

THE BEING OF GOD

IN THE LIGHT OF

FEUERBACH'S "ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY".

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## INTRODUCTION

The subject of this thesis is the theology of the being of God, and we shall be looking at the problems raised for such theology by Feuerbach's "Essence of Christianity" (1841). The method employed is systematic exposition not so much of Feuerbach's thought considered for its own sake as of the problems which Feuerbach himself so acutely raises, and the manner in which he raises them. Feuerbach was not a systematic thinker. He writes in a vigorous, often poetic style; his method is to exhort with prophetic passion rather than to analyse, discuss or argue. The reader of Feuerbach's work may find himself swept from off his feet and carried to a position of passionate agreement, without always being able to see or understand how he has arrived at that position. Or if the reader is not sensitive to such treatment, he will lay the book aside in despair. This analysis will be, in part, an attempt to force some logical rigour upon his work, without falling into the temptation merely to score off him. What he says may be sayable systematically.

## I. THE CONCEPT OF FAITH.

We will begin with an exposition of Feuerbach's concept of faith. We will develop this exposition by taking in turn four facets of Feuerbach's understanding of faith in answer to the question: What is Christian Faith?

We shall discuss first the subject of Faith as Projection, then Faith as illusion, third: faith as a function of human subjectivity, and fourth: God, the object of faith.

In the Preface, Feuerbach calls himself "a natural philosopher in the realm of mind" (1). Faith is a religious phenomenon, a phenomenon to be understood. He sees his work in terms of ANALYSIS and REDUCTION (2); the subject-matter of his Analysis is the tradition of Christian theology, and his method is that of reducing theology to Anthropology, understanding theology exhaustively in terms of man. We shall understand this method when we see it in action.

For Feuerbach, faith is the unconscious process whereby the idea of the perfect essence of man, purified from all

(1) "Essence of Christianity" (subsequently referred to in these footnotes as "Essence"), p. xxxiv

(2) "Essence" p. xliii

defects and limitations, is posited in existing reality as though an Object of experience corresponding to the idea existed in actual reality.

"Faith", he says, "isolates God; it makes him a particular distinct being." (1). Faith speaks of God EXTRA NOS: Faith externalizes God. This is a projection, it is an illusion, a dream. God can be understood in terms of human self-consciousness or human subjectivity. Thus, we have four facets to his doctrine of faith: PROJECTION, ILLUSION, SUBJECTIVITY, GOD.

#### Theory of Faith as Projection.

I will begin by quoting two passages: First, "Man projects his being into Objectivity, and then makes himself an Object to this projected image of himself, thus converting it into a subject.....a being other than himself." (2) Second, in faith, "man propels his own nature from himself, he throws himself outward". (3)

In these passages Feuerbach uses the word faith for the phenomena of the religious man's conviction that God is in some sense external to him. I shall develop the Analysis

- (1) "Essence" p.247
- (2) do. p.29-30
- (3) do. p.31

at this point by a short consideration of the ontological Argument, which will show that this Argument is of central importance for Feuerbach. There are five references to the Argument in the "Essence of Christianity" (1). Anselm argued that God is THAT-THAN-WHICH-NOTHING-GREATER-CAN-BE-THOUGHT (or conceived). *Id quo nihil maius cogitari potest, Deus est.* Since God, so defined, could not exist "in intellectu" only, because this would involve a logical contradiction, God must exist "in re" also. Whether it is a believer or an unbeliever who so reasons, does not affect the argument. But Feuerbach was very interested in the Argument, for he understands faith in terms of its logic. He calls it "the most interesting proof" (2), because faith may be understood as an attempt to project, rather than argue, the idea of God, from its existence in the mind (in intellectu) to an existence in actual reality (in re). Faith is an attempt to ascribe Ontological Status to that which is an idea in the human mind. Or it might be described as an attempt to give a psychic phenomenon the status of an extra-psychic, distinct and independent being. Faith confesses God as NON-EGO, or in Luther's words "indubitably extra nos", it has projected that which is thinkable out into the objective world, as though it were in principal experiencable.

As such, Faith is an illusion, which brings us to our second facet:

(1) Cf. Anselm: *Proslogion* ch. II transl. Charlesworth, p. 116-7; and for Feuerbach's references cf. "Essence" pp. 17, 36, 98, 198, 213.

(2) "Essence" p. 198

### Faith as Illusion:

"Dreaming", writes Feuerbach, "is the key to the mysteries of religion" (1). "The fundamental dogmas of Christianity are realized wishes of the human heart" (2). Here we encounter Feuerbach in a wider context, for he is not confining his Analysis and Reduction to God alone, but to all the important doctrines of the Christian faith. The Incarnation, the Trinity, the Logos, God as creator, God in relation to Nature, providence, mysticism, prayer, miracle, resurrection, heaven, immortality, all these and more, are ANALYSED AND REDUCED.

The illusion of all Christian doctrines may be formulated as a FALSE regarding as OBJECTIVE that which is subjective, a mistaken seeing of the world as a wonderful dream, an unconscious attempt to realize the deepest wishes of man in actual reality. Religious faith is illusion, and Feuerbach seeks to waken men to the "simple daylight of reality" (3). We will leave the question of the subjective aspect of faith until the next section. It may be pointed out here that Feuerbach understood his work as an elimination of illusions and a withdrawing of projections. "What was formerly contemplated and worshipped as God", he writes, "is now seen to be something human." (4). There is a process in theological thinking, according to Feuerbach, which is an ever-increasing self-knowledge. The first title of the "Essence of Christianity" was to have been Τῶ<sup>ς</sup>Θ<sup>ς</sup> ΣΕΚΥΤΟ<sup>ν</sup>: KNOW THYSELF. His work is something of a climax in this

- (1) "Essence" p.141  
 (2) do. p.140  
 (3) do. p. xxxix  
 (4) do. p. 13



process of thought because he uncompromisingly identifies knowledge of God with knowledge of oneself. The illusion of faith is, in general, the false attempt to make religion into anything other than a human business; the attempt to believe that the dreams and wishes of each man have come true. It is the Christian's negative attitude to the world which arouses Feuerbach's prophetic passion. There has been no christian theology which has not correlated in some manner the predicament of man with the addressing Word of God to man in that predicament. Whether the theology has leant more heavily towards the initiative of God or towards the situation of man, there can be no theology which says nothing about man or nothing about God. Feuerbach's thought enters theology as a fundamental question, the form of the question raises the theological understanding of miracle in such a way as to ask of the theologian: Can miracle be anything other than a negating of the world and the human? Feuerbach's answer to his question was a theological one: Faith is an illusion, and only the man who can know himself well enough to admit this, can really affirm the world and his own humanity. (1).

#### Faith as SUBJECTIVITY:

Feuerbach's Concept of Faith is best understood in relation to his notion of subjectivity; though faith is always 'faith-in' and therefore involves an Object of faith, whether it be God, or Christ as God-for-us. We begin with the notion of faith as subjectivity, and consider the Object of Faith in the next section.

(1) Creation out of nothing miracle: p.101ff; Faith makes real  
 Unreal and Unreal real p. 126 Negation of world p. 128.

"Faith", he writes, "is belief in the Absolute reality of Subjectivity" (1). This proposition is expressed in various forms, for instance:

"God is the highest subjectivity of man abstracted from himself". (2).

Or: "Faith is nothing else than confidence in the reality of the Subjective in opposition to the limitations, or laws, of nature, or reason". (3).

Or: "Faith is the undoubting certainty that his own subjective being is the Objective or Absolute being, the being of beings". (4)

What is meant by subjectivity in this context?

Subjectivity is so often a word used to express some vitally important part of a man's thought, and it is just as often the most ambiguous term he uses. The case of Feuerbach is no exception. To answer the question of what Feuerbach means by subjectivity is to begin to turn away from his negative polemics against illusions and evasions, and to turn towards his philosophy. It is to ask how Feuerbach understands faith, how he explains it by means of an hypothesis, how he relates faith to the anthropology which is the foundation of his thought.

The hypothesis he tests in the various chapters of his "Essence of Christianity" is formulated in the Latin proposition: HOMO HOMINI DEUS EST (5). MAN IS THE GOD OF MAN. At present, however, we are considering the hypothesis that faith can be explained in terms of human subjectivity, that which appertains to the human subject, rather than any entity or entities outside man and knowable by him as external to him.

(1) "Essence" p.126  
 (2) do. p. 31  
 (3) do. p.126

(4) "Essence" p.127  
 (5) do. pp. 83, 159, 271, 281

To come back to this point; that is, to return to it and understand it, we shall have to go by way of Feuerbach's introductory philosophical remarks. Man, he says, is the being who is not merely conscious, but is conscious of self; he is the being who is conscious of himself in relation to the species. We shall return to this idea of species in a moment. Man can also be defined as the only being for whom religion is possible. (1). Feuerbach then identifies the two: self-consciousness is religious consciousness. He seems to think this is a deductive step: it is not. It may, nevertheless, be a correct step to take, though it will be an inductive not a deductive Argument. We can now, however, see that when Feuerbach looks to subjectivity to explain Faith, he is meaning that faith can be understood within his own philosophical analysis of the consciousness which is specifically human, - SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS. We will turn to this Analysis in a moment. We must say one last thing on the subject of Subjectivity. In relation to Feuerbach's employment of the word, it is worth asking whether he is using it as a definitive concept; by which I mean, does he wish to confine or limit the term faith to a particular context? Is that context such that Faith is logically defined in terms which are laid down by the context? That is to say, is faith defined in terms of subjectivity, thus making the conclusion that it is Illusion or projection tautological? In relation to the use of the word faith in the main tradition of Christian theology, if we could speak of such a thing, we might ask of Feuerbach's use of the concept: "When Feuerbach speaks of faith, is it of faith that he is speaking?"

(1) "Essence" pp. 1 and 2

### THE OBJECT OF FAITH:

Christian faith is either understood as faith in God simply, or faith in Jesus Christ as God-for-us. Feuerbach's Analysis of what Christian theology, and particularly Luther, says of such a faith led him to the conclusion that neither God nor Jesus Christ were anything other than human. *HOMO HOMINI DEUS EST.* Since the doctrine of the Incarnation claims precisely that God became man, Feuerbach naturally interprets it in terms of his thesis. We will turn first to what he says about God, as the Object of faith, and then consider the Incarnation.

The structure of human self-consciousness can be shown, Feuerbach thinks, to be a twofold I and THOU. Thought is an internal relation between a self and Other; in thought, man, he says, "converses with himself" (1). Man has an outer life, his relation to external reality, to other persons and things; he also has an inner life, which is a life of dialogue with himself. "Man", he writes, "is himself at once I and THOU." (2) In cognition, subject knows object; remove all objects methodically, and man is still conscious of himself. What is this Other Self of my self-consciousness? Feuerbach's answer to this question is: GOD. God is man's essential nature, of whom he is conscious in his self-consciousness. The being of God is the human nature purified and freed from all the limits and imperfections of the individual man. God is the Other of whom my consciousness is conscious. Thus, Feuerbach can say with Augustine that: "God is nearer, more related to us and therefore more easily known by us than sensible, corporeal things." (3)

(1) "Essence" p.2.

(2) do. p.2. Also p.66.

(3) De Genesi ad Litteram Ivo:16 quoted "Essence" p.12

What, we may ask, is this perfect essence, this idea of the species, which is God? Sometimes Feuerbach speaks as if he meant an Ideal, a perfection, which transcends the particular. *Homo homini Deus est* seems to mean: Essential or perfect man is the God of particular finite and limited man. But this is not always clear, as in the proposition: "In and through God, man has in view himself alone" (1). Is God, here, my finite self? These considerations lead us to the subject matter of the second half of the chapter. This subject-matter concerns the relation between the self and the other in two contexts. First: the Self and the Other in Self-consciousness. Second: the Self and the Other in Consciousness of an external, independent Other. Feuerbach's Christology raises these questions in a similar way, and it is to this aspect of his thinking that we now turn.

"The Incarnation", says Feuerbach, "is nothing else than the practical, material manifestation of the human nature of God." (2) "In the incarnation, religion only confesses, what in reflection upon itself as theology, it will not admit, namely that God is an altogether human-being." (3) He follows Luther in Galatians ("There is no other God besides this man Jesus Christ": Commentary on 4:3, pp.42-5) in speaking of Christ as God-for-us, though he takes the additional step of eliminating the dialectic which led Luther to insist also upon the infinite transcendence of God. Feuerbach understands the Incarnation as the ultimate

- (1) "Essence" p. 30  
 (2) do. p. 50  
 (3) do. p. 56

manifestation of the love of God. "As God has renounced himself out of love," he writes, "so we, out of love, should renounce God." (1) God became a man, and as far as we are concerned God is man, our fellow man or the species.

The Son of God is God made finite; since God is the idea of the species, the essence of man; the Son of God is the idea actualized or realized as an individual. "With the Christians, God is nothing else than the immediate unity of species and individuality, of the universal and individual being." (2). In Christ, the wishes of the human heart are realized. (3). God is the Essence of the Species, known in the imagination only; Christ is what the imagination imagines, made objective. (4). The Incarnate God is thus the Unity of the essence of the species in an individual. Here again, we come up against the question of the Ontological Status of the Other in its relation to the self, and the problems which are raised by Feuerbach's answer to this question.

In conclusion, Faith is the attitude of belief, trust and worship of the Idea of the Essence of the human species, known as the Other of my self-consciousness. It is an illusion when it projects this Other out of subject-consciousness as though it existed in external reality as an Object of Consciousness. It is a dream of subject-consciousness: it is human. Moreover, faith turns to Christ as the mediator between the relatively Abstract notion of

- (1) "Essence" p. 53  
 (2) do. p. 153  
 (3) do. p. 140  
 (4) do. pp. 75, 69.

essential humanity or God, whereas man turns to his fellow man as the mediator; therefore, says Feuerbach, faith evades the fundamental relation between man and man in its "excessive transcendental subjectivity". (1).

So much for Exposition: We now turn, in the second part of this chapter, to some of the problems which have been raised but not discussed. This Analysis will formulate a second question, closely related to the first. Our first question was: What does Feuerbach mean by Faith, and how does he understand it? Our second question is: What is the relation between the self and the other which is articulated in Feuerbach's understanding of Faith?

(1) "Essence" p.167

Feuerbach's epistemology of the inter-human seems to comprise of two opposite and contradictory tendencies: he seems to be going in two directions at once. The problem can be approached in a number of ways. It could be said that Feuerbach wishes to derive self-consciousness from consciousness of the Other and also say that Consciousness of the Other was only a form of Self-consciousness. Or it might be better to express this by saying that there is no knowledge of oneself as a human-being without relationship; and yet knowledge of the Other is only a form of knowledge of Oneself. The latter tendency is most difficult to understand. Feuerbach speaks of it as the "eye seeing itself" (1), or he may say, "Consciousness of the Objective is the self-consciousness of man" (2). We could not be blamed if we called his epistemology solipsist and his attitude to human relationships a form of philosophical narcissism, if we might use such a phrase. But Feuerbach is very anxious to maintain precisely the opposite thesis at the same time.

"The Thou", he says, "belongs to the perfection of the I; 'Men' are required to constitute humanity, only men taken together are what men should and can be." (3) Thus Feuerbach clearly wishes to understand the being of man not in terms of the Conscious Ego of his thoughtful isolation, but in terms of man WITH man in community. He also wishes to take the interesting and important step of making human sexuality the centre of his understanding of human-being with Another. (4)

- (1) "Essence" p.158
- (2) do. p. 5
- (3) do. p.155
- (4) do. p.167



The distinction between I and Thou is seen fundamentally in terms of the distinction between man and woman, and the condition of all personality and all consciousness. (1) The truly human-being needs another human-being, man needs woman, to become in any way complete or whole as a human-being. The Christian does not need the Other in this primary sense, for his faith speaks to the Other whom he has falsely externalized in his imagination, that is, God. The subjective is regarded as objective, the real unreal, and the unreal real (2).

How can we understand this powerful tension within Feuerbach's epistemology of the Inter-Subjective relation between man and man? Which is primary: self or Subject-Consciousness, or Consciousness of the Other? We find a strangely similar tension in Feuerbach's great teacher, Hegel. This may throw some light upon the problem. In that remarkable chapter upon Self-Consciousness in the "Phenomenology of Mind", Hegel says:

In self-consciousness, "I distinguish myself from myself....I thrust myself away from myself. Consciousness of Another, of an Object in general, is indeed itself necessarily Self-Consciousness, reflectedness into Self, consciousness of self in its Otherness." (3) Here Hegel makes a statement which corresponds to the second direction of Feuerbach's epistemology: Consciousness of the Other is self-consciousness. But Hegel, in another passage, writes: "Self-Consciousness exists in itself and for itself....by the fact that it exists for Another Self-Consciousness, it IS only by being acknowledged or recognized." (4) This is Hegel's

(1) "Essence" p. 92  
 (2) do. p.127 and 126  
 (4) (3) Hegel: Phenomenology of Mind. p.211  
 do. do. do. p.229

way of saying there is no I where there is no Thou.

But how does Hegel himself deal with these conflicting principles? For Hegel, self-consciousness emerges only at the end of a "life and death struggle" (1). When one self-consciousness faces another, a twofold event occurs. First, each self-consciousness loses its own self and finds itself in the Other, and the consequence of this is that it does not regard the other as real but sees its own self in the other. There is a mutual attempt to destroy the Other, but at the same time each Self-Consciousness risks its own life. Each proves himself and the other in this struggle, but at the cost of possible annihilation. Thus, in Hegel's words: "Consciousness finds that it immediately IS AND IS NOT (my italics) another consciousness, as also that this Other is for itself only when it cancels itself as existing for itself, and has self-existence only in the self-existence of the Other....Thus they recognise themselves as mutually recognizing one another." (2) Notice here: the IS and the IS NOT : In Feuerbach's 'I-Thou' terminology: this passage is saying : The I emerges only through the THOU at the risk of possible annihilation. The unreality and the reality of the Other, together with the recognition and negation of the self, must be held in dialectical tension. The emergence of self-consciousness, of the I, is both a negation and an affirmation of self and Other. We have here a circular movement of thought from solipsism to self-negating nihilism.

Returning now to the terms in which this problem was raised, Feuerbach's Concept of Faith, we see that because for Feuerbach the essential nature of the species was the Other of

(1) Hegel: Phenomenology of Mind. p.232  
 (2) do. do. do. p.231

Self-Consciousness: we are formulating a curious but important question. Do we derive our idea of the essential man, that is : God, from our consciousness of other men; or is our knowledge of other men really only a knowledge of our essential self, i.e. God? Or, in other words: Is God the Thou of my fellow man, or is God the Thou of the "complete unity of I and Thou" which is my self-consciousness? Thus two assertions emerge: That God is some nebulous human ideal, and that my fellow man has no real existence but is only a reflection of my own self to myself.

Now, this is one way of formulating the main problem raised by Feuerbach's dealing with the relation between the self and the other. Our excursus into Hegel's Phenomenology throws light, of an historical nature, upon the problem. Perhaps we can see that Feuerbach inherits it from Hegel. But, by so doing, we must not allow ourselves to think that we have understood, never mind resolved, the problem. My own conclusion is that we cannot move forward in our present terminology. That is to say, our formulation of the matter has not yet grasped the question which must be asked in order to take farther steps forward. To revise the form of our question, we would have to come to grips with the Idealist philosophical tradition from Descartes to Hegel in which the problem of the relation between the self and the other is articulated in terms of self-consciousness and object-consciousness. We cannot undertake to do this in this present study.

Perhaps we might be tempted to confine attention to the area of Feuerbach's Analysis in which he seems to go beyond Hegel in stating that the Egocentric 'I' of Cognition is not

an adequate starting point for philosophy. Feuerbach makes it clear that for him there is no I without a Thou. But it would be quite wrong to ascribe this development to Feuerbach; for as we have seen there is no self-consciousness, for Hegel, unless there is also recognition or acknowledgement by Another. (1) I would suggest that Feuerbach is merely re-expressing Hegel's thoughts in another terminology.

Or again, we might undertake a phenomenological Analysis of human-being with Another, along the lines implicitly laid down by Feuerbach, in order to reveal the essential structure of the ontology of human-being which his work pre-supposes. This method would be beset with complexity, but would perhaps clarify the adequacy or inadequacy of his anthropology enough for us to formulate the question satisfactorily.

The thought which lies behind these suggestions is that a re-statement of Feuerbach's Analysis of faith in other terms would reveal his theory in a far more favourable light. It would be most unwise to leave a man's thought at the point where his terminology is found to be unsatisfactory. Clearly the problem is only partly linguistic. He analyses and reduces the theological language of Faith's confession to the Hegelian philosophy of self-consciousness and re-expresses some of this in his own I-Thou categories. He sees self-consciousness as consciousness of the idea of the species, i.e. God; the religious consciousness is reduced to a general characteristic or disposition of all men. The distinctive phenomenon of faith is the illusion that the idea

(1) Hegel: Phenomenology of Mind. p.229

of the species exists as a divine being independent of man. The unresolved problem of this chapter is the relation between the self as this ideal essence, or unlimited perfection which faith calls God, and actual existing human-beings external to this internal self-consciousness. What is the relation between the essence and the existence of the species; or what is the relation between God and the human community, which for Feuerbach is the same question? In the more general terms of a wider context, What is the relation between the I and the Thou, between the self and the Other? It is this question, which we will have to re-ask in another form, that lies beneath Feuerbach's concept of Faith.

## II. ANTHROPOLOGY.

Our first chapter raised, but only briefly considered, the philosophical and theological questions which are involved in Feuerbach's philosophy of religion. We looked at Feuerbach's Concept of Faith. We saw that Faith was the illusory projection of that which is essentially human, into independent existence external to man; faith gave distinct Ontological Status to certain essential human qualities, freed from their finite limitations and defects, by positing them in a divine being which transcended the limits of the individual man. Feuerbach wishes to attack such a faith because it evaded the relation between man and man, with what he called its "excessive transcendental subjectivity". (1) By this he meant that faith turns away from the world and men to God, finding in God the answer to all needs and the realization of all wishes. The purpose underlying Feuerbach's "Essence of Christianity" was that man should withdraw such illusory projections and subjective imaginings, and emerge into the "simple daylight of reality". (2) Instead of speaking of God extra nos, instead of worshipping him as a being external to man, we must recognize that Man is the God of Man: Homo homini deus est. (3) Thus, Feuerbach's Concept of Faith raises one fundamental problem, that of the relation between man and God, and man with his fellow man. Did Feuerbach wish to say that the first Homo of "Homo homini deus est" was to be unambiguously identified with the human Other, the human Thou; or has he some ideal or universal essence of humanity in mind? The two structural poles of theology, the I in relation to God, and the I in relation to the Thou, are

- (1) "Essence" p.167  
 (2) do. p.xxxix  
 (3) do. p.83, 159, 271, 284

identified by him in a highly problematic manner. This is our problem.

This chapter will take as its subject-matter Feuerbach's philosophical Anthropology. Feuerbach describes the method of his work as "Analysis and Reduction". His Analysis is of the central doctrines of the Christian Tradition, and he reduces these to his Anthropology. But this Anthropology is, for Feuerbach, no mere 'distilled' theology; he develops it as a positive alternative to Christian Faith, one which is fully able to affirm the world, and to take inter-human relations absolutely seriously. In it, he introduced what has since been called the "discovery of the Thou", which has an important place in a number of existentialist philosophies of our own century. (1) We must, however, remember that Feuerbach was not writing a philosophical Anthropology; I intend to isolate his Anthropology, by eliminating, for a while, his main concern, which was a polemic against the transcendental evasions of Christian Faith. We shall, however, reserve the main body of our criticisms for Chapter 5., where we shall be in a better position to understand the full extent of Feuerbach's thought.

Before we consider the aspects of his Anthropology which seem to have most interested Feuerbach himself, the I-Thou, Man-Woman relations, I want to deal with his psychology.

(1) Martin Buber: *Between Man and Man* p.182., also K. Hein, *Christian Faith and Natural Science*, p.48f. also throughout "God Transcendent".

1. Feuerbach's Psychology: rests upon these fundamental categories: REASON, WILL, and AFFECTION. Each man is the unity of these three taken together. "To think, to will, and to love", says Feuerbach, "is the absolute nature of man as man, the basis of his existence." (1) We recognize these three familiar categories as those in which Kant classified all psychological phenomena. For Kant, the categories were employed to schematize the psychological as it appears to us as empirical phenomena. He distinguished sensibility and understanding as two parts of the first category: Reason. But Feuerbach does not add anything of importance to our understanding of the Categories, nor does he question their validity, but employs them in his reductive method. His first three chapters on the being of God are entitled 'God as a being of the Understanding,' 'God as a moral being or law', and 'The Mystery of the Incarnation; God as love, as a being of the heart'. Thus the categories provide a basis for his "Analysis and Reduction" of the doctrine of God. God is the illusory, non-objective being which, for Feuerbach, was the projected image of man, man as he would be if the three formal psychological categories were absolutized and made perfect. God infinitely transcends any particular human being who is limited and finite. He is nonetheless essentially human. Feuerbach depends for this kind of argument upon a simple set of premisses. First, we do not know or speak of God except as we know and speak of him; and our knowledge and speech about God is knowledge of and speech about human attributes absolutized or made superlative. God is in this sense human, and this is the only God we can and do have. God as Absolute Mind or intelligence, God as Absolute Will, and God as perfect love, is the absolutized human being, extended into infinity and worshipped as God.

(1) "Essence" p.3ff.



2. I-THOU; SELF-OTHER: The distinctive contribution which Feuerbach's Anthropology makes to philosophy is that it takes as its starting point the fundamental distinction between man and man, between self and other. There are two aspects to his thinking. First, he employs the categories I and Thou in this connection. Second, he emphasizes the distinction between man and woman, and attaches considerable importance to this distinction when he outlines his understanding of the relation between two human beings.

We shall begin with the I-THOU Categories, and note in passing that it is necessary to eliminate later formulations of a similar type from our mind, so that it is of Feuerbach that we are thinking and not someone else. Feuerbach employs the categories in at least two contexts. First, he conceives of both thought and reflection in terms of a twofold polarity of self and other within consciousness. "Man", he writes, "is himself, at once, I and Thou. (1). We saw that Feuerbach identified the other of self-consciousness with God, so that he can write in this context: "Religion is man's consciousness of himself in his concrete or living totality, in which the identity of self-consciousness exists only as the pregnant unity of I and Thou." This internal 'I and Thou' is Feuerbach's reformulation of Hegel's understanding of self-consciousness, which was for him, the basis for consciousness of anything whatever. Self-consciousness is a distinguishing of myself from myself, and says Hegel, "I am immediately aware that this factor distinguished from me is not distinguished." (2) That is to say, the myself which I can know, cannot be identified with <sup>the</sup> ever elusive 'I', because that which can be known as non-Ego is not the knowing

(1) "Essence" p.2.

(2) "Phenomenology of Mind" p.211.

subject. Thus, in Feuerbach's terminology, knowledge of self is the I knowing a thou, a Thou which the I is conscious of, and which is the knowable self of self-consciousness. Thought, for him, is "man conversing with himself" (p.2). We shall return to this use of the Categories when we come to a wider formulation of the problem.

The second use Feuerbach makes of the Categories is inter-personal. The Thou of Another human-being plays a major part in Feuerbach's thought, for him as for Hegel there is no I without another human-being in relation to that I. Hegel introduced his chapter on Self-consciousness in the "Phenomenology of Mind" with the following words:- "Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself....by the fact that it exists FOR ANOTHER self-consciousness; it 'is' only by being acknowledged or recognized." (1) Feuerbach reformulates this as follows: "The Other is my Thou - the relation being reciprocal. In Another I first learn, I first feel, that I am a man; in my love for him it is first clear to me that he belongs to me and I to him, that we two cannot be without each other, that only community constitutes humanity." (2) In many passages, he insists that there is a qualitative, essential distinction between one human-being and another, and in those very passages asserts that: "the Thou belongs to the perfection of the I".

The I-THOU relation between human-beings is understood by Feuerbach within the framework of post-Cartesian philosophy, where consciousness is the starting point. He develops his philosophy of consciousness by describing the emergence of a

(1) "Phenomenology of Mind" p.229

(2) "Essence" p.158

human-being's consciousness of his world. (1) Between consciousness of self and consciousness of world there is a middle category, consciousness of the human Other. The Thou of Another human-being mediates between I myself and that which is not me, the world.

"The Ego", he writes, "first steals its glance in the eye of a Thou before it endures the contemplation of a being which does not reflect its own image." (2) In other words, in order to become a HUMAN-being, the I must meet the Thou in reciprocal relation.

Not only consciousness of world, but also self-consciousness, which precedes it, depends upon the prior consciousness of the Other. Consciousness of self is the form of consciousness peculiar to humanity, (3) and self-consciousness is derived from the human THOU, the ALTER EGO, who is both distinctly separate from me as an individual, and essentially One with me in a common humanity. This common humanity is the problem we shall consider when we turn to the place of God in Feuerbach's Anthropology, for we must remember that his purpose is to reduce theology to anthropology. For Feuerbach, the doctrine of God is "an unconscious, esoteric, pathology, anthropology and psychology." (4)

But before we turn to the doctrine of God, I shall raise the third aspect of his Anthropology, which is that of sexuality. I mention it because Feuerbach lays unusual emphasis upon its importance, and he gives it much more attention than, for instance, his psychological categories of Reason, Will, and Affection.

- (1) "Essence" p.82-3
- (2) do. p. 82
- (3) do. p. 1
- (4) do. p.89

3. Human Sexuality: The relation between man and woman is, for Feuerbach, not just a random instance of the more general categories of I and Thou. Neither is it merely to be understood as a physiological distinction with psychological aspects. "The distinction of sex", he writes, "is not superficial or limited to certain parts of the body; it is an essential one"...."Personality is essentially distinguished into masculine and feminine". (1) Feuerbach does not think that any philosophical anthropology can pass over the distinctions of sex, for it would be unable to understand the nature of human love, which rests upon two tenets. First, love requires two independent individuals, and second it consists in making whole the incomplete partiality of the individual by means of a complementary fulfilment. Feuerbach notes that the Adam of the Old Testament is incomplete without woman, whereas in the Adam of the new, there is a conspicuous lack of human sexuality. This point is added to the many which Feuerbach gathers throughout the "Essence of Christianity", in order to press home his polemic against the dehumanizing impulse within New Testament Christianity, (2) and Christian theology as a whole.

We saw that the human I of each individual emerges only through the I of another, the Thou, self-consciousness only through recognition by another self-consciousness. Feuerbach fills out this idea with a detailed sketch of the relation between a son and his mother. "The love of the son to the mother", he writes, "is the first love of the masculine being for the feminine" (3). In this passage on the feminine principle of love in the Godhead, we have Feuerbach reducing the theological dogma of Mary as mother of God to the psychological truth that the son's relation to the mother is of unique importance. The believer finds in the Virgin Mary

(1) "Essence" pp. 92, 156, 167, 170.

(2) do. p. 156

(3) do. p. 137

what the man of Feuerbach's Anthropology finds in his own mother. In another passage, Feuerbach criticizes Christian Faith because it makes man's subjective wishes and feelings the "standard of what ought to be" (1). The believer is the man who has alienated himself from the natural and the human, including sexuality; his horror of these drives him to the supernatural or the anti-natural. (2) "That which offends his transcendental supernatural or anti-natural feelings", he writes, "ought not to be." (3) The virgin birth, the gospel miracle stories and the resurrection are all examples of the profoundly negative attitude to the world in Christian theology, which Feuerbach wishes to reverse. He wishes us to take the incarnation so seriously that we renounce God and affirm with him that "MAN IS THE GOD OF MAN" : homo homini Deus est. (4)

"As God has renounced himself out of love, so we, out of love, should renounce God", he writes. (5)

We now come to the "Analysis and Reduction" of the Christian doctrine of God which plays such a very important part in Feuerbach's Anthropology. His use of the psychological categories, his understanding of self-consciousness, and consciousness of the human Other, and his Analysis of Sexuality, are all closely related to, if not actually dependent on, his doctrine of God. The first difficulty encountered when reading the "Essence of Christianity" is that there are almost as many explanations of the being of God as

- (1) "Essence" p.137
- (2) do. p.136
- (3) do. p.137
- (4) do. p. 83, 159, 291, 281
- (5) do. p. 53

there are pages in the book. Which, if any, are we to take seriously? What can we make of the poetic vision of the sentence: "This open-air of the heart, this outspoken secret, this uttered sorrow of the soul, is God", (1) or of the suggestion that God is the unutterable sigh in the deeps of the heart, or the essence of human tears? (2) In all these we find the underlying thesis that: "The beginning, middle and end of religion is man" (3) HOMO HOMINI DEUS EST (4). The variety of individual explanations depends upon a single primary principle: that "GOD IS THE MIRROR OF MAN"(5).

This difficulty first encountered in the variety of different definitions becomes more acute when the most important identification of God with the essence of the human species, is found to be indefinite and ambiguous. We have seen that knowledge of the idea of the essence of the species is in some way bound up with self-consciousness, and that the particular human Thou of my fellow man mediates between myself and the species. But how the various categories are related is very difficult to determine. "Self-consciousness", writes Feuerbach, "is present only in a being to whom his species, his essential nature, is an object of thought." (6) In this passage God is identified with man's essential nature, which seems to be an Idea of the Species, a Universal category embracing all that is essentially human. The Status of this Universal is difficult to determine, especially when Feuerbach in other passages speaks of the species as the aggregate of all human individuals. (7) Here Essence is understood not so much

- (1) "Essence" p.122, also p.62  
 (2) do. p.122, also p.61  
 (3) do. p.184  
 (4) do. p. 83, 159, 271, 281  
 (5) do. p. 63

- (6) "Essence" p. 1,  
 of also p.270  
 (7) "Essence" p. 83

in terms of Ideas and Universals, as the transcending of the limitations which exist for each individual, in the whole community of mankind taken together. Here the question of the status of the idea of human nature or essence of the species must be raised.

In God, man contemplates his own nature, God is human; the being of God can be expressed as the human nature of God. But in what sense is God man? Is God my fellow man? Is he all men taken together? Or is he some ideal essence of humanity which has Ontological Status independent of the whole of human society and each particular individual in that society? We might express these ambiguities as follows: The essential nature of man, or the ideal essence of human nature, knowable as the self of self-consciousness, is one thing.

The aggregate of all human qualities, the sum of all that mankind as opposed to an individual, is capable of, is another.

That which man would like to be, that which he wishes he could be, that which he dreams he is in the illusion of faith, is something else again. The answer to the question of clear definition in relation to Feuerbach is that he simply wasn't interested.

There are these three ideas involved in this tricky notion of Feuerbach's. We must note this fact at this point, although we shall not discuss the problem critically until Chapter V. (1)

(1) cf. Chapter V. p. 80ff.

In order to formulate this problem satisfactorily we shall pass by Feuerbach's arguments against the Christian understanding of God, which he concludes is illusion, and consider the place of God in his Anthropology. There are two views to be found within his thought, first that since God is our human nature, we need never speak of him, because we can say all that we want to say in purely psychological and anthropological terms. The second view, which is far more complicated, is also to be found, and it is this view which enables us to speak of a doctrine of God within, rather than opposed to, his Anthropology. One of the passages in which this view is to be found most clearly is in his discussion of ethics in relation to Faith at the end of the "Essence of Christianity".(1) Here, Feuerbach sets the Categories Faith and Love apart, as two opposing principles. Faith is exclusive, it is "imprisoned within itself" (2). That is to say, faith must hold itself apart from the world in order to remain faith, it prides itself upon its special relation to God before whom it is humble. "But the humility of the believer", answers Feuerbach, "is an inverted arrogance", because God is after all only the nature of man personified or projected into objectivity. Love, on the other hand, is for Feuerbach the opposite of faith.(3) Love does not evade the world, it affirms it. Where faith easily becomes orthodoxy and thus intolerance, hatred and persecution; Love begins with the ethical demands of human relationships and does not seek to evade them by turning aside to God. Its very nature excludes orthodoxy and intolerance. Christian Love, on the other hand, is love tainted by Faith, because it posits love in God, outside and apart from human existence.

The purpose of Feuerbach's ethics is one of inversion;

- (1) "Essence" p.247-281
- (2) do. p.249
- (3) do. p.257



the divine predicates are no longer to be understood as belonging to a transcendent God, they are to be understood as divine in themselves and for their own sake. (1) The doctrine of the divine predicates becomes a set of ethical principles. Or, in his own words:

"What theology and philosophy have held to be God, the Absolute, the infinite, is not God; but that which they have held not to be God IS GOD: namely the attribute, the quality, or predicate." (2)

"He alone is the true atheist to whom the predicates of the divine being - for example, love, wisdom, justice - are nothing; not he to whom merely the subject of these predicates is nothing." (2)

If ethics, or inter-personal relations, are now the concrete, imminent field of theology, and the existence of a transcendent God is forgotten, we have a doctrine of God which refuses to speak of God apart from the actual situations in which the so-called divine attributes are worked into ethical decisions and actions. Thus, Feuerbach concludes the "Essence of Christianity" with the following words: "HOMO HOMINI DEUS EST: this is the great practical principle. The relations of child and parent, of husband and wife, of brother and friend - in general of man to man - in short all the moral relations are per se religious. Life as a whole is, in its essential substantial relations throughout of a divine nature." (3) Every human relationship, in other words, is to be lived with what Feuerbach calls a "religious conscientiousness", with the same seriousness as the traditional believer once lived in relation to God. Thus, instead of the traditional compromise of love by the exclusiveness of faith, faith itself is excluded, and love placed at the centre of theology. Ethics has taken the place of theology as traditionally understood.

(1) "Essence" p. 264, 14ff.

(2) do. p. 21

(3) "Essence" p. 271

But to say that inter-human ethical relations are religious or divine in themselves, and are to be taken as seriously as the relation to God once was, is to remain much too imprecise. Does Feuerbach actually wish to say that the human-being I love is God for me, or is God other than the particular human Thou? The human nature of God is formulated in a number of ways, and in his reduction of christology, Feuerbach exchanges the human Thou for Christ as mediator between the Idea of the Species, or God, and man. So that in this context, God is other than the human Thou (1). God is the sacred idea of the species with whom I am related through my fellow men. But this view would result in Feuerbach's speaking of inter-human ethical relations as the step to a sort of mystical union with the perfect essence of humanity; he could hardly repeat the passage just quoted, that human relations are in and by themselves divine, and all that we need retain of Christianity.

Perhaps we can begin to grasp what is being asked when we again put to Feuerbach the questions: Is God my fellow man? Is he all men taken together? Or is he some ideal essence of humanity which has Ontological Status independent of the whole of human society and each particular individual in that society?

At the beginning of this paper we spoke of the two structural poles of theology, the I in relation to God, and the I in relation to the Thou. Feuerbach wishes to identify these poles, and we are now able to formulate the problem which this identification raises somewhat more clearly. In the reflective movement from theology to anthropology, the essentially human nature of God is realized, especially through the Incarnation;

(1) "Essence" p.159  
 (2) do. p. 13, 50.

and instead of faith in God which involved love of my fellow man, there emerges an ethic which needs no external divine Authority and which makes love of my fellow man in itself a truly religious relationship. The tension and possible contradiction lies in two rather different elements in this line of thought, the one which moves towards a sort of ethical Godlessness, the other which seeks to continue to speak of God but only in the context of ethical relationships and only as in some sense human. Feuerbach knows of this tension; we can see him holding the tension when he wishes to retain all the divine predicates; all, that is, of what we in fact know of God; and yet to repudiate the separate existence of God external to man. (1)

It is necessary to summarize his position at this point, though to do so is to take much for granted. God is the idea of perfect man, of the essence of the species. This idea is not limited to, and therefore transcends, the finite limitations of individual man; God is all-loving, all-merciful, omnipotent and so on. I know this idea as the object of my self-consciousness, the self or Other of myself which is knowable in Self-Consciousness. But since I need another human Thou to become human myself, since I become a self-conscious human-being only through meeting with, and recognition by, another self-conscious human-being, I only become conscious of God or the perfection of human nature through my fellow man. I can come to know God, who is my own essential nature, only through relationship with other men and women. Theology is ethics, faith has become love, God-centredness has become man-centredness; God is an idea of much psychic importance. But God has no extra-psychic, independent existence. In this sense, Feuerbach's ethic and indeed the whole of his Anthropology is Godless.

(1) "Essence" p.21

To the question: Is God my fellow man? We answer that for Feuerbach ethical relations between men relate them to the human God because through such relations each man becomes conscious of God as the Other Self of his own self-consciousness. To the question: Is God the aggregate or sum of all men taken together? We answer that Feuerbach undoubtedly wished to avoid the philosophical difficulties of maintaining most of his thought around a universal concept which stood in opposition to the empirical world, with an ontological status of its own. So he tried to give the universal empirical content and thus dissolve its ideal nature; the idea of the essence of humanity embraces all that men actually are taken collectively. Where an individual fails another will succeed. So the universal essence of humanity is materialized and becomes the sum of that which the species is actually capable. This answer also answers the third question: which was concerning the status of the idea of perfect human nature or God. God is that which man would like to be; He is an infinite, omnipotent, omniscient human nature existing as an idea arising from the encounter of man with man.

It must be noted, in conclusion, that Feuerbach does not need to reduce the incarnation to anthropology, for he makes the incarnation the centre of his theological methodology; it is the principle of the divine becoming human. "The idea of the incarnation", he writes, "is nothing more than the human form of God, who already in his nature, in the profoundest depths of his soul, is a merciful and therefore a human God." (1) God becoming man is the essence of Christianity for Feuerbach. Now this particular interpretation of the Incarnation is not merely a part of Feuerbach's thought; it is the essence of it. Christology, for him, is necessarily atheistic, because it is,

(1) "Essence" p.51

as he says, the renunciation by God of his divinity. The motive for this renunciation is love. Love, a divine predicate, is "a higher power and truth than deity" (1). Christology has become an ethic of Love. Feuerbach's Anthropology, which has been the subject of this chapter, is a theology reduced to an ethic of human relations, in which the Categories I and Thou are first formulated, and the relation between man and woman is given very careful attention. Moreover, Feuerbach's doctrine of God has been found to contain not only the attack of all theologies which speak of the separate existence of God independent of man, but also the explanation of the essential nature of God as the essence of human-nature knowable only through the relation of the I to a particular Thou.

### III. THEOLOGICAL LANGUAGE.

Feuerbach's philosophical theology depends in part upon one of the most important and interesting analyses of the nature of theological language in the history of Western Theology. He is a powerful exponent of one of the principal solutions to the problems of religious language, and there are few thinkers whose work better enables us to grasp the essential issues. I will begin simply by outlining the form in which he raises his questions for us.

Feuerbach's thesis could be expressed in the proposition: God is what we say he is. This eliminates the other traditional understanding of theological language which may be summarily expressed in the following proposition: God is in some sense 'other than' what we say about him. These two opposing views of theological language are the subject-matter of this paper. Our problem might be formulated as follows: If theological language is both to be used and understood univocally, then some form of anthropomorphism emerges as a necessary consequence. If, on the other hand, it is possible to use and to understand such language equivocally, then there is always an indescribable, unknowable "beyond": for that of which we speak is other than what we say of it, and this "beyond", if taken seriously, forces us to a form of agnosticism. We shall have to consider the relation between knowing and language in both these views, and we shall have to consider such theological problems as those raised by cataphatic or positive theology which employs affirmative propositions of various kinds in its method, and those raised by apophatic or negative theology, which employs a methodological critique, consisting of negations. This will mean that the Tradition of Eastern Theology, and particularly its central concept:  $\xi\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\acute{\iota}\chi$  (unknowing or ignorance) will never be far from our minds.

We begin, however, with Feuerbach. (1) He reasoned that because all the divine predicates are the predicates of human personality (Love, Justice, Mercy, Goodness &c.) except that in God they are unlimited and perfect, God is in some sense man's human nature. This conclusion rests simply upon a literal or univocal interpretation of the concepts predicated to God. Feuerbach was fond of quoting Luther in support of his interpretation, and his understanding of Luther's christology amounted to the assertion that God exhaustively expressed himself in Christ, and could not, therefore, be separated from the humanity of Christ as one who was knowably different from Christ. Feuerbach thought himself a good Lutheran in his fundamental dependence upon the incarnation for speaking of the human nature of God. I will not here be able to consider the justice of his interpretation of Luther. The point I wish to make is that Feuerbach inherited from Luther the emphasis upon the Incarnation for the actual content of God-language, and a certain fear of what Feuerbach called "the dark background" (2) of God, the Deus Absconditus behind the familiar humanity of the Incarnate Son. It is this "dark background" that we must consider more closely.

The essence of the Incarnation, of the God-man, was Love. Feuerbach is quite clearly happy with much traditional, particularly Lutheran, christology. But, he asks, "Is God a being distinct from Love?" If he is, then Feuerbach fears what he is beside love. "So long as there lurks in the background of love a subject who even without love is something by himself", he writes, God may be "an unloving monster, a diabolic being." (3) The point, however, is that we cannot know what God is if he is not what he is in Christ; and this unknowable darkness in the

(1) for further discussion of dichotomy cf. p.67chap.IV

(2) "Essence" p.54ff.

(3) do. p.52

background, this hidden silent Other, threatens the peace of faith. (1)

"The alleged religious horror of limiting God by positive predicates is only the irreligious wish to know nothing more of God, to banish God from the mind", he writes(2). Or, in another passage, he says: "Wherever this idea that the religious predicates are only anthropomorphisms has taken possession of a man, there doubt and unbelief have obtained the mastery of faith." (3) The question we must ask is whether this is any more than a cheap attempt to put the case for cataphatic theology as naively and as rigidly as possible simply in order to attack it by dissolving it into anthropology. Our answer to this question must include an admission that there are times when Feuerbach seems to see only the sheer humanity of the divine predicates by eliminating all the rigorous reflection which usually accompanied the assertion of them, and which qualified them or clarified the precise mode of their application. On the other hand, our answer would also have to include the seriousness with which Feuerbach wrestled with the "dark background", the Deus Absconditus revealed by, but not eliminated by, the Incarnation, the unknowable 'otherness' of God beyond Christ. It was the problem of the Transcendence of God which led him to his human God. Christ is God for us, the only God our finite minds can know; as human-beings, argued Feuerbach, we cannot know God in total independence of ourselves. God as he is in himself is, 'therefore', identical to God as he is for us; we know God as he really is, human.(4) This response to the problems of religious language is diametrically opposed to that made by the Via Negativa. We have just seen Feuerbach use such words as 'irreligious', 'doubt', and 'unbelief' to

(1) "Essence" p. 16  
 (2) do. p. 15

(3) "Essence" p. 17  
 (4) do. p. 17. For an exposition of the logic of this argument cf. ch. IV. p. 60 f



characterize this theological method. In another passage he writes: "The theory that God cannot be defined, and consequently cannot be known by man, is therefore the offspring of recent times, a product of modern belief." (1). It is true that Kant had reformulated the unknowability of God in a particularly powerful way in the Critique of Pure Reason, but to speak of this tradition as a product of recent times is quite wrong. It was a live force in the Old Testament traditions (2), and the dominant tradition in most of the Fathers of the early church, not to mention its importance in the great world religions, particularly the Indian, for some thousands of years. So I maintain that whilst Feuerbach's opposition to the Via Negativa, or apophatic theology, is in part an attempt to make his anthropological reduction easier to accomplish, there is also the serious problem of agnosticism which he rightly sees to be the essence of the Via Negativa. If God is other than what we say about him, there is no knowing what this otherness is, and a potentially threatening darkness takes the place of the familiar God as Christ revealed him.

The underlying problems of which these considerations are a prelude is that of the relation between speaking and knowing, between language and theological knowledge. The question is whether the limits of language coincide with the limits of knowledge. Is, in other words, that which is unknowable in God inexpressible? Is the Otherness of God unknowable because it is inexpressible? We cannot attempt

(1) "Essence" p.14

(2) Ex. 3:14, Is.40:25, 55:8 and 9, &c.

to define here the relation between knowledge and language, and we are well advised to avoid moving through the problem with one of the major philosophers, with the status of a passive passenger. The pitfalls are indeed numerous.

We can, however, say clearly that Feuerbach himself identified that which we say about God with what God really is. In other words, he used theological language univocally, and refused to entertain any possibility of a "beyond" in God; he remained blind to anything which might transcend what we can ourselves know and say of God. God is human because our language is human language speaking about human realities. If, on the other hand, God transcends in some sense what we can say about him, is the limit of our language still the limit of our knowledge? But we have seen that to question the fundamental ordering of the problem is to involve ourselves in more than we can manage here. (1) It would be simple enough to state dogmatically that the knowable is that which in principle can be an object of experience, or that which in principle can be empirically verifiable through observation. We could go on to limit the area within which the use of the category "knowledge" is applicable, and we could then identify this area as that within which so-called 'meaningful language' can function. This would limit that which can be spoken about to that which can be empirically known; the unknowable is the inexpressible. We would be laying essentially the same foundations as those upon which Feuerbach's thesis rests. But to make this procedure definitive would be arbitrary in the extreme.

(1) We return to this point again in Chapter IV. p. 60-61.

The fact, however, that Feuerbach maintained, as we have seen, that language about God was really speaking about man, because understood univocally, such language employed concepts appropriate to the subject-matter of human nature and personality, means that he is working within the limits we have indicated. Theological language meant for him literally what it said. This, too, is a form of dogmatism, and it is clearly inextricably bound up with the thesis he persistently advocates, that "Homo homini deus est".

The apophatic method of the *Via Negativa* may be understood as a form of limiting critique, a sort of clipping of wings. Its purpose is, on the other hand, totally different from the powerful western mode of thought to be found in Feuerbach's work. Apophatic theology limits the applicability of theological language, it adopts a critically rigorous methodology and subjects all God language to its critique. The essence of the Eastern position is that it holds God the other side of the limits of the expressible and the empirically knowable. We should perhaps distinguish here the mediaeval use of the Negative Way, where, for instance, Thomas Aquinas employs it as a corrective to Affirmative Theology, and the essentially different use of apophatic method in the East, and particularly in the *Areopagitica*. For Thomas, the negations were the *modus significandi* to be held in dialectical tension with the Affirmations, the *Res Significata* (1). In the *Areopagitica*, on the other hand, the relation between apophatic and cataphatic theology is not that of dialectical tension but of the dominance of apophatic theology. The *Via Negativa*, which refuses to form concepts of God, becomes the essence of theology. (2)

(1) *Quaestiones disputae* VII:5; for much of this paragraph I am indebted to Vladimir Lossky: "Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church" p.25ff.

(2) of: especially "On the Divine Names" and "Mystical Theology",

The point to be seen clearly in our present position is that Feuerbach is moving in precisely the opposite direction to that of the Via Negativa. Feuerbach, far from conceiving God as beyond the limits of the expressible or the empirically knowable, reinterprets all God language by understanding it univocally, and thus sets God firmly WITHIN the limits of the knowable and the expressible. The being of God is human nature absolutized or divinized because theological language is, after all, human language employing human concepts. Understood literally, such concepts can only be appropriate to the sphere of human realities. God, far from being unknowable, can be known as the Essence of the Species, my fellow man, or the other which is the self I am aware of in self-consciousness. However, ambiguous Feuerbach's various explanations of the human nature of God may be, they all locate God within the sphere of the knowable and the expressible.

Thus Feuerbach stands in the tradition of western cataphatic theology, but his undialectical literalism leads him to a human God. The apophatic theologian would object that Feuerbach had made the demonic error of identifying the symbolic nature of the divine predicates with the divine or ultimate itself. Thomas Aquinas was careful to hold this negation in dialectical tension with an unshamed affirmative theology. But he would have opposed Feuerbach's arbitrary literalism. The difficulties we have to consider are those which arise when we recognize that if God is set beyond the expressible and the knowable, then only a theology of revelation can reconnect God with men. It is the work of critique of the language in which this revelation is expressed that is again given to us, after a period of arbitrary empiricism in which theological language was forced into the framework of ordinary language and found to be meaningless. It is all too easy, however, to establish that theological language

can never be judged by such norms; it is easy to start from a theology of revelation which gives theological language its own logical status, and therefore to remain naively satisfied with some past theological fashion. Theological language is an independent language; it is not, because of this, immune from change; nor are there no criteria which can be employed in deciding what should and should not be said.

Feuerbach's undialectical literalism reveals the task of the theologian's critique of theological language to lie in the direction of apophatic theology. Apophatic theological method subjects the "horizon concepts" of theology to rigorous criticism by determining the precise mode of their application. Feuerbach negates the extra-empirical mode of application, the use of analogy and symbol; and the apophatic protest to this procedure is based upon its making God knowable and expressible, and thus finite and even human. Max Scheler noted the close relation between the phenomenological method and Negative Theology. "Many", he writes, "who make use of the (phenomenological) method, (in our present field or any other) are surprisingly unaware that as a method it is basically none other than that of Negative Theology. For the method of Negative Theology", he continues, "itself arose purely from the deep conviction that the Divine and Holy form has such a prime elementary quality which can only be demonstrated by a slow process of elimination and analogy...There is no doubt that as an approach and method, phenomenology was first employed, in the time of Plotinus, in exactly this theological context." (1) Scheler grasped quite clearly that the methodological "peeling away of correlates and contraries", and the "consequent laying bare of the phenomenon present to the inspecting mind" (2), was not rationalism, God

(1) Max Scheler: "On the Eternal in Man" p.171

(2) do. do. do. do. p.170

was not being inspected by speculative Reason. Rationalism, he points out, understands the mystical nature of Negative Theology as a rational theory, and as such must lead to "religious nihilism - even to Atheism" (1). Here, Scheler indicates the attitude of Feuerbach to Negative Theology; the Negative Way, we recall, was for him "irreligious unbelief and doubt" (2). For Scheler, the negative method served only to reveal the "positive datum", as he called it, (3) which is separated from the mass of "finite, non-divine, or merely analogous" propositions of affirmative theology (ibid). This positive datum is self-given, it is given to the particular form of cognitive knowing of religious consciousness. We might wish to remove what Scheler has to say to more familiar ground, perhaps by making the positive datum knowable to faith alone; but nevertheless his identifying the method of phenomenology with the method of apophatic theology is of considerable importance to us. (4).

The Way of Analogy must now be considered. I will maintain that the logic of theological analogy breaks down on the unknowability of God. Ferré, in his recent book,

- (1) Max Scheler: "On the Eternal in Man" p.172
- (2) do. do. do. do. cf.p. 4
- (3) do. do. do. do. p.172
- (4) To find a non-reductionist interpretation of these matters, and to undertake a systematic presentation of such an interpretation lies well beyond our scope at present. of also p.4

'Language, Logic and God' distinguishes two classes of analogies. First, the "Analogy of Attribution" is the use of an analogy in which one analogate possesses the characteristic predicated of it in a "formal" or univocal manner, whilst the second analogate has the predicate applied to it in a derived or equivocal sense (1). Second, the "Analogy of proportionality" is the use of the analogy in which the application of the analogue or predicate to the analogates is proportional to the analogates concerned. The logic of both types of analogy is dependent upon the knowability of the analogates, or, in our context, upon an element of finitude in God. But God is infinite or not God at all, the empirical world finite. Where is the basis for analogy?(2) I cannot here consider Barth's answer of the *Analogia Fidei*, though I would have to if this were an essay on religious language in modern theology.

Copleston gives us the traditional dialectical answer to Aquinas; he advocates an oscillation between the affirmative and the negative ways, between agnosticism and anthropomorphism (3). But he does this on the presupposition that the *Via Negativa* leads finally to agnosticism and even atheism (4). His adoption of the Way of Analogy takes this for granted. But we have already hinted that this is not necessarily so. The Rationalist understanding of apophatic theology

(1) F. Ferre. *Language, Logic and God*. p.70ff.

(2) I here presuppose Kant's *Critique of natural theology*, in which the unknowability of God is asserted on the basis of the finitude of human reason and the exclusively finite applicability of the categories of thought and intuition. There is, unfortunately, no place here for a full discussion of the reasons for such a presupposition.

(3) F. Copleston: *Contemporary Philosophy* p.96ff. So does J. MacQuarrie's 'God Talk'.

(4) MacQuarrie p.213 "God Talk" writes: "In practice the *Via Negationis* has always been supplemented by some other way of talking about God, and apart from such supplementation, we do seem to fall into atheism."

led to nihilism and atheism for Scheler, but the mystical understanding did not. What is this mystical understanding? We have seen that it was a clearing of the way for a positive datum, the actual experience of God as the unknowable and the inexpressible. Consequently, the Negative Way can never be resorted to in the absence of this experience. It would then be nihilism and atheism. Feuerbach's negative reduction ruthlessly moves in precisely the opposite direction from the *Via Negativa*. It eliminates the possibility of the positive datum, and is blind to any experience of the Transcendent God whatever. So his reduction, far from starting from the unknowability and inexpressibility of God, starts from the knowability and expressibility of God and the univocal use of theological language. From this standpoint, Feuerbach rightly thought the *Via Negativa* to be nihilist and atheist. Perhaps the Thomist presupposition that this was so, makes it as little able to understand apophatic theology as Feuerbach was.

I therefore turn to the view put forward in the *Arcopagitica*, that the apophatic method is primary, and that the negative character of the method is only apparent. Scheler endorsed this opinion, and made it the basis for his support of Husserl in calling phenomenology the basis of all the empirical sciences. He writes: "The proposition that.... Negative theology.... is the basis of all positive theology (and not *visa versa*) is as certainly true as that the eidetic phenomenology of any object-group is the ultimate basis of the positive science concerned with that group" (1) Apophatic theology may, then, be the essential and primary theological method. We must consider the central concept of Eastern Theology: *ἀγνωσία* previously mentioned at the beginning of this paper. A logical analysis of this concept must be undertaken

(1) Max Scheler: *On the Eternal in Man*. p.172



within the theological context of its use. It will therefore be irrelevant to usher in criteria for determining its meaning from any alien context, even theological context.

ἄγνοια, or unknowing, was a concept dear to the heart of the mystics, and those who followed the way of contemplative prayer in Christian monasticism. Wherever the influence of the so-called Areopagita writings was felt, 'unknowing' was a theological term of primary importance. The unknown Syrian monk of the late 5th century had an immense influence upon Christian mystical theology, as is well known. The term is used by him primarily as a negation, a negation of all finite being to distinguish them from God. The negation is a methodological procedure integrated into the life of prayer, whereby finite knowledge is eliminated to reveal the infinite God. The invisibility of God is included in the concept, thus such mystical works as that written by an unknown author from the north-east midlands of England, in the 14th century was called the 'Cloud of Unknowing' (1). Thus ἄγνοια is a form of καθάρσιμος, a purification or cleansing, as well as a theological procedure. (2). The incomprehensibility of God in this theological tradition, as well as the inexpressibility of God, make the attempt to verify theological language futile; God is beyond the limit of all finite knowing, and therefore, with regard to finite knowing, unknowable.

ἄγνοια is also a prophetic concept, one which well articulates Tillich's Protestant Principle. It is also

- (1) of "Cloud of Unknowing" Intro. to Burns Oates ed. p.viiiif.  
from Psalms 17:12, 96:2, I John 1:5  
(2) of Lossky: Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church p.27

possible to understand his interpretation of Christianity's final revelation in this light; "a revelation is final," says Tillich, "if it has the power of negating itself without losing itself" (1). For him, distinction must be made between revelation and the medium in and through which it appears. Christ is the medium of final revelation because he sacrificed himself, negating like the Via Negativa, his own finitude, and pointing beyond himself to infinity. Thus, christology is understood as a throwing of all absolutes and ultimates out of the finite world, so that no demonic deification of some part of this world is possible. Only then can God be God and the world be world. It is this sort of definalising of the worldly media, by <sup>ε</sup> means of which God is obliquely known by man, that lies behind the <sup>Λ</sup> Eastern concept of *ἀγνωσία*.

We have now come full circle from the point at which this chapter began. For here the contrast between the two propositions: God is what we say he is; and: God is in some sense 'other than' what we say about him, is clearly seen to be the conflict between apophatic and literal cataphatic theology, between the Via Negativa and Feuerbach's interpretation of theological language. Our way through the problem of the relation between speaking and knowing can now be seen to be arbitrary and provisional, because we have now arrived at a position in which there is a form of knowing, which through its refusal to halt at the finite object immediately known, unknowns this finite content, and thus grasps the *μυστήριον* or Mysterium

(1) Tillich. S.J.I. p.148

of Transcendence. Ἄγνωστος refuses to identify the God which is referred to if theological language is used univocally with the Christian God. Similarly, Luther wrote, "God here in this life dealeth not with us face to face, but veiled and shadowed from us. (of I Cor.13:12) Therefore, we cannot be without veils in this life. But here wisdom is required, which can discern the veil from God himself". (1); here the wisdom Luther requires is the Via Negativa, with its methodological discrimination and critique of all the media of God's revelation.

Our contemporary problem is set by the recent emancipation of theological language from alien criteria of meaningfulness, and theology is now at times in danger of saying too much. The Via Negativa contains within itself the most rigorous criteria with which our critique of theological language can begin to move forward, once it is understood that it is a rationalistic misunderstanding of the Via Negativa which leads to nihilism, or atheism. Through meeting Feuerbach's standpoint on these matters, we have been enabled to see clearly where we cannot go, and moreover where we should now turn. I am not suggesting that the apophatic critique of theological language has the answer to our problems, our problems are far bigger than the subject matter of this paper; but I do suggest that in apophatic theology we have a tool for logical critique which would tend to move our thought away from our positive assertions about God to God himself; admittedly only to founder on the inarticulate hiddenness of the Deus Absconditus. But the attitude with which we then return to our cataphatic assertions is that of humour, because our positive theology is now seen to be a game between the times, a sort of eschatological hide-and-seek.

(1) Luther: Galatians II v.6 p.104.

#### IV. THE BEING OF GOD.

We must now undertake to give a systematic exposition of all the aspects of Feuerbach's doctrine of the Being of God which have not so far been expressly dealt with. We have looked closely at Feuerbach's understanding of Faith, and we have thus seen the general purpose of his work. But we have not so far seen how he works his interpretation out in the detailed instances which make up the Doctrine of God. We have also given much attention to the Anthropology which Feuerbach offers as the end-product of his Analysis and Reduction of Christian theology, but we shall now have to consider the Doctrine of God as a human phenomenon in all its aspects, and thus complete our study of what Feuerbach has to say to us.

The structure of the "Essence of Christianity" consists of two parts, the first presents the Anthropology which Feuerbach maintains is the Essence of Christianity; the second is a support of the principal theses upon which the anthropological reduction is based, which draws attention to absurdities which result if theology is not so interpreted. He notes in his Preface (1) that he intends the former part to be concerned chiefly with Religion, and the latter with theology. The distinction he seems to wish to make is that between a living faith, religious experience, and the intellectual formulations

(1) "Essence" xxxvii, also p.197

which he thinks misinterpret such a faith. The illusion of faith consists in the distinguishing of the divine nature from the human, regarding God as a being independent of the humanity of the believer. Thus he can justifiably claim not to oppose the phenomenon of religious faith itself, but only the way the theologian persists in understanding such a faith. But the implied naivety of the believer, in contrast to the sophistication of the theologian, has never fitted the mould Feuerbach has in mind for him. His God was never Feuerbach's human God; it is rather the particular philosophical and theological movement, of which Feuerbach was himself a part, that led to his radical subjectivism in theology. The simple believer has continued to hold himself apart from such thinking, and it is not simply the theologian who insists upon the separation of God from man as an independent being transcending the world. (1).

We shall have to ask one important question in the course of the Analysis which follows, and that is: To what extent does the Anthropological understanding of religion in the first half of the "Essence of Christianity" depend upon the disclosing of the absurdities of theology in the second? Or can the Anthropology stand independent of the refutation of the theologian's understanding of his subject-matter, in the second part?

Both parts of the "Essence of Christianity" are an highly individual, often colourful study of many of the aspects and versions of the conceptual expressions of the Christian doctrine

(1) cf "Essence" p.56

of God. Feuerbach often seems to be summoning us to a feast of human Gods. His method lacks rigorous argument, but consists rather in the power to persuade by means of the sheer force of these examples. We shall proceed by taking the problem of the inter-relation of the two halves of the book as one of our principal considerations although we shall also halt at various suitable points in the discussion to draw attention to some of the problems of which we have already become aware in the first three chapters. Thus I hope to continue to clarify individual questions as well as ask the wider question of the inter-dependence of the two halves of the book.

We begin with the first four chapters of the first part of the book in which the Anthropological essence of Christianity is formulated. The whole of this first part is presented in the form of seventeen mysteries, mysteries of human nature. All are in some way involving the Christian doctrine of God, and all are the residue left over after the method of Analysis and Reduction has been thoroughly completed. The mysteries of the being of God are found to be essentially mysteries of the being of man.

The first chapter deals with God "as a being of the understanding" (1). In it he puts forward the argument, now familiar, that "in religion man contemplates his own latent nature", so that "God is not what man is, man is not what God is." (2) To maintain such a position, Feuerbach sees that he

(1) "Essence" p.33ff.

(2) do. ibid

has to show that every part of the doctrine of God can, if not conclusively, then convincingly, also be understood in purely human terms. His first argument starts by asserting that the disunion or estrangement between man and God could not be genuine unless God and man were essentially one. One example of this unity is the relation between the God of man's intellectual striving and the human intellect itself. "God", Feuerbach boldly states, "is the objective nature of the thinking power" (1), or as we should need to correct him in the light of other passages, God is the power of the human intellect objectified, or projected in the human imagination, and thus freed from its actual limitations in the individual.

We are then offered a decidedly rationalistic interpretation of the *Via Negationis*, for he understands apophatic theology as a method of abstraction aiming at the concept of 'infinite spirit' by means of an intellectual disengagement from the real world. He ascribes this negative method of thought to the Greeks, the church fathers and the schoolmen. Thus all theologies of an abstract speculative nature are challenged; for are they not, after all, calling the ability of the human intellect to think abstractly, God? Their idea of God is simply a speculative flight of the human intellect.

All men, he continues, feel a sense of want, a void; and they therefore posit the perfection they themselves lack in the God which is the highest of which their intellects can conceive. Hence, Feuerbach concludes, "All the metaphysical predicates of God are real predicates only when they are recognized as belonging to thought, to intelligence and to understanding". (2)

(1) "Essence" p. 35  
 (2) do. p. 37

The traditional *Ens Realissimum* is the "God who is what the understanding thinks as the highest" (1). The God who gives the world reasonable meaning and saves it from aimless irrationality is simply the human belief in the rationality of the world. This might be summed up in the dramatic proposition: "The measure of thy God is the measure of thy understanding". (2)

It would be useful to ask at this point what relation this passage has to the uncovering of the contradictions and absurdities of theological metaphysics to be found in the third chapter of the second half of the book. (3) In this passage Feuerbach discusses the contradiction involved in the various ideas of God, including the God of the human intellect. The first absurdity he has in mind is the conflict between the abstract being. "One half of the definition", he observes, "is always in contradiction with the other half", one statement annihilates the other (4). And what theologian has not known the unrest of this problem? A second example we will quote in full. He writes:

"A God who does not trouble himself about us, who does not hear our prayers, who does not see us and love us, is no God; thus humanity is made an essential predicate of God; - but at the same extent it is said: A God who does not exist in and by himself, out of men, above men, as another being, is a phantom; and thus it is made an essential predicate of God that he is non-human and extra-human." (5)

- (1) "Essence" p. 37
- (2) do. p. 39
- (3) do. p.213-225; ch.XXII
- (4) do. p.213
- (5) do. p.213



The question at stake here is, of course, the theology of symbol and analogy, the univocal and equivocal use of religious language, a problem we have discussed elsewhere. All affirmations must be negated and set against others which are also negated, or else a finite God is settled for. What is it, then, which makes theologians able to continue their work, and others - for example Feuerbach, - to conclude that God is as essentially human as the ideas men have of him so clearly are?

We might be tempted to answer this question immediately by pointing to faith or the 'positive datum' which Max Scheler separates from the "finite non-divine or merely analogous" propositions of affirmative theology (1). For it would seem to be this basic experience of God which renders it impossible for some to take Feuerbach's thought and make it their own. One suspects that it is not simply Feuerbach's shallow blindness to evil and death that enables Barth to laugh in his face (2), it is also his certainty that there is in his own theology no possibility of "an inversion of above and below, of heaven and earth, of God and man". Barth urges all theologians that the only answer to Feuerbach worth its stuff is one in which the whole line of the boundary of the relation between God and man is "in principle uninvertible" (3). Barth sees that Lutheran theology, in which the "predicates of the divine majesty really belong to the humanity of Jesus as such and in abstracto" (4), can lead, without Calvin's corrective, to a blurring of the distinction between God and man. Hegel, and of course Feuerbach, exploited this interpretation. So his own theology took as its starting

(1) Scheler: On the Eternal in Man. p.172

(2) Intro. Barth p. xxviii

(3) do. do. p. xxiii

(4) do. do. p. xxiii

point the "infinite qualitative distinction" between God and man so clearly understood by Kierkegaard (1), and he made it the pivot of his theological work. (2) It was this first principle which led Barth to repudiate the theology of the *Analogia Entis*, and which continues to enable him to take Feuerbach with a seriousness that others must hesitate to do. (3) But what is the ground of his assurance? Can it be anything other than the "Assertio" of faith which Ebeling sees must take the responsibility for what is said of God, and is the only answer to the accusation of those who interpret it as "subjective caprice and pure illusion"? (4)

We see, then, that the same "absurdities" of conflicting ideas in the doctrine of the being of God can lead in two different directions, the way of the believing theologian and the way of the "natural philosopher in the realm of mind" (5). We will not proceed with this problem at present (6) but before we continue with the God of morality and human emotion, we will glance at Feuerbach's study of Revelation in the second chapter of this second portion of the book. (ch. XXI pp. 204-212). We cannot continue to attend to the problem of the being of God for faith without understanding Feuerbach's interpretation of revelation, nor can we see Barth's remarks in their rightful context, unless we can see their relation to this interpretation.

- (1) Søren Kierkegaard. *Phil. Fragments*, p. 57/8 - and in relation to Feuerbach p. 56.
- (2) Barth: *Romans 1:18* p. 44, also 47, 98, 108, &c. and *The Humanity of God*, p. 37, 20, 26 on Feuerbach.
- (3) *Church Dogmatics I.1 Foreward* p. X
- (4) Ebeling: *Word and Faith*, pp 346-7.
- (5) "Essence" p. xxxiv
- (6) We shall do so on p. 60 of this chapter.

Feuerbach's theology of revelation (ch.XXI p.204-212) rests upon the thesis that: "Religion is a dream, in which our own conceptions and emotions appear to us as separate existences, beings out of ourselves". (1) Thus, for him, to believe in the revelation of God was to believe in the illusion that the subjective was 'really' objective, that God was in himself other than man. Belief is naive personification of human thoughts, emotions and wishes; the projection of these into a false objectivity. Feuerbach outlines the schema of revelation as follows:

"Man can of himself know nothing of God; all his knowledge is merely vain, earthly, human....But God is a super-human being; God is known only by himself, thus we know nothing of God beyond what he reveals to us. By means of revelation, therefore, we know God through himself; for revelation is the Word of God - God declaring himself." (2)

He then raises the important question of communication between God and man, and asserts that God can only reveal what he must reveal if his revelation is to be for man and not for some other being. It is not, of course, that God is limited but that man is limited; and for God to work in relation to man, he must move within these limits. Thus Feuerbach continues:

"In the scheme of his revelation, God must have reference not to himself, but to man's power of comprehension. That which comes from God to man, comes to man only from 'man in God', that is, only from the ideal nature of man to the phenomenal man, from the species to the individual. Thus between the divine revelation and the so-called human reason or

(1) "Essence" p. 204  
 (2) do. p. 206

nature, there is no other than an illusory distinction." (1)

Feuerbach employs here the same argument with the same interpretation of the language of religious belief, as we saw him do when he drew attention to the absurdities of conflicting ideas of God a few moments ago. In the context of revelation, his argument proceeds as follows: The understanding of man is limited. God reveals what man can understand, he is what he can say of himself within this limit. Since man can know nothing of God other than what God himself reveals, this revelation 'for' man is a revelation 'of' man to himself. "In revelation", he writes, "man goes out of himself, in order, by a circuitous path to return to himself." (2) The similarity between this and the logic of the argument against the usual theological use of religious language is obvious. A univocal or literal understanding of all we say of God, and all that can be revealed to us of God by God, inevitably leads us to a human God. We have again arrived at the central point of the theological problems so acutely raised by Feuerbach. But we are not quite ready to formulate them definitively. (3)

If man contemplates his own nature in his imagination, and this is his God; one might ask how this affects man's life. Feuerbach answers that it is clear that the power of the idea of the perfect nature of the human species upon man through his imagination has beneficial moral effects. (4) Such an idea contains, after all, the goal and purpose of human life, it is the image of as yet unrealized humanity. This brings us to the second of the Mysteries of human nature, falsely called mysteries

(1) "Essence" p.207

(2) do. p.207

(3) We will take this up again on p.60

(4) "Essence" p.208

of the divine nature by theology. The moral being called God by Christian theology must have human attributes to be God. We shudder at the idea of the impersonal God, of the inhuman, immoral God. "Where thou givest me God", wrote Luther, "thou must give me humanity too." (1)

In the passage we are now considering, (ch.III p.44-49) Feuerbach notes that the "infinite, universal, non-anthropomorphic being of the understanding" which he had discussed previously (ch.II) was only a "mathematical point of religion" (2); it was not important for the essence of Christian faith itself. What is of absolute importance is the idea of the moral perfection of God which, for Feuerbach, is of course the moral nature of man which the believer strives to posit as an absolute and independent being. We do not feel we ourselves have to become the Omnipotent and Eternal being which is the idea of the God of the Understanding, but the idea of the God of moral perfection is a law for all men, a call to moral action, a judgement of all that falls short of such perfection. Feuerbach quotes Kant as saying that the moral law humiliates every man because it shows him up to be what he is, a sensual being. Christian faith, however, makes the moral law into the being of God, in the idea of God as judge; but just as man also loves and has mercy as well as knows what is wrong, so God too is loving and merciful. God is not inhuman in his attitude to sin; he acts as we should expect of him, in a human manner. Thus Feuerbach proceeds to show how his proposition "Homo homini deus est" can be found to be the essence of this as well as all the other mysteries of Christian faith.

The contradiction between differing ideas of God which we have already considered when we looked at some passages from the

(1) "Essence" quoted p.45  
 (2) do. p. 44

second portion of the book, can now be seen to contribute to the form in which the idea of a moral divine being is criticized. "One half of the definition", wrote Feuerbach, "is always in contradiction with the other half" (1). The idea of God as a being of the understanding is the product of a process of theological abstraction; or perhaps more accurately, it is an attempt to avoid the demonic pitfalls of literal anthropomorphism. On the other hand, the idea of God as the moral being who both judges and loves, checks this attempt, and begins to find a way back to a human God. In this light, the two parts of the "Essence of Christianity" seem to be fulfilling a complementary role in relation to each other. The Anthropology comes out quite clearly in the showing up of the contradictions, and the absurdities of conflicting ideas of God become clear in the Anthropology. Both sections rest, however, upon the univocal use and interpretation of God-language which Feuerbach naively assumes to be the only one which avoids complete scepticism and atheism. (2) It is to this central problem that we now turn.

But we shall come to it through a study of the Incarnation which Feuerbach turns to his own purposes in a most interesting way. We saw that in his theology of revelation, God revealed only human qualities within the limits of human understanding and language; God acted in a way man could understand and express. (cf. p. 56) The Mystery of the Incarnation is the mystery of the Love of God, and the mystery of the loving God is simply the contemplation of God as human. "The Incarnation is nothing else than the practical, material manifestation of the human nature of God", he writes. (3) Or again: "The idea of the

- (1) "Essence" p. 213. cf. p. 5  
 (2) do. p. 17  
 (3) do. p. 50

Incarnation is nothing more than the human form of a God, who already in his nature, in the profoundest depths of his soul, is a merciful and therefore a human God."(1)

A presupposition of these two passages is of much interest. All revelation is revelation for man, which seems to lead inevitably to a human content of revelation, if the language in which revelation is expressed is understood literally. It is this transition from the finite, human nature of the language of revelation to the father, and quite different point, of a finite, human nature of the being who reveals himself in revelation, that we have been continually returning to in our discussion of the nature of revelation and of religious language. Indeed, it is the pivot around which the whole of Feuerbach's understanding of the being of God revolves. We noted that the choice of two ways can be distinguished, one which is taken by the believing theologian who asserts that when he speaks of God it is of God that he speaks, and the other chosen by Feuerbach who suggested more potently than anyone else that when the believer speaks of God, it is of the nature of man that he is speaking. (2) When we studied the nature of religious language (3), we saw that Feuerbach chose this course in three different contexts, that of theological epistemology, that of theological language, and that of christology. In the first he concluded that because man's capacity to know man was intrinsically limited to the empirically knowable, and thus to finite reality, God was either

(1) "Essence" p.51

(2) cf. p 55-58.

(3) Ch. on religious language. Chap.III pp. 37-41

finite and human or else completely unknowable. In the case of theological language, he argued that either God was what we are able to say of him within the limits of our human language; or he is outside, or other than, what we say about him, in which case we can neither know nor say what he is. Or in the terms of Christology, which for Feuerbach meant an undialectical interpretation of Lutheran christology, God exhaustively reveals himself in Christ. As far as we are concerned Christ as God pro nobis, the Incarnate God, is the only God that man can know or speak of. Thus all three cases are concluded in the proposition: Homo homini deus est.

We might draw attention at this point to two modes of theological reflection, both of which Feuerbach questions fundamentally. We have seen that Feuerbach draws the being of God within the confines of human thought, emotion, morality and language. But we also saw that God was these forms of human self-expression in their infinite aspirations, in their drive towards complete realization and absolute perfection. Thus, God, or the various ideas of God, encountered in the relation of faith, is human nature stretched or extended beyond the limits of the individual in the intensity of the human attempt to transcend the confines of finitude. This mode of theological reflection begins with man but as Feuerbach so clearly shows, only apparently aspires from man to the infinite.

The second way of doing theology which Feuerbach also questions is that of a fully developed theology of revelation. Many have listened to him in the case of the former theological method, and have made it their own criticism of most of 19th century liberal protestant theology. But few have noticed that Feuerbach threatens the great answer of our own time to such theology, with an equally potent question. We saw (p.56) that



Feuerbach understood revelation as a circuit which is in fact from man to man, but which appears to faith to be from outside man during the second half of the circuitous process.

(1) But it is not this rather too vague pictorial explanation of revelation which is of first importance. For we must look closely at the problem of the language in which God reveals himself rather than anything else. This mode of theological reflection argues that however far the innate faculties of human nature are stretched, however much man may experience an internal drive towards self-transcendence, he will find only human Gods and not the God who himself freely chooses to reveal himself in his word. This would be in line with Feuerbach's criticism of theology starting from man. But the language which is allegedly God speaking in his revelational word is human language. And to say as Barth does, that God gives to human language, through his own grace, the capacity to speak of himself, (2) is to leave Feuerbach's question unanswered. It is to fail to see that even if it is God who authenticates the use of such language, the language itself can still lead unchecked to the God who is the self-transcendence of human nature. Barth tries to let God do the difficult job of justifying and explaining the language of revelation; but fails because he does not see that his answer leaves the problem untouched, and that it is the responsibility of man to attend to it. To say this is not, of course, to exclude the priority of God in the relation of grace, nor to identify faith with some intrinsically human experience; but it is a refusal to evade the inevitable responsibility of man for what he says. The danger lurking behind Barth is that he has no way of checking whether he is not illegitimately calling in the name of God to authenticate a

(1) "Essence" p.207

(2) Church Dogmatics II 1 204-254, cf. esp. 213, 223, 233, 45, 228, 243f.

theological fashion which must one day die a healthy death. Or else, the privilege of all users of theological language must henceforth be to speak, as Barth does, of the appropriateness of their language of revelation as being due solely to the Grace of God.

We shall have to leave, however, the specific problems of particular theologians such as Barth, fully aware that to relate what Feuerbach has to say to Barth in a fair and balanced way would require a book in itself. The problem we do have to continue to give our attention to is that of the appropriateness of theological terminology. The theologian must face the question Feuerbach puts to him in his use of both ancient and modern ideas of God, and even every possible christological formula; Does what he says not refer to an exclusively human rather than a divine context? Does a dialectic of divine-human still have to be maintained? Or is the dialectic not rather between the ideal and the actual, between essential and existing man? Is the transcendence of God not a human transcendence, the transcendence of self which human nature achieves in the ideas of God which free him from the limited confines of his individual finitude? And recalling what we saw in the chapter on Anthropology, this transcendence is also bound up with the transcendence of the human other, the Thou who mediates the essence of human nature to me. (1). All these questions rest upon the step which Feuerbach takes which leads him from the inevitably human situation in which the language of revelation must have meaning, to the unambiguous conclusion that the content of revelation, as well as the form, (if we might use the old distinction for a moment), was after all thoroughly human.

(1) p 22-25, particularly 23.

These fascinating questions, the most difficult theology ever has to tackle, ought now to be a good deal clearer in our minds, and therefore we must continue with the task of expounding both parts of the book with them close to hand. So we turn from the Incarnation to the human mystery which is the essence of the suffering God. (1) Feuerbach formulates this in the sentence: "God as God is the sum of all human perfection; God as Christ is the sum of all human misery." (2) The self-sacrificing Love of the incarnate God in the suffering of the passion is the picture or image which satisfies the human need for meaning and purpose in human suffering, and it therefore fulfils the drive to transcend the evil and despair of finite existence. Thus the mystery of the suffering God is the mystery of the suffering human heart. "God", he writes, "is the mirror of man" (3). "Every man must place before himself a God, i.e. an aim, a purpose" (4), and in this God he will place what ultimately concerns him, and this he will do whether he begins from man and reaches God by extending in God what he cannot reach himself, or whether he is blind to this, and is aware only of his God revealing what he needs God to reveal to him.

So far the various explanations of Christian beliefs and doctrines have not seemed too improbable, so as to require objection. But there are passages (5), in which theological doctrines are arbitrarily, even naively, forced into an anthropological mould. At the beginning of the book the divine trinity was unconvincingly reduced to the human trinity of the Kantian categories by means of which all psychological phenomena were classified: Reason, Will and Affection (6). This analysis

(1) "Essence" p.59-65

(2) do. p.59

(3) do. p.63

(4) do. p.64

(5) for instance, "Essence" p.3

(6) of Anthropology p.3 (Ch.II)

is considerably modified in the chapter on the Trinity which we shall look at next. (1) In this chapter specifically devoted to the Trinity, the explanation in Kantian terms is not employed. Instead, Feuerbach reduces the inter-trinitarian relations to human self-consciousness, which as we have seen (2) consists of an internal relation between I and another, the Thou which is the self I know as myself. This self is 'object' to me in my own self-knowledge, and is not to be identified with the subject or I which eludes all knowledge, since it is the I which knows. The triune God consists of the relation of self-consciousness, "the Father is I, the Son is Thou", and the Holy Spirit is the "bond of Love between Father and Son". (3)

The Logos is the idea of a being constructed by the human imagination as an image of itself, just as the abstract being of the Reason is constructed from the self-transcending potentiality of the intellect. The Logos shares with all ideas of God, including the Trinity, therefore, an intrinsically human essence (4). These 'explanations' of the Trinity, and the Logos doctrines are undoubtedly less contrived than the psychological trinity noted above. The so-called cosmogonical principle in God, which we consider next (5) is the ingenious theory that the mediation of the imagination between abstraction and perception, between the conceptual and the concrete, is the true essence of the theological dogma of the mediation of the Logos, between God and world in creation. It is difficult to estimate the value of such ingenuity. An abstract God and a concrete world are, to be sure, polar

- (1) "Essence" pp.68-73
- (2) cf. ch. on Faith, p. 9 (Wh.I)
- (3) "Essence" p. 67 and 70
- (4) do. p. 74-79
- (5) do. p. 80-86

opposites; but whether the imagination as mediator between the one and the other, can simply 'explain' the Logos theology is doubtful. It is all a little too simple, though the underlying method of reduction does not stand or fall upon the success of such individual instances.

We must now add to these questions one farther question arising from them. What does the method of reduction stand or fall by? How are we to regard such a method? To answer this we must first ask again how far the analysis of contradictions and obscurities in the second part of the book provide the foundation for the Anthropology in the first. If we look at the chapter on the Contradiction in the Trinity (1) we see that the absurdities of trinitarian language bear no relation whatsoever to the anthropological reduction of the trinity we looked at above. Feuerbach's argument is expressed as follows: "To require the reality of the persons is to require the unreality of the unity, and conversely, to require the reality of the unity is to require the unreality of the persons." (2) His line in the anthropological interpretation passage was quite different. Instead of arguing that the three contradicted the one, and vice versa, he left numerical considerations alone, and proceeded to attempt to show that what Christians believed was a triune divine being was 'really' something else. The method of reduction in this case bears no relation to the unearthing of contradictions. What sort of considerations, therefore, are likely to clarify the nature of this method of reduction?

It undoubtedly rests upon some largely unquestioned

(1) "Essence" p.232 to 235  
 (2) do. p. 235

positivistic presuppositions, which became clear when we indicated the limits which which knowledge and language were thought, by Feuerbach, to function (1). It is because the language of theology could not refer to what it purports to refer to, because man is confined in his knowing and his speaking to the experiencable world of physical nature, that the method of reduction can begin to be employed at all. If the idea of God cannot be external to man, God must be understood to be an idea, an intelligible essence, a genetic universal, a moral and loving principle, an abstraction of the intellect, and so on.

In the chapter on religious language we discussed Feuerbach within the framework of a deliberate dichotomy (2). Either God is what we can say about him, or he is in some sense other than what we can say of him. We found this rather rigid polar framework valuable in gaining a grip upon the problems before us, but is it a valid dichotomy in the wider context in which we now find ourselves? It posed the problem of the being of God in a crisp either/or fashion, which we will now have to consider more closely in relation to the presuppositions of the method of reduction outlined above, and to the chapter on the Existence of God. (3) Our problem is an ontological one: What kind of being is the being of God? Feuerbach's naturalism led him to a reductive thesis which makes this question split into a number of similar questions such as: What kind of being has the divine being of human morality? Or, What kind of being has the God who loves man by becoming man, or the God who is coextensive with the intellectual ability of man to abstract and speculate? We are clearly coming at the

(1) cf. p. 60-61

(2) cf. p. 35 of Chap. III on Religious Language.

(3) "Essence" ch. 20, p. 197-203.

ever-recurring question which Feuerbach raises for theology from a different angle, this time openly ontological rather than linguistic. We were seeking for a non-reductive interpretation which also took seriously Feuerbach's acute analysis of religious language. But we saw that this was a massive task that lies beyond our scope at present. (1)

We can, however, raise the questions involved in Feuerbach's analysis of the obscurities and contradictions in the idea of the existence of God, and thus clarify the ontological question itself somewhat. The complexity we have before us consists, in part, in the tension between Feuerbach's positivism and his willingness to embrace the aspiring self-transcending of finite limits which is the 'essence' of man's faith in God within his thought as well. Although the objectivity of God is broken down, it is done at the cost of maintaining a rather anti-naturalistic concept of essence, a universal category abstracted from the actual existence of man. We have already seen a great many of the difficulties involved in this. For example: the God of the so-called Proofs for the existence of God is the God of the Intellect; the "id quo nihil majus cogitari potest" is the self-transcending drive of the Intellect at the limits of abstraction and of thought; it is the fulfilment of itself in the concept of the highest being. Here the leap from thought to being is made by the believer simply, as Feuerbach says, because "this highest being would not be the highest if he did not exist" (2) But the ontological argument reveals, according to Feuerbach, the externalizing, objectifying, projecting process whereby God takes on an apparently distinct and independent existence to the believer.

(1) cf. p. of ch. III

(2) "Essence" p. 198. Also ch. I p. 344.

Thus we can formulate the ontological question as follows: The kind of being ascribable to God is not, as theological and religious thinkers maintain, external existence; but is classifiable in the same realm as an idea, a moral principle, a picture of the imagination which depicts qualities which have a very considerable beneficial effect upon the life of men. We cannot here consider the psychological aspect of the problem. But, for Feuerbach, the objectivity of God becomes an aspect of the subjective being of man; God has the same sort of ontological status as the predicates which are ascribed to him when they are taken from God and applied exhaustively to the realm of human being in both its individual and social aspects. For it is in an anthropological ethic and a philosophical metaphysic, both human activities, that the once divine predicates are allowed to be what Feuerbach thinks they essentially are.

So much, then, for the being of God conceived as A being, an independent existent. But the theological and philosophical (even mystical) use of being-language is not so easily shattered. What if the assumption that because God was not to be found amongst beings he must be a mere idea or set of principles and moral qualities, (i.e. a subjective, psychic phenomenon), were not valid? Is there not a third way, and an ontological way at that? "God is something that must transcend being", wrote Meister Eckhart, "God acts at large above being, animating himself. He acts in uncreated essence. Before there was being, God was; and he is where there is no being. It would be as incorrect for me to call God a being as it would be to call the sun light or dark." (1)

(1) Eckhart Sermon p.218-219 (of Harper ed. tr. Raymond Blakney)



Eckhart, nevertheless, proceeded to formulate a doctrine of God in terms of being. We see here the breaking up of the dichotomy which was set up in chapter III and questioned a moment ago. (1) We have in many theologians a doctrine of God as Being, ESSE IPSUM, or  $\acute{\omicron}\nu \hat{\eta} \acute{\omicron}\nu$  or  $\alpha\acute{\upsilon}\tau\omicron \tau\acute{\omicron} \acute{\omicron}\nu$  and such a doctrine offers a possible alternative to exclusive unknowable and inexpressible transcendence and exhaustively anthropological immanence. We have transcendence and immanence in dialectical tension. The Otherness of God to all beings, all entities, leads us to speak of him in negatives, even as non-being or no-thing. But as the Being of beings, God is not relegated to the inaccessible heights of exclusive and unknowable transcendence. All things are seen as directly depending upon God for their being, though that does not mean that God is directly known in all things.

We have seen, in recent years, important attempts to arrive at ontology by means of an existential analysis of the being of human being. Feuerbach's critique of the theological attempts to speak of God in such a context can be derived from the principle behind the proposition: "The idea of deity coincides with the idea of humanity." (2) The principle is that of inversion whereby the distinction between God pro nobis and God per se is denied; and the God pro nobis is understood to be the human transcending of finite limits in thought, imagination and moral yearning. Feuerbach's reductive inversion may be undertaken, therefore, at the point where the philosophical theologian professes to have ceased to speak of human existence alone, and to have begun talking of God, or Being, in relation to human existence.

(1) cf. p. 67 (Ch. IV, this Ch.)

(2) "Essence" p. 152

There seems to be a kind of boundary, extremely nebulous perhaps, which can be distinguished in all the problems Feuerbach raises. This is the boundary, or limit, of what we know as our finite human world, a boundary which is sometimes arbitrarily set up by philosophers at a certain fixed point, a boundary which is constantly in the process of being extended when new questions are asked in the light of which new aspects of reality are seen. But whatever the boundary is, (and we must fully admit the ambiguous nature of such a term), and wherever it is, we can see in these ontological doctrines of God as in much recent theology, a strong tendency to press God out beyond the boundary in one way or another. This tendency has received recent and repeated emphasis. God was not to be confused with finite reality, with the world, with man; God was other than all knowable phenomena. God was independent of the world, though the world was dependent upon God. The really tricky question is how the world can be understood to depend on God, because in practice the problem has been thought out in explicit relation to modern science, and the world has been given a corresponding independence and autonomy to the sovereign independence of the wholly transcendent God. It has been in the paradoxical tension of faith that the two have been brought together.

In Feuerbach, we encounter the crucial question: How does God stand in relation to man, and to the world? Feuerbach gives a quite clear answer: All ideas of God are in essence human, and thus God can be understood to be the essence of humanity known only through the I-Thou relation, since it is only through the human other than human consciousness of self arises, and to be human is to be a self-conscious being. The logic of this reasoning has, as we have repeatedly shown, a queer turn. The problem we are facing

is that raised by all talk of the infinite from a finite standpoint, all talk of transcendence from the human situation.

There seems to be a point, we have called it, perhaps too ambiguously, a 'boundary', which all those who subject theological language to a negative critique must reach. When this point is reached, a number of theological alternatives are open, all of which are an answer to the limiting halting-point of the boundary. A theology of revelation can be constructed, or a persisting way of negation which proceeds to point to God by articulating what he is not, or there is Feuerbach's answer. He does not conclude that because our ideas of God are found to be inadequate, God must be other than what we say of him, that is, beyond the boundary; but he returns to the human situation and refuses to think in any other than human terms. Thus he avoids, in the last analysis, the seriousness which leads man to the boundary. He evades the insistent questions which arise out of human existence and which cannot of necessity be answered by recourse to the human situation. He has, nevertheless, recognized the first stage in the movement of self-transcendence; though he returns unambiguously, or from the point of view of the theological answer to such questions, unparadoxically, to the sphere of human existence.

In the light of such considerations, it would seem that to persist in asking the question of God is the truly theological answer to Feuerbach, who does not do so. He has settled for an unproblematic God who is easily understood and spoken about because he is nothing other than the peaks of all the various aspects of human endeavour. Although Feuerbach

remains notably unclear in informing us of the ontological status of his idea of God as essence of humanity, it is certain that it is to be derived exhaustively from the immanent sphere of the human world and not from any possible transcendence of the limits of this finite context. He turns away, so to speak, from the boundary.

It is in the asking of the question of God, rather than in any formulation of both question and answer within a theological system, essential though the latter must always be, that we detect the difference between Feuerbach and those theologians, who have grasped the situation in which we find ourselves, but have continued to do theology rather than anthropology. Expression of the theology of transcendence, which is involved here, is always provisional and impermanent, but the question of transcendence must still be asked if theology is to remain theology. Feuerbach has shown us that if God is related immediately and unparadoxically to man, it is only a matter of time before man recognizes that he is looking at himself in a mirror, except that the reflection has tendencies towards infinity, omnipotence and so on. On the other hand, the theologies of the transcendence of God which have, in our own time, been formulated in reaction to this, seem to leave the world in a position of the same sovereign independence from God as is ascribed to God from the world. The question of a middle way cannot be dismissed, but it is clear that no theology can avoid the tension of these two poles. The situation in contemporary theology can be understood only in the light of such considerations. The question of the expendability of God is raised for both polar positions, Feuerbach's because there is no need to use the term God for

simply human realities, even for human self-transcendence in any of its many forms, and in the second case, because the world can stand on its own in autonomous independence of the God on whom it was for centuries thought to depend.

## V. THE BEING OF GOD AS LOVE.

We now turn to the last aspect of our analysis, the anthropological ethic in which the being of God is understood as love. We have already given a basic presentation of the anthropology, and we are familiar with the important problems. It therefore remains to us only to formulate criticisms of what we discussed. Such criticisms were postponed in the Chapter on Anthropology for the sake of clarity, but at the cost of sounding somewhat naively uncritical. We will look at these now.

We have the core of those criticisms which must be made of Feuerbach's Anthropological sketches, reduced from the doctrines of Christian theology, in an essay written in London in 1888 by Frederick Engels (1), entitled "Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of Classical German Philosophy". Writing in 1888, Engels looks back over forty years and notes that "to Feuerbach, who after all in many respects forms an intermediate link between Hegelian philosophy and our conception, we never returned." (2) "A full acknowledgement", he continues, "of the influence which Feuerbach, more than any other post-Hegelian philosopher, had upon us during our period of storm and stress, appeared to me to be an undischarged debt of honour." (3)

(1) Marx and Engels 'On Religion' pp.213 to 268

(2) Ibid p.213

(3) Ibid p.214

Marx had written his well-known eleven "Theses on Feuerbach" in 1845, which were simply notes "hurriedly scribbled down for later elaboration", as Engels tells us, "absolutely not intended for publication but invaluable as the first document in which is deposited the brilliant gem of the new world outlook." (1)

In these theses Marx made certain criticisms of Feuerbach, later modified and filled out in the substantial essay by Engels, which are well worth close study. Theses Nos. IV, VI and XI require our special attention; Thesis No. IV draws attention to the religious self-alienation which splits the world into two, the real one and the religious, imaginary one. Feuerbach's work, writes Marx,

"consists of the dissolution of the religious world into its secular basis....The fact that the secular foundation detaches itself from itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm is really only to be explained by the self-cleavage and self-contradictoriness of this secular basis. The latter must itself therefore, first be understood in its contradiction, and then revolutionized in practice by the removal of the contradiction." (2)

Thus Feuerbach is criticized by Marx first because he fails to take the contradiction in the secular world seriously enough and second because he fails to do anything practical about it. Thesis XI runs "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it". We must bear both these criticisms in mind.

(1) Marx and Engels "On Religion" p.214

(2) Ibid. p.70

We have noted already the ambiguities in Feuerbach's concept of God as essence of humanity. Thesis No. VI makes all the necessary critical points which must be made, short though it is. We shall quote it in full.

"Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.

Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence, is consequently compelled:

1. To abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment as something by itself and to presuppose an abstract - isolated - human individual.

2. The human essence, therefore, can with him be comprehended only as 'genus', as an internal, dumb generality which merely naturally unites the many individuals".

We have, in Marx's short but acute analysis of Feuerbach in Thesis Nos. IV and VI, the broad spectrum of the discussion which follows. We shall proceed from Thesis No. VI just quoted, and raise the question of Feuerbach's concept of man, his idea of the essence of humanity, the notion of genus or species; all of which we have already encountered, and all of which have puzzled us in their obscurity. Marx has laid his finger on the weak point of Feuerbach's position, and it is our task to clarify this point as far as we can. We shall then move to the subject of Thesis No. IV, the conflict within the secular world.



The kernel of Marx's criticism is that Feuerbach's concept of man is too abstract, isolated, and general to be of any use in the study of man in the secular world. In other words, Feuerbach employs an understanding of man which although it is indeed reduced from theology, is nevertheless ill-equipped to cope with the real world of human society because it has not been reduced enough. Engels approaches this in another way. He refers to a strong remnant of Idealism in Feuerbach's philosophy. Where religion based the truth of its ethic of love upon "the Gods - the fantastic mirror images of human qualities", writes Engels, Feuerbach's anthropological ethic finds its truth "directly and without any mediation in the love between I and Thou." (1) Engels continues a few lines later:

"Feuerbach's Idealism consists here in this: he does not simply accept mutual relations based on reciprocal inclination between human beings, such as sex love, friendship, compassion, self-sacrifice, etc. as what they are in themselves; but instead he asserts that they will attain their full value only when consecrated by the name of religion." (2)

Whilst it is true that some passages in the chapter we are considering especially at present (ch.XXVII) do include this assertion, Engels fails to see the other side of Feuerbach at this point, the side which takes his materialism consistently to its conclusion. (3) We need not go over this question again, however. Feuerbach brings "The Essence of Christianity" to a close with a passage which does speak of all inter-human relations as per se religious, and we would

(1) Engels: Feuerbach and the end of Classical German Philosophy: in 'On Religion' p.238

(2) Ibid. p.238-9

(3) This tension was pointed out in Ch.II p.29.

be clearer about what this means if we analysed this 'per se'. All the moral relations are only moral when they are regarded as "sacred in themselves" (1); they are moral not for the sake of any external principle or divine being, but for the sake of their own intrinsic worth. We have obviously reduced all theological ethic here to a straightforward anthropological one, but we still have to talk of such relations as 'religious' or 'sacred'. Indeed, we may still speak of God just as long as it is of the essence of the human species that we are speaking.

Engel's questioning of the use of such terms in this secular context is quite justified. He writes: "Sex love and the intercourse between the sexes is apotheosized to a religion, merely in order that the word religion, which is so dear to idealistic memories, may not disappear from the language." (2) I think it more likely that the term God be conserved for these reasons than the term religion; nevertheless, such a criticism can be extended far beyond Feuerbach to all theologians who unconsciously or uncritically employ the method of apotheosis in their theology, which may not be quite all theologians.

Engel's criticism is best expressed, however, when he says: "Feuerbach who on every page preaches sensuousness, absorption in the concrete, in actuality, becomes thoroughly abstract as soon as he begins to talk of any relations other than mere sex relations between human beings." (3) It is not

(1) "Essence" p.271

(2) Engels: Ibid p.239

(3) do. Ibid p.241

so much his attachment to religious or theological terms mentioned above, that is important for us, as his continuing use of an abstract concept of man. Feuerbach remains a pupil of Hegel, he is unable to break completely free from Hegel when he attempts to speak of concrete human relations; he still sees them in terms of self-consciousness and bases the epistemology accompanying the theory of the essence of man on a basically Hegelian foundation. (1) This question is more clearly defined when we analyse, once again, the anthropological essence known as God, this time recasting our discussion in sympathy with our present aims.

We noted in concluding our study (2), that there were three distinct ideas involved in the decidedly unclear use of the term essence of the species made by Feuerbach. The essential nature of man knowable as the self of self-consciousness was clearly distinguishable from the aggregate of all human qualities, the sum of all that mankind can attain, but the individual fails to attain. This again can be distinguished from the idea of essence as ideal in the non-philosophical sense, that which man would like to be, or wishes he could be in the dreams or illusions of faith.

The only possible conclusion one can draw from this ambiguous state of affairs is that no one answer to the question of Feuerbach's philosophical position can be made. Sometimes he subscribes to a kind of naturalism, repudiating the Hegelian concept of essence; at others, he employs the

(1) cf. Ch.I pp. 8 and 13-14

(2) Ch.II p. 27 and 28-9.

Hegelian philosophy, especially Hegel's study of self-consciousness, to explain the subjective nature of faith and God as the object of faith. His naturalistic concept of species or genus, which Marx called an "internal, dumb generality" (1), is of little use in explaining the being of God; and this, no doubt, was one reason why Feuerbach had to resort to a richer set of ideas.

The idea that God is what man would like to be finds an intermediary position in Feuerbach's understanding of christology, faith, miracle and providence. This sense of ideal essence, the third one in the analysis outlined above, becomes actual in the existence of the person of Christ. Christ does all the things man dreams of doing, but cannot do, because he, unlike Christ, is bound to the laws of cause and effect in the natural world. In the chapter on the mystery of Prayer (Part I. ch.XIII), Feuerbach understands prayer as the negation of the ordinary limitations of the finite world, and the absolutizing of his own wishes. "God satisfies our wishes, our emotional wants", he writes, "He is himself the realized wish of the heart....God is the nature of human feeling, unlimited, pure feeling, made objective." (2) Miracle is the suspension of the laws of nature in answer to the personal needs of man (3). Providence expresses the value of man as over against natural things, it is a form of self-love bought at the cost of a devaluation of external things. (4) The belief in personal immortality has a similar motive (5), as has the doctrine of the resurrection (6), and the idea of heaven. (7).

(1) Ibid. p.71

(2) "Essence" pp.121-3

(3) do. pp.128-134

(4) do. pp.101-111

(5) do. p.105

(6) "Essence" pp.135-139

(7) do. pp.170-184

The weakness in such a theory is its inability to cope with the negative side of man's psychological life; because familiarity with later psychological analyses of the idea of God reveal that there is a reverse or dark side of God as a being of the psyche, only partially expressed in the projection of evil in men onto a devil. Perhaps Feuerbach's theory could be reformulated so that God may be understood as a complete reflection of the whole human psyche, with not only its wishes but also its negative, destructive aspects mirrored faithfully in a deified form.

How Feuerbach could possibly identify this idea of a wish-fulfilling God, corresponding to all that man was not, with the idea of God derived from the aggregate of all mankind taken as a whole, is difficult to imagine. And again, the self which I am aware of as myself, which is the object of the Ego's knowledge in self-consciousness, is obviously an idea of God from a totally different, philosophical context. It enables Feuerbach to agree with Augustine that God is more immediately known by us than objects of the physical, natural world, (1); but it involves him in a difficult philosophical line of thought largely foreign to the purpose of his work.

What have these three ideas in common? All three share in a fundamental lack of openness towards any non-human, transcendent otherness, but to notice this at this stage in our study will hardly surprise us. All three contain the implication, on the other hand, of self-transcendence, whether it be the individual transcending himself in his self-conscious awareness, or in his idea of

(1) "Essence" p.12

God as Essence of man, and his idea of God derived from a general estimate of all possible qualities and possibilities existing in the concrete human community, past and present. But the lack of open-ness referred to above has its own methodological significance. It is no fruitless negativism, but may, indeed, be said to be one of the pivots around which theology has since revolved. It leads us now to the main subject of this chapter, Feuerbach's Ethic of Love.

In what follows, we shall see that thesis No. IV of Marx's eleven theses on Feuerbach, together with Engel's useful elaboration, gives us the starting point for an understanding of Feuerbach's Anthropology, and particularly its central concept; Love. We will pick this subject up, however, by drawing attention to part of thesis No. VI on the idea of the human essence, where Marx criticized Feuerbach's concept of man because it was an abstraction from the historical process, isolated and individualistic. This point emerges in another form in Marx's criticism of Feuerbach's failure to take the "self-cleavage and self-contradictoriness" of the secular world seriously. (1). Thus we can begin to see quite clearly the close relation between the tensions within Feuerbach's idea of God as the essence of man, and his understanding of the world.

There is still enough blatant evasion of serious involvement in, and commitment to, the world in Christian life and thought, for us to hesitate to understand Feuerbach

(1) On Religion. p.70.

in terms of the following estimate of Engels: "Already it becomes evident how far today we have moved beyond Feuerbach. His 'finest passages' in glorification of his new religion of Love are totally unreadable today." (1) Feuerbach's movement towards the world, his acceptance of the concrete human situation of interpersonal relationship as being of primary importance, all evoke a sense of relief if one comes to them after much Christian Dogmatic. On the other hand, Engels here indicates where we can, and must, be severely critical, and that is of Feuerbach's naive optimism and blind disregard for most of what we know to be human. Engels expressed his criticism as follows: "Feuerbach who on every page preaches sensuousness, absorption in the concrete; in actuality becomes thoroughly abstract as soon as he begins to talk of any relations other than mere sex relations between human beings." (2) Engels notes also Feuerbach's astonishing poverty when compared with Hegel in the question of morality. The form of Hegel's moral philosophy is idealistic but the content realistic; for Hegel includes much concrete material such as law, economics and politics. But Feuerbach, though his form is realistic in that he starts from man; his content is mere abstract formality, there is "absolutely no mention of the world in which this man lives."

"He appears just as shallow", continues Engels, "in comparison with Hegel, in his treatment of the antithesis of good and evil".(3) We have already noted Barth making

- (1) Engels: On Religion p.241  
 (2) do. do. p.241  
 (3) do. do. p.242

a similar criticism: "The root of Feuerbach's shallowness" is for Barth that he was a "true child of his century," a "non-knower of death", and a "misknower of evil". (1) The question we have to consider is whether such criticisms are justified, and whether the limitations they imply to the value of Feuerbach's work substantially threaten the main purpose of his anti-theological thesis.

There is perhaps no need to re-quote the passages we have already studied earlier, in order to be able to say that Feuerbach's ethic of love, although it is moving in the right direction, has not encountered the real world of illusion, misunderstanding, and conflict. We have no mention whatever of the problematic nature of loving in human life; on the contrary, he persistently offers us Love as the answer to all the needs, wishes, frustrations and sense of limitation which were once the starting point, from the human side, of the journey from God to man, and man to God. Feuerbach stops short of the concrete situation which is the only context within which the ethic of Love can be worked out. His I-Thou philosophy is thus left poised above the world, isolated from the problematic nature of both the life of the individual and man's historical existence in community.

Marx's criticism in Thesis No. IV was that Feuerbach took no account of the contradictions in the secular world, that he was blind to the importance of the cleavage revealed in the developments of history. In theological terms, Feuerbach fails to take evil seriously. In the sphere to which he does give attention, that of interpersonal, or I-Thou, relations; he again fails to see the complexity of the subject matter.

(1) Barth: Intro. to Essence p.xxviii quoted from Hans Ehrenberg: Die Philosophie der Zukunft. p.94



He does not take account of the fact that no amount of urgent exhortation to love without reservation will make love possible in an actual existing situation. Human relations involve a complex conflict of worlds, of ways of seeing things, so that there can be no easy claim that how things seem is how they really are. Human being is not an unambiguous, straightforward being, and neither is love between human beings. In theological terms, again, Feuerbach fails to grasp any of the hard, distorted problems which must be raised when man's inability to love is fully taken seriously - as seriously as the true possibility of loving. He is blind to the existence of evil. We cannot, however, undertake the task of a deeper understanding of these problems in this work, although it is a task which must soon be undertaken in the present situation of contemporary thought.

It is important, however, to make it quite clear that although Feuerbach continues to employ certain abstractions, these are well on the way to becoming concrete, to ~~becomings~~, concepts that may be worked into an understanding of reality rather than some super-reality. It may also be said that Feuerbach's materialism bears the distinct marks of this transitional state in which he is precariously balanced. His concept of 'essence of the species' has shown to us the full ambiguity of his position. (1) And now his idea of love has manifested both a movement towards, and a recoiling from, a thinking which is completely involved in the historical and interpersonal affairs of the world. He fails to take hold of the subject-matter of human existence because in the

(1) ch.V. p. 80 and ch.II p. 27.

naturalistic side of his thought, his basic concepts are formulated in such a way as to result in his being unable to comprehend the world of human being without certain naturalistic abstractions, such as, above all: 'species' or 'genus'. And such abstractions have only a limited functional significance; they do not complete our understanding of man. On the contrary, they lay Feuerbach open to a possible naturalistic reductionism which would completely defeat the purpose of his reduction of theology to anthropology, of God to the reality of existing man. For a naturalistic reduction would simply lay him open to yet another evasion of the truly human; this time, however, the abstraction would be naturalistic rather than theological.

We may justifiably conclude, therefore, that the form which Feuerbach's philosophical presuppositions took, were much more of a liability to him than a help. The value of what he has to say will stand independently of, indeed, in spite of his philosophical foundation.

## VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS.

Our final task is to work towards some conclusions, in spite of the fact that in the present state of contemporary theological study, no satisfactory solutions to the problems we have raised will be possible. Feuerbach is worth studying precisely because his problems are very much ours again today. Thus to attempt solutions would be to call to a premature halt a development of large proportions and considerable interest. Instead, we shall take a close look at some of the most decisive points that have been made in the course of this thesis.

1. The first question we must clarify may be indicated in the following proposition:

God for me is God shaped to my needs; God as He is revealed to man is essentially human because man is the criterion and yardstick of what is and what is not comprehensible, and therefore man determines the God who is revealed to him. "God is the mirror of man", hence "all the predicates, all the attributes of the Divine Being are fundamentally human." (1).

The line of argument we shall consider first is that which reveals the extreme questionability of much of the kind of theology which centres its concern upon the existence of man, and which comes to speak of God only by way of man's need for forgiveness and grace. I have in mind the doctrine

(1) "Essence" pp 63 and 222

of God as  $\hat{\epsilon}\lambda\upsilon\alpha\lambda$   $\hat{\eta}\mu\acute{\iota}\nu$  , as deus pro nobis, and the Lutheran emphasis in Protestant dogmatics. Feuerbach sees the danger of an unqualified Lutheranism, and exploits such propositions as "Apart from Christ there is no God, and where Christ is, there is the whole Godhead". Luther (1), to unearth the basic tenets of any christian doctrine of God. I will quote a brief example of his argument, and then elaborate its significance.

"If God is a living, i.e. real God, is God in general only in virtue of this, that HE IS A GOD TO MAN, a being who is useful, good, beneficent to man; then, in truth, man is the criterion, the measure of God, man is the absolute divine being." (2)

Feuerbach proceeds by accepting, for reasons which will enable him to build a firm foundation for his theory of theological reductionism, the traditional refusal to speak of God as He is in himself, except insofar as this is obliquely revealed to us in God's being for us in his acts. (3) His argument, then, is that God becomes proportionally more like a human being as his loving concern for man increases. God empties his divinity in the gift of himself in communication with man, God becomes man in the reaching out of himself in his acts towards man in the worldly situation of his actual existence. Man becomes the criterion, the norm beside which the divinity of God as he comes to meet man's need, is measured. Our fear, today, of false objectification of God in our doctrine of God, meets, at this point, Feuerbach's quite different approach, in which the objectivity of God is understood as sheer illusion; and instead of avoiding one kind

- (1) Quoted p.337 of "Essence" from Luther Th.XIX p.403.  
 (2) "Essence" p.338  
 (3) do. p. 16

of bad thinking, we are faced with a crucial dilemma. How is God to be known obliquely in the worldly and the human, rather than directly above or beyond the world as some kind of metaphysical entity, and still be God, distinguishable as God, in sovereign independence from the worldly and the human? Faith's paradoxical knowing and not-knowing is sharply clarified in that it clearly does not think that it is identifying God with the human, neither that it is claiming that God can be known directly in isolation from the human. Theology can never live in separation from anthropology, we cannot speak of God as though we did not exist, as though it were not as men that we spoke of God. But does that mean that man and not God is the criterion of what is divine and what is not? The question of criterion is the central question of theology, and we are not, here, responsible for working out a contemporary formulation of it. Feuerbach draws our attention, with almost prophetic insistence, to the human in our idea of the deus revelatus, and he tells us that when we speak of God as he is for us in his revelatory acts, we speak simply of the human.

The problem of the dark background, the existence of which is affirmed, though not of course known, in some theological assertions of the aseity or independence of God, has already been discussed (1). We need say here only that Christian faith itself persists in threatening such defence reactions against Feuerbach's onslaught, in the doctrine of the incarnation. However much we may affirm the separate existence of God in absolute distinction from man, the central event of God's drawing near to man, in himself becoming man for man, returns us to the point of crucial uncertainty.

(1) "Essence" p. 52. cf. p. 36-7.

## 2. The doctrines of the Imago dei and the Analogia entis:

Secondly, we learn that all assertion of likeness between God and man is rendered questionable and problematic, unless the reduction of theological propositions to anthropological ones can be shown to be illegitimate. Thus the uncertainty noted above causes immediate reverberations in the doctrines of the Imago dei and the Analogia entis. We cannot go deeply into either of these doctrines at this stage; we must simply indicate the point where Feuerbach's questions come home. We read in the Summa Theologica (Qu.XCIII Art.1), for instance;

"It is manifest that in man there is some likeness to God, copied from God as from an exemplar; yet this likeness is not one of equality for such an exemplar infinitely excels its copy. Therefore there is in man a likeness to God, not, indeed, a perfect likeness, but imperfect."

Aquinas, here, asserts the doctrine of the imago dei, and at the same time tries to hold the divine and the human apart on the basis of the infinite perfection of God in contrast to the imperfection of man. Many theologians have thrown great emphasis upon the doctrine of the fall and the radical sinfulness of man for the same reason. This would be one kind of defence against Feuerbach's impending threat; but there is no doubt that Feuerbach has his answer to this. Man's sin, his imperfect nature is simply the doctrinal formulation of his feeling of alienation from, and imperfection in contrast to, the infinite potentiality of the species. Between what man essentially is, and what he actually is, there is a wide and prominent gully; and when man comes to know God as the perfect essence of humanity, he feels both

separation and imperfection very strongly. Thus we cannot disarm Feuerbach so easily at this point.

Feuerbach links the Image dei to the revelation of God as personal, which appears to us to be the revelation of a being distinct from man and in sharp contrast to man's imperfect being. But both man and God participate in the idea of personality. The kinship between God and man, which Feuerbach admits to be a vague expression, is articulated in Christian theology in terms of the personal, in terms of Father and child. "The idea of man being the image of God reduces itself", writes Feuerbach, "to kinship; man is like God because he is the child of God." (1) Man resembles God as child to father, he is created in the image of God. (Gen: 1:26. Col.1:15. I John 3:2 &c.) He is in some way like God; and the fundamental theological question of the priority of God or man emerges. The idea of personality as a theological category is used both of God and man; it may be used in such a way that to speak of God as person can be the best way of articulating his self-subsistence and the dependence of man upon him; it may be used so that the idea of personality, as an essential category of human being, is derived first from man and then projected into infinity, so that God is dependent on man.

The doctrine of Analogia entis raises similar questions from a different angle. We cannot, here, go into the complicated analysis of different kinds of analogy which Aquinas

(1) "Essence" p.224

can offer us (Summa Theol. Qu.IV art.3); it is sufficient to show that to speak of created things and their "Likeness" to God is to open a way, though not necessarily a smooth one, between the finite and the infinite. "The same things", wrote Pseudo Dionysius, "can be like and unlike to God: like according as they imitate him, as far as He, who is not imitable perfectly, can be imitated; unlike according as they fall short of their cause." (1) The created can be like God, but not God like the created. Aquinas answers the objection, which might have been Feuerbach's, that if any creature is like God, God will be like some creature. He tries to ensure that the doctrine of analogy is not turned upside down, so that God's likeness to man is derived from man, by quoting Dionysius who said that: "A mutual likeness may be found between things of the same order, but not between a cause and that which is caused." (2) and he adds: "We say that a statue is like a man; but not conversely. So also a creature can be spoken of as in some way like God, but not that God is like a creature." Aquinas fails to take the objection seriously because he simply presupposes the priority of God as Cause, he presupposes, that is, that it is God from whom man is copied as the statue from the real thing, and not man from whom God is copied. He takes for granted what he is responsible for proving.

Barth has drawn a definitive line through this problem, as is well known. Indeed, he answers Feuerbach definitely and explicitly in many passages, and almost everything he writes

(1) De Div.Nom. X:7. Quoted Summa Theol. Qu.IV art.3.

(2) do. IX:6. do. do. Reply Obj.4 Art.3.



bears an implicit relation to Feuerbach. There is no need to quote the oft-quoted passage in which the *Analogia Entis* is called the invention of Anti-Christ (1); of more use to us here is the way Barth deals with such categories as Lord, Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer. "We possess", he writes, "no analogy on the basis of which the nature and being of God as the Lord can be accessible to us.... It is not the case that we have only to extend our idea of Lord and Lordship into the infinite and absolute to finally arrive at God the Lord and his Lordship"...."it is in consequence of God's revelation alone" that we come to know God as Lord.(2) Similarly, we come to know God as Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, indeed all the divine predicates, only from revelation, emphatically not from an extension of the finite into the infinite. Therefore, there is no basis at all for the *Analogia Entis*, neither is there any doubt in our minds that Barth has decided the question of priority in favour of God.

Feuerbach answered Barth when he continued to ask his questions even when he was considering these categories as revealed, as the revelation of God to man, and not man's extension of aspects of his own existence into the infinite. To answer that the predicates of God are revealed in Jesus Christ, and that nothing man can either do or think will ever lead him to God, is to begin unreservedly with the priority of God. Barth does this, though in a way which takes Feuerbach's objection far more seriously than Aquinas was able to do. He does it, and therefore, from our point of view, evades

(1) Barth. *Church Dogmatics* I:1 p.X  
 (2) do. do. do. II:1 p.75ff.

the question. To say that God in his revelation is the criterion of what is and what is not truly God in his revelation is an attractively powerful, but ultimately fruitless argument, at least in relation to Feuerbach's radical question. It is circular, and evokes in us the appropriate response of submission before God which is appropriate to God if he is God. If he is not, but is an illusion, a projected image of essential humanity, a psychic archetype or such-like, then all our appropriate responses are in vain. Feuerbach's perturbing questions still stand; and are not, as Barth implies, questions directed only to the theology of his own day. (1) A proposition like the following: "Man first unconsciously and involuntarily creates God in his own image, and after this God consciously and voluntarily creates man in his own image;....for revelation is the self-unfolding of human nature" (2) remains a hard question to the theologian, and one which he cannot evade by recourse to revelation.

### 3. Atheism and Nihilism:

The issue of atheism, and the tendency towards nihilism is one which, once having defined our terms, will prove a useful starting point for discussion, just as long as we don't sink to a mere discussion of labels. Feuerbach does not employ these terms, but the issues they denote concern us in our understanding of Feuerbach, considerably. Atheism is a very loose term which can mean any kind of negation of,

(1) Barth. Intro, to "Essence" p.XIX  
 (2) "Essence" p.118

or denial of God. It can be a methodological exclusion of God, or it can be an existential denial of God; it is also necessary to emphasize that every kind of atheism depends upon the kind of God denied or negated. Our purpose is not to decide whether Feuerbach was an atheist or not. He obviously denied the objectivity of God, but affirmed the subjectivity, or human nature of God. The issue involved has much more to do with nihilism, for though Feuerbach was in no sense a nihilist, he nevertheless participated in the same climate of thought to which Nietzsche's philosophy was such a powerful response. There is no doubt that he did so with far less insight and far less daring, and he did not grasp the kind of radicality which led Nietzsche's madman to cry: "God is dead!"

Feuerbach's reduction of the transcendent God to the transcendent essence of the human species left him with a kind of norm or value with which he could pass judgement upon the actual concrete situation of man in the world. He did not have to establish values in total separation from any transcendent or supernatural authority or criterion as Nietzsche tried to do. Thus he never really grappled with nihilism, nor with a truly existential atheism. Rather, he reflects the kind of position implied in the constitution of some of the modern mandalas observed by Jung in the course of his Analyses. "I have found", he writes, "the same fact in an overwhelming majority of cases: There was never a deity occupying the centre". (1) "The place of the deity", he comments, "seems to be taken by the wholeness of man." (2) The new value Feuerbach grasped was not dissimilar to the idea of the 'wholeness of man' and it

(1) C.G. Jung. Psychology and Religion. p.97.

(2) *ibid.* p.99.

filled the void which would have been left had the essence of the species <sup>not</sup> immediately taken the place of the transcendence of God. We have previously noted the poverty of Feuerbach's understanding of man and human existence, his tendency towards abstract generalisation, and his blindness to the estrangement and alienation of that existence. This renders his humanism a more ineffective answer to nihilism than it might have been.

#### 4. Between Supernaturalism and Naturalism.

Feuerbach saw clearly that a transcendent God above and beyond the world, the God of traditional supernaturalism, could lead, without the paradoxical assertion of his immanence, to an <sup>in</sup>authentic, perverted religiosity. Such a religiosity he identifies indiscriminately with Christian Faith. His I-Thou philosophy contained the criterion of unreserved concern for the world as the gauge against which all ethical questions should be considered. "The well-being of every man", he wrote, "let this be sacred", sacred per se, and not for the sake of some super-human principle, value or deity. (1)

But we have already seen many times the transcendent status of the concept of Essence, the relation to which is just as likely, as a transcendent God, to divert the concern of each man from his neighbour and thus, under the judgement of Feuerbach's own criterion, be an inauthentic mode of human existence.

We have here the issue of supernaturalism and naturalism,

(1) "Essence" p.271

one which stands behind centuries of discussion on the subject of the doctrine of God. The two extremes, pressing in opposite directions, make any attempt to force a way between the two a difficult business. Clearly, we have the issue of supernaturalism and naturalism in a specific form, the idea of the wholeness of man and the sacredness of his existence culminating in the concept of the perfect essence of humanity set against the naturalistic reduction of the divine to the human, and of the explanation of man's spiritual capacities in terms of his relation to the species. We have often drawn attention to the strange ambiguities of this position; but we shall now look at them in a different light.

It is impossible to dwell for long upon the inconsistencies of Feuerbach's position without realizing the fruitful nature of the tensions which are ours as much as his. Our own theological task is to work out the relation between the concern for the priority of God, his absolute transcendence and infinite freedom, most characteristic of Barth; and concern for man and for the world taken so seriously by, for instance, Bonhoeffer and a number of theologians who are working on the relation between Christianity and secularism. We seem to be torn between two opposing loyalties; and the concern for the world is more often than not proving the stronger, especially amongst the young.

We noted, above, that Feuerbach failed to distinguish between a Christian faith unreservedly involved with worldly concerns, and one which tries to hide away in an escapist religiosity. He might therefore seem to have missed the whole significance of the eschatological existence of the Christian "in the world" but no longer "of the world",

(John 17:11,14,16) (1). He would seem to have read only those passages in which the Christian's existence is already bound up with God and thus free from the world; he does not seem to have understood the paradoxical character of this existence, nor to have understood that the Christian's so-called "other-worldliness" in fact frees him from subjection to the power of the world and thus enables him truly to involve himself in the world.

But Feuerbach himself feels another kind of tension, that between the individual's participation in, and worship of, the essence of his own humanity, which is a relation to himself through the mediation of the love of the neighbour, and the love of the neighbour for his own sake alone. He ought to have been more aware of this than he was. But the tension is there. It has its own peculiar eschatological 'even now' and 'not yet'; because it looks forward to a perfection and a fulfilment of human existence in which it already participates, in the knowledge of human potentiality revealed in human self-consciousness, and yet this perfect fulfilment lies in the future, though man's future and not God's.

We must now, however, consider the question of escapist religiosity, as it arises out of the polar tension of supernaturalism and naturalism.

##### 5. Religious Escapism:

The Christian's "excessive transcendental subjectivity",

(1) Bultmann: Theol. of N.T. p.78 of vol.II.

Feuerbach maintains (1) inevitably leads him to isolate himself from the world and his fellow men, because his sense of the presence of God increases in inverse proportion to the decrease of concern for the world and for other men. (2) The Christian must needs annihilate the world because it shatters the illusory dream world of his imagination, in which his God defeats death, heals disease, and overcomes all finite limits. (3)

The question that remains for us is: Is concern for God exclusive of concern for the world and for the neighbour? Feuerbach's failure to distinguish between different kinds of faith, some of which are guilty of escapism, whilst others not, forbids us from asking less radical questions, questions which might presuppose the kind of exclusive dualism which Feuerbach's position rather uncritically accepts. He presupposes an absolute dualism of either God or the world, and then, on finding this contradictory, adopts a monistic identification of the divine with the human. Having made this identification, he can then speak in terms of a kind of dialectic, in which, as we have seen, the human other is, and yet is not, God for me.

"My fellow man", he writes, "is per se the mediator between me and the sacred idea of the species", which is God.

(4) Through my fellow man I meet God, my relation to my neighbour implies, one step removed, ~~from~~ God. But in the proposition: "Man and woman, the unity of I and Thou, is God" (5)

- (1) "Essence" p.167
- (2) do. p.160
- (3) do. p.128
- (4) do. p.159
- (5) do. p.vxi

we have a doctrine of the immediate knowability of God as the substance of human relationship itself.

The problem before us is best dealt with in a short exegesis of three passages from I John, ch.4. We read:

"If a man says 'I love God' while hating his brother he is a liar. If he does not love the brother whom he has seen, it cannot be that he loves God whom he has not seen." (1) Here, love of the neighbour, a worldly concern, is part of, indeed a precondition of, love of God, an ultimate concern. Again: "Though God has never been seen by any man, God himself dwells in us if we love one another; his love is brought to perfection within us." (2) God is invisible to us but comes to us and dwells within us in our loving of one another. These two passages begin with God and then speak of the relation with God in terms of love of the neighbour. Our third passage reveals a significant shift; it states that love in and of itself participates in God, so that the one who loves knows God and is a child of God. "Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, but the unloving know nothing of God". (3) Clearly, the point made in all three passages is that love of God and love of the neighbour are not conceived in terms of a dualistic either/or, but seem to imply a kind of participation of the neighbour in God and God in the neighbour. This is not a monistic identification of the two because God is still somehow spoken of as distinct from the neighbour. Here is the authentic paradox that Feuerbach has missed. But in what does it really consist? This will have to be taken up another time.

The result of this short diversion enables us better to meet such questions as: "How then can I at once love God and a mortal wife?" (4) "Do I not thereby place God on the same footing as my wife?" It also makes us even less happy than we might otherwise have been with Paul's view of marriage in

(1) I John 4:20

(2) I John 4:12

(3) I John 4:7,8

(4) "Essence" p,167



I Cor. 7:32-40. Here Paul failed to grasp the paradox he so clearly understood in other contexts.

#### 6. Feuerbach's soteriology:

The other, or worldly pole of the dichotomy between transcendental religiosity and concern for the world, is best considered in the form of the soteriology which Feuerbach proposes as an alternative to the evasive attempt to negate the world in an exclusive love of God.

His soteriology consists not in an attempt to give meaning to the world, which has lost its God, in isolation from other human beings; it is rather to see in concern for the world and others the end and purpose which God once gave to us. Man himself is the meaning of God, for God has become man. Feuerbach reaches his position, which has much in common with the concern for the world and the human in our secular views of Christianity, by way of a particularly one-sided, though as we have seen, powerful interpretation of the Lutheran doctrine of the incarnation. Our answer cannot simply be to avoid all Lutheran elements which leave this way open, and thus avoid Feuerbach. His soteriology is worth taking seriously. It may be summarized as salvation through love of the neighbour, without the traditional transcendent God. The weakness in this lies in the concept of essence of man, in which the individual seems to have an almost mystical participation. Such a concept has little philosophical foundation today, and there is not much point in wishing this were otherwise. We would be happier to remain with the concrete reality of particular personal relations, and to refrain from synthetic generalizations about such relations, as if these would give them any deeper meaning. Whether this kind of answer

will prove satisfactory in our present theological debate remains to be seen.

#### 7. The Meaning of Transcendence:

Our last point is one of clarification. We have seen the category 'transcendence' used in a number of ways, each revealing a distinct theological facet of the main problems under discussion. Transcendere = to transcend, means to pass beyond, to climb or surmount, to cross from somewhere to somewhere else.

We can speak of modern means of travel transcending the horse and cart, of human intelligence transcending animal instinct, of man's increasing success in controlling his environment transcending his primitive submission to it. To transcend is to pass out beyond the confines of one sphere into another sphere no longer limited in the same way. To transcend in a straightforward empirical context in which both the transcendent and the transcended are indubitably spheres of finite being is clearly distinguishable from the transcendence of the finite in the infinite. But many more distinctions must be made when we move, as we now do, to the theological use of the category Transcendence.

The deities of Hinduism seem to be personified powers of the natural and supernatural worlds, as such they transcend any particular entities within these worlds, they transcend, for instance, the images which represent them in cultic worship. The Canaanite Gods were personified powers of heaven, earth and abyss (1); they transcended the concrete world about them, but remained, for Israel, part of the

(1) Von Rad: Theol. of O.T. Vol.I p.218

created world. Yahweh transcends his creation in quite a different sense. The deities of the ancient east were known more immediately and less ambiguously than Yahweh; because their relation to the world was more immediate, i.e. less paradoxical. Yahweh, on the other hand, was a mystery, an enigma to his people; his transcendence involved something far more radical than the transcendence of the Canaanite deities.

Feuerbach's concept of essence of man transcends the individual man, it denotes a perfection unknown among existing men. His conception of God as the unity of man with man, which is a transcendence of the isolated I in his relation with the Thou. But we speak of a transcendence, here, which remains within the bounds of finite being; and thus to worship such a God is in traditional terms idolatry: (Rom.1:23). Whether the radical kind of transcendence, one which must involve a negation of the divinity of all created being, is also involved in the relation of love between man and his neighbour, is the unresolved question of this thesis. Nevertheless, we have been able in a close study of Feuerbach, to clarify what this question involves, and to formulate, in a preliminary kind of way, the difficulties we must meet to answer it. Feuerbach undoubtedly reaches the contemporary theological scene with a relevance that few 19th century thinkers do, and which, perhaps, he himself has never done until quite recently.