousness. However, this capacity does not arise in and of itself. It is instead the process of movement from the concrete, sensual perception of material things towards the more abstract concepts of species, their nature, or their essence. Since this abstraction enables the development of characteristically human symbolic systems such as science and religion, their content could not be achieved without the

application of empirical observation and sensual perception. In contradiction to the ideas of Plato and Hegel and the Christian belief in the creation of the material world by the immaterial spirit named God, Feuerbach argues against the ability of ideas to create content on their own:

The tone of the text has often given critics the impression that Feuerbach's ultimate goal is to undermine Christianity and religion as a whole. But in the preface to the second edition of the work, he is keen to refute reproaches of this kind. Feuerbach points out that the first half of the book is dedicated explicitly to demonstrating the true nature of Christianity. His goal, like that of Hegel, is to put Christianity on a solid footing. For this reason, in the second half of the work, he is keen to criticize what he takes to be mistaken and misleading pictures of Christianity that are presented in the mainstream theology of his day. According to Feuerbach, these views present illusions and thus make Christianity appear contradictory and implausible. By contrast, his own position can be seen as rescuing it. But here the question in the eyes of his critics is whether the remedy is worse than the disease, since in order to save Christianity, Feuerbach must interpret it so radically that it seems to have lost almost all of its most defining dogmas (Stewart 2021, 94).

While Stewart notes that Feuerbach does not agree with Hegel's interpretation of the separation of the human into body and soul and the resulting alienation in the wake of the Fall, he does concede that the perception of this dichotomy enabled the emergence of religion. In his description of the process of the emergence of religion in the history of humanity, Stewart is acutely aware of the epistemological conditions and the intellectual faculties of human beings that Feuerbach believed were the necessary presuppositions for the creation of religion and its establishment in society. These presuppositions stand as clear evidence of the human capacity to create religion together with other symbolic systems in a manner which is contrary to that of the animal, but they do not explain the real motivation for doing so, one which Feuerbach sees as emerging from an emotional need rather than an intellectual background. For Feuerbach, it is the sense of absolute dependence,<sup>1</sup> the awareness of human vulnerability in nature, that leads the human being to form an image of God as "an absolute, infinite being" (Stewart 2021, 96), which "according to Feuerbach ... is simply the awareness of ourselves in that part of our nature that is infinite; that is, our consciousness" (Stewart 2021, 96).

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<sup>1</sup> The feeling of absolute dependence is conceptualized by Stewart later, on page 97, where he emphasizes the similarity of the approaches of Schleiermacher and Feuerbach to the role of feeling in the true knowledge of God as a consequence of Romanticism.

Stewart also leans towards epistemological argumentation in Feuerbach's definition of intersubjectivity, in which the human capacity of empathy is again seen as more a result of the human capacity for abstraction than emotionally conditioned intersubjective relationships:

The human ability to think and to abstract means that we are able to see ourselves from the perspective of the other, even when the other is not there at the moment. For animals, the relation to the other is always immediate; the other animal must be there physically for them to have this relation. But this is not the case for humans. Since we can think of human nature as an abstract concept, we can think of another human being even when we are alone... Thus, humans have the ability to put themselves in the role of another person at any time... Feuerbach argues that this ability is the origin of religious thinking, since it means that we can see ourselves from the perspective of another self-consciousness – God – even where none exists. In religion we think of God, an absolute, infinite being. According to Feuerbach, this is simply the awareness of ourselves in that part of our nature that is infinite; that is, our consciousness... The ability to think in terms of abstract concepts is what constitutes infinity, since concepts can be interpreted and applied in an infinite number of concrete cases (Stewart 2021, 95 – 96).

On the other hand, the observation that Feuerbach's view of God as an abstract concept of the highest human capacities – those which are not subject to the limitations of corporeal existence – is undoubtedly inspired by Hegel's idealism (even though Feuerbach himself would never admit this) is very accurate; it leads to the revelation that despite his rejection of Hegel and the focus which he places on sensual cognition in the *Principles of Philosophy of the Future* (Feuerbach 2012, § 32, 224 – 225), Feuerbach's epistemological perspective remains Hegelian in *The Essence of Christianity*. "It is the ideas of the human mind that constitute the divine" (Stewart 2021, 97). Despite this Hegelian speculative intellectualism, Stewart draws attention to the fact that Feuerbach's speculations about the possible cognition of God are in line with those of another philosopher of religion, Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher's thinking led Feuerbach to conclude that a sense of absolute dependence was the main motivation for the emergence of religion in human culture. Nonetheless, while Schleiermacher aimed "to rescue religion from science" (Stewart 2021, 97 – 98), Feuerbach's perspective was far less romantic, and I would therefore be somewhat hesitant to attribute the significance of feelings in Feuerbach's philosophy to the influence of the romantic movement.

Schleiermacher argued for the existence of an objective, transcendent entity which was capable of satisfying the human need for security articulated in the feeling of absolute dependence, but for Feuerbach, the human relation to God was merely emotional; although, as Feuerbach claims, the only entity with the capacity to reflect human feelings meet the desperate need for security was another human being. In this way, God became an image of non-material perfect human being. Thus, as Stewart argues, God is not something external, an objective being, but is instead the feeling which resides within the human, the sensation that can be considered as

the highest, the grandest, and the absolute, and this is *per definitione* what we call the divine. But it does not follow that there is anything objective that answers to this. So, Feuerbach argues that the conclusion of this view is a form of atheism, but its advocates are too frightened by this result to admit it (Stewart 2021, 98).

This concept raises a question regarding the true nature of the relationship between atheism and religious faith; in the current period of religious pluralism, we cannot assume that faith is simply interchangeable with theism. The commonly accepted definition of atheism in Hegel's era as an absence of religious faith due to the denial of the existence of God can no longer be considered valid. Some contemporary theologians and philosophers of religion such as the Czech Templeton Prize winner Tomáš Halík (2009) or the French materialist philosopher Simone Weil (2009) have suggested that idolatry rather than atheism should be seen as the real contraposition to religious faith (Kočí 2015, 97 – 126). Stewart describes this as Feuerbach's theory of projection, in which Feuerbach argues that all positive human attributes are projected in their general and unlimited version onto an objective, external yet still immaterial being called God. This in turn raises the question of whether the projection of specific human attributes, even in the form of a very general and abstract deity, does not result in the objectification (*die Vergegenständlichung*) of God himself. Can this process still be defined as projection, or have we already crossed the line into idolatry? To what extent is such a belief contrary to faith in God, a being whose real nature often remains hidden from both atheists and believers alike?

### III.

These considerations also raise the broader issue of belief in the existence of God. Is it possible to accept the existence of an object which lacks any concrete attributes? Furthermore, are we not in fact creating an idol by the act of ascribing typical human attributes to God? Feuerbach argues that all things which exist possess a specific set of attributes, and this would also be the case for God if we believe in his existence.

Once again, Feuerbach “believes his position can help to save religion from errors of this kind. By saying that God is simply a set of human attributes, this is not a denial of God or a statement of atheism. Feuerbach believes his view sees God for what he truly is, so religion can have a firm basis” (Stewart 2021, 100). This firm basis is to some extent connected to a certain degree of flexibility and the willingness to admit that any image of God, regardless of whether a monotheistic or polytheistic deity, emerges from a specific historical context and is often the result of contemporary understandings of human nature: representing either the values most esteemed in humans themselves or, in the case of the so-called “natural religions,” the attributes valued most highly in nature itself.<sup>2</sup> This process of ideation occurs in and through the self-alienation of humans (Stewart 2021, 101), the process by which the concrete, corporeal existence of mankind is separated from its spiritual qualities and abstracted and refined beyond its natural limits before being attributed to another, external being:

In this sense, projection is a separation or a distinction, a splitting up of something that was originally one. Specifically, this is a form of self-alienation since it involves projecting human qualities onto the divine and presenting them as something foreign or different. Humans are thus not separated from something else or other but rather from themselves or their own nature (Stewart 2021, 101).

Although the result of this act of self-alienation appears in a very negative light even at this stage of development, the whole procedure is far from complete. After its finest attributes have been stripped away and attributed to another being, to God, the remaining husk of the human acquires a predominantly negative aspect. Although the human is permitted to retain its corporeal existence, the limits of this existence become a source of further negativity, with Christianity in particular associating the human body with corporeal weakness and vices:

Feuerbach argues that it is a natural aspect of the logic of objectification that when humans conceive of God, they try to understand him as being greater than humans. So they ascribe to him the positive qualities, while they ascribe to themselves the negative ones....Humans thus deprive themselves of the things that they attribute to God. For example, as we have seen, there is

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<sup>2</sup> As Stewart emphasizes, Feuerbach is inspired here not only by Hegel’s classification of the world religions, but also by his concept of projection, although Feuerbach’s understanding of alienation differs from that of his teacher. Feuerbach does not speak about the alienation of spirit from itself in nature but instead discusses the alienation of human beings from their true nature through the process of *division* and *disunion*, when certain qualities are taken from the human and attributed to God as the highest form of human, one which is freed from corporeal existence (Stewart 2021, 100 – 101).

a religious sentiment that says that knowledge is only for God and that we as human beings cannot know anything ultimately. For us to know, God must reveal something to us, but on our own we are incapable of attaining the truth. Similarly, humans are conceived as evil and sinful, where only God is truly good. In this way human beings and God are conceived as being the polar opposites of one another, with God having all of the positive qualities and humans all the negative ones. According to this view, humans are alienated from their true selves (Stewart 2021, 101).

Stewart is claiming here that Feuerbach's critique of Christianity is not intended to bring about the destruction of religion but rather the liberation of the human from the idolatry which exists in revealed religion. Feuerbach notes that that it was humans themselves who created the idol by ascribing the finest human attributes to God and defining themselves by the remaining negative qualities; this sense of alienation from their own selves results in a similar form of alienation from God, and instead of seeing the presence of God in every human being, humans are resigned instead to worshipping an external, transcendent idol:

By contrast, when we realize that the divine is just human nature objectified, then we can begin to recognize ourselves in God. Moreover, when we understand this, we can come to recover the positive characteristics of humanity that we had previously abandoned (Stewart 2021, 101 – 102).

In this sense, Feuerbach's essence of the human enacts the same form of movement as that performed by Hegel's absolute spirit, a process of alienation that ultimately leads back to itself (Stewart 2021, 102).

Stewart also emphasizes that Feuerbach defines the concept of reason "in a less technical way more in tune with common usage" (Stewart 2021, 102). His usage of the term also differs slightly from the way in which it is applied in German idealism in general.<sup>3</sup> He also argues that for both Feuerbach and Hegel, God represents the general faculty of understanding; this capacity is universal and applies equally to all people, and therefore differs from a purely emotional experience that is perceived subjectively and lacks the ability to "build any bridges between us and other people" (Stewart 2021, 103). This perception of God as representing a universality of rational understanding which enables interpersonal relations stands in sharp contrast not only to assertions of the emotional cognition of God mentioned above, but also to Feuerbach's communicative philosophy of I and Thou, in which he explicitly formulates his thesis on the importance

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<sup>3</sup> He is thinking here of Kant and Hegel in particular.

of sense perception and emotional experience of the corporal existence (*Leiblichkeit*) of the other in order to achieve a sense of mutual recognition and understanding. Feuerbach is critical of both images of God in Christianity, objecting both to the concept of God as a non-corporeal human and to that of God as abstract, universal reason (*die Vernunft*).

Although Feuerbach does not deny human beings the faculty of rational understanding, the capacity by which they differentiate themselves from the animal, he sees the belief in the divine rational organization of the world as a mere projection of a humanity which has created a more powerful, humanlike being to assuage their fear of the unpredictable natural world of which they themselves still constitute a part. In this framework, divine reason represents a force with the capacity to overcome the cruelty of natural laws and make decisions in favor of humans, but Feuerbach is a strict rationalist who believes that any sort of rationality attributed to God is ultimately derived from nature itself; the existence of God thus lacks any rational basis and is seen instead by Feuerbach as a sensation of man (Feuerbach 1989, § 3, 284).

Reason cannot content itself in the individual; it has its adequate existence only, when it has the species for its object, and the species not as it has already developed itself in the past and present, but as it will develop itself in the unknown future. In the activity of reason, I feel a distinction between myself and reason in me; this distinction is the limit of the individuality; in feeling I am conscious of no distinction between myself and feeling; and with this absence of distinction there is an absence also of the sense of limitation. Hence it arises that to so many men reason appears finite, and only feeling infinite. And, in fact, feeling, the heart of man as a rational being, is as infinite, as universal as reason; since man only truly perceives and understands that for which he has feeling. Thus, reason is the essence of Nature and Man, released from non-essential limits, in their identity; it is the universal being, the universal God. The heart, considered in its difference from the reason, is the private God of man; the personal God is the heart of man, emancipated from the limits or laws of Nature (Feuerbach 1989, § 4, 285).

Stewart rightly emphasizes that neither God nor religion would hold any significant meaning for humans if the stories told in religious or mythological texts and traditions did not portray typically human characteristics and show real human feelings and concerns, such as love, sympathy or anger. Does God possess these human attributes because he is deeply interested in the salvation of humankind or is it because humans project so many of our own feelings and concerns onto God? “If God were radically separate and other, then how could he be relevant for us?” (Stewart 2021, 104). In order to have relevance for humans, God must resemble us to some degree; this can

be observed in the person of Jesus, God become flesh, a figure whom Stewart sees as representing another predominantly Hegelian feature in Feuerbach's philosophy and his perception of religion, drawing particular attention to Hegel's definition of freedom and personhood which is incorporated in the Hegelian theory of mutual recognition. Stewart notes Hegel's belief that mutual recognition is only possible between two free individuals who each perceive the other as equals and whose decision to recognize each other is, in consequence, a voluntary act (Hegel 2018, 389). The result of this recognition might be friendship or love, forms of relationships that Hegel suggests were granted to humankind by God through the person of Christ, the specific Christian conception of God that enabled the development of the concrete, individual relationship between the divine and the corporeal. In contrast to Feuerbach and despite the remarkably corporeal humanity of Christ, the Hegelian understanding of religion continues to perceive God as an external entity, an abstract being that can act in a perfectly moral way while still providing human beings with an externally derived moral law that they are bound to obey. Feuerbach takes a very different approach to this idea:

So, the understanding of God as a moral agent is simply the transference of the human understanding of morality to something external. But the understanding of God as a moral being is far beyond the human capacity to realize. This conception makes us acutely aware of our own moral shortcomings. When we compare ourselves to the morally perfect being, we always come up short. This underscores the radical disunion and separation from the divine (Stewart 2021, 105 – 106).

Here, Stewart demonstrates that despite the strong influence which Hegel exerted on his thinking, Feuerbach is moving in an opposite direction; instead of seeing God's attempt to reach out to humans directly through the person of Christ, he argues that it is in fact humans who choose to perceive God as an individual with characteristic human attributes regardless of whether or not this takes the form of the Christ figure. In consequence, it is not God that gives the moral law to humankind, but the very opposite; humans are transferring their own ideal of what is moral onto God. The Hegelian grasp of religion might very well satisfy the human need for security, but, as Feuerbach argues, this temporary sense of satisfaction causes a long-term rupture between God and the human and the separation of the human from his true essence, as it envisages the human being not as being made in the image of God but as a weak, sinful and vulnerable creature, an entity that is the polar opposite to the morally perfect, eternal and almighty God.

#### IV.

This dilemma can be successfully resolved through the phenomenon of love, and, as Stewart notes, the belief in the unifying nature of love is shared by Hegel, Feuerbach, the Christians and the critics of Christianity; once again, however, it is clear that they do not perceive this in the same way. According to Hegel and “the Christian doctrine, it is love that resolves this split and disunion. Out of love, God forgives human sinfulness. So, like moral perfection, love is a divine quality” (Stewart 2021, 106). In Feuerbach, however, “here again we have a human property, love, that is ascribed to the divine being” (Stewart 2021, 106). Feuerbach sees the ability to love, to show compassion and mercy and to forgive as the highest human qualities, vital components of the social skills and solidarity that enable healthy relationships within the family or the wider community of humans and hence the survival of its individual members. In this line of thinking, any specific skill, feature or feeling which is esteemed by human communities or societies can be considered as an attribute of the divine. Therefore, the capacity to create a moral law belongs to the human who can apply their reason to develop a moral sense and the capacity to feel and show a reciprocal love for other beings; this is a feeling which is both quintessentially human and truly divine.

Being as the object of being – and this alone is truly, and deserves the name of, being – is sensuous being; that is, the being involved in sense perception, feeling, and love. Or in other words, being is a secret underlying sense perception, feeling, and love. Only in feeling and love has the demonstrative this – this person, this thing, that is, the particular – absolute value; only then is the finite infinite: In this and this alone does the infinite depth, divinity, and truth of love consist. In love alone resides the truth and reality of the God who counts the hairs on your head. The Christian God himself is only an abstraction from human love and an image of it. And since the demonstrative this owes its absolute value to love alone, it is only in love – not in abstract thought – that the secret of being is revealed. Love is passion, and passion alone is the distinctive mark of existence. Only that which is an object of passion, exists – whether as reality or possibility. Abstract thought, which is devoid of feeling and passion, abolishes the distinction between being and non-being; non-existent for thought, this distinction is a reality for love. To love is nothing else than to become aware of this distinction. It is a matter of complete indifference to someone who loves nothing whether something exists or not and be that what it may. But just as being as distinguished from non-being is given to me through love or feeling in general, so is everything else that is other than me given to me through love (Feuerbach 2012, § 33, 226).

Similarly, for Hegel and for Feuerbach “love thus represents another important point of unity between the human and the divine” (Stewart 2021, 106), but they each perceive this unity in their own distinctive ways. Hegel is focused on overcoming these differences, and this particular concern is also paramount in his concept of love. Love not only secures unity between the perfect God and the sinful human being, but it also guarantees unity between two separate human beings who become one both in and through love. If this unity does not initially develop within a relationship, then it surely happens once a couple have brought a child into the world, the product of their love and a manifestation of the perfect unity of both parents (Hegel 1971, 249). Given Feuerbach’s rejection of the idea that God is an autonomous, external entity, existing beyond human beings, any love which God directs towards a human must be the same as that which one human feels towards another human, and this must also be the case for the love which a human feels towards God. The only true form of love is that which exists between humans, but this love is a diverse phenomenon that can be perceived in many ways and generate a wide spectrum of feelings. The assertion that “according to Feuerbach, the difference between God and human is not a qualitative but a quantitative issue” (Stewart 2021, 110) leads to two significant consequences. The first of these is epistemological and is connected to the reason why we can consider humans as gifted in a way which is denied to animals. The second is linked to our feelings, to the intersubjective relationships that enable us to see God in other humans. It is this second aspect which we should focus on given its close relationship to Feuerbach’s concept of love.

In contrast to Hegel, Feuerbach draws attention to the otherness of the other in both friendship and in loving relationships. He argues that it is precisely this sense of difference that makes intersubjective relationships so rewarding; real love, the love for a concrete, corporeal human, is so difficult to achieve given the impossibility of overcoming the otherness of the other. Paradoxically, this impossibility evokes a feeling of completeness while simultaneously inflicting pain.

Traditionally, people have been taught to love God as an external, transcendent other. Now, Feuerbach claims, people can begin to love each other; that is, to realize the command to love other human beings. We no longer need to dissipate our love on some illusion, but now it can be given to concrete human beings who are regarded as absolute in themselves. Our mundane world takes on an importance of its own when the true value of the human is realized (Stewart 2021, 116).

Moreover, this makes it apparent why it is so easy to proclaim love to the perfect, external, transcendent other, the being whose otherness cannot be felt in its entire

profundity; the unknowability of God is similar to that felt in the case of our love for the imperfect, concrete, corporal, human other. As for the second consequence, God cannot exist as a detached entity, separable from the human being because, ultimately, he is only a projection of human attributes onto something external. The attributes which are ascribed to God are so vast that they cannot be possessed by any single human being. God is not a mystery, only comprehensible to humans through the mystical act of Revelation; consisting as he does of human attributes, he can be understood through human reason to the same extent that we can understand other humans. Indeed, as Stewart notes, Feuerbach rejects the Revelation theory on two grounds. In his opinion, it is not only full of absurdities and contradictions, but it is even dismissive of the essence of what it means to be human because it denies the human capacity of understanding based on reason. The nature of God as an anthropomorphic entity can be comprehended only to the same extent that we can comprehend the nature of humankind.

Stewart's argumentation on the influence of Hegel's thinking on Feuerbach's anthropology and philosophy of religion is elaborated in detail and with great precision. The impact of Hegel's philosophy of spirit is clearly formulated, especially in Feuerbach's understanding of conscience and self-consciousness as the product of human rationality and the most important epistemological presuppositions on the emergence of religion. The same can be said about the description of the movement from idea to material, although in this case Feuerbach adopted an opposite approach. One aspect of the topic which might benefit from further development is the emotional aspect of religion, in particular the argumentation about the emotional roots of its emergence in terms of the sense of absolute dependence. As was mentioned above, Feuerbach was in general agreement with Schleiermacher and Jacobi on the importance of feelings and emotions even though he did not hold their romantic attitude. He was actively critical of Jacobi's overestimation and divinization of the I in its relationship to the Thou, an approach that was commonplace in the era of Romanticism, in which the role of the special individual, often seen initially as an outsider figure, was considered as crucial and divine. Feuerbach, however, rejects this romantic approach to feelings and emotions and instead adopts an anthropological perspective. He refuses to idealize the I and Thou as individuals, and he does not address the relationship between them. He also disputes the Hegelian claim that the idea of love as the most meaningful emotion and bond between I and Thou combines two people into a single person. Feuerbach's definition of love is full of resistance based on the impossibility of overcoming the simple fact that I and Thou remain two different subjects even when united in love, a stance which has a stronger basis in reality. In Feuerbach's understanding, love is not the solution for the problems of human beings, nor is it a universal panacea for all of the problems of human existence. As with all other feelings and emotions, love has an

important cognitive value; it offers an I concrete knowledge about itself as it is reflected in the other, in a Thou. It is this aspect that differentiates Feuerbach's perception of feelings from the concepts found in Romanticism or German Idealism. Feuerbach sees the sense of absolute dependence combined with the capacity for abstract thought as the most important reasons for the existence of religion and science, the two archetypically human attempts to compensate for the inherent feeling of vulnerability, and this renders the topic worthy of further investigation.

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