

# The Debate Between Feuerbach and Stirner: An Introduction

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## I

In 1843 and 1844, Max Stirner – Young Hegelian, disciple of Bruno Bauer, radical Feuerbachian – worked feverishly in secret, in the time he could free from his teaching duties at a fashionable girl's school, preparing an attack on his erstwhile friends and political allies. Stirner was confident that his work, *The Ego and Its Own*, would be a decisive critique of the Young Hegelian movement, particularly of Feuerbach, and in 1844 quit his job in anticipation of its success.

For a short period immediately following its publication, Stirner's book had an extremely destructive effect. The book brought him neither money nor lasting fame, however. Stirner went into business, using his wife's dowry to start a milk delivery service in Berlin. There followed a series of financial and personal reverses. His business collapsed. His first and subsequent marriage failed. Stirner turned to minor writing and translating, and struggled to keep ahead of his creditor's efforts to jail him for default. After years of poor health, he died in obscurity from a violent allergic reaction to a bee sting.

Stirner's book was above all an attack on Feuerbach, and appropriately so; while it was being written, Feuerbach was clearly the leader of the Young Hegelian movement.<sup>1</sup> Arvon describes the effect that the appearance of Stirner's book had on the Young Hegelians:

"From this point on, the contradictory character of Feuerbachian humanism appeared to them to be definitely established. After Stirner's critique, a virtual tidal wave broke over the illusions born of the dogma of omnipotent love, which had been supported until then with the most enthusiastic conviction. The very "true socialists" who still expressedly called themselves Feuerbachians began to doubt this humanism."<sup>2 3</sup>

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1 Not until Stirner's book was almost completed did Bruno Bauer split the Young Hegelian movement by adopting the standpoint of "critical criticism". Until then, he could be considered to be a radical Feuerbachian. A separate treatment of Bauer's philosophy was not, then, necessary to a critique of Young Hegelianism until late 1844. Stirner inserted a short critique of Bauer's new philosophy in a postscript to Part I of *The Ego and Its Own* to deal with his new element, but the book is overwhelmingly an attack on Feuerbachian humanism. See Arvon, *Aux Sources De L'Existentialisme: Max Stirner*, Paris, 1954, pp. 45-6.

2 Arvon, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

3 The powerful effect of Stirner's book on the Young Hegelian movement has been appreciated only recently, but is now fairly well documented. For Ruge's reaction, see Auguste Cornu, *Karl Marx et Friedrich Engels*, Paris, 1970, Vol. IV, p. 58; for the effect on Engels, see *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, Berlin, 1927, Dritte Abteilung, Band 1, "Der Briefwechsel zwischen Marx und Engels, 1844-53," p. 4-8. For Stirner's effect on the Young Hegelians generally see William J. Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, New Haven, 1970, p. 120 ff., David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, New York and Washington, 1969, p. 129-132, R.W.K. Paterson, *The Nihilist Egoist: Max Stirner*, Oxford, 1971, and

For Feuerbach himself, Stirner's critique began a long process of the disintegration of his philosophical position. At first, Feuerbach did not seem to realize the danger of Stirner's critique. In a letter written in late 1844, Feuerbach wrote of Stirner's book:

"It is a brilliant and ingenious work which is able to glory in the truth of egoism, but in its eccentric, incomplete, and erroneously defined form. Its polemic against anthropology, above all against me, is based on pure incomprehension or facetiousness. I side with him save on one point: it does not affect me in essence. He is nonetheless the most ingenious and freest writer I've had the opportunity to know."<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after, in a letter of December 13, 1844, Feuerbach began to show some irritation with Stirner's critique, and wrote that "the attacks of Stirner betray a certain vanity, as if he would make a name for himself at my expense."<sup>5</sup> In 1845, Feuerbach was sufficiently troubled by Stirner to reply to his critique and to go on the offensive against him. Feuerbach's reply, an essay called "The Essence of Christianity in Relation to The Ego and Its Own," and Stirner's rejoinder, called "Stirner's Critics" – both of which I have translated below in their relevant sections – mark a turning point in the intellectual life of the time. In this interchange, Feuerbach is seen as struggling to save an untenable philosophy. Feuerbach's followers looked on with dismay, and one after the other abandoned him.

Feuerbach himself began a more gradual process of distancing himself from his beleaguered position. By 1861, after many shifts in philosophy, he conceded that little indeed was left of the key concept of The Essence of Christianity, which was the main target of Stirner's criticism.<sup>6</sup> Stirner's ability to devastate Feuerbach's philosophy so quickly and completely arose from the fact that Feuerbach's philosophy was never coherent: as we argued elsewhere in this issue, each of Feuerbach's major concepts was ridden with deep contradictions. Feuerbach presented a theory of knowledge which was based on the sense-immediate intuition of particulars; yet his epistemology was also as abstract, mediated and universal as that of Hegel. Feuerbach championed the "empirical individual human being" whose life was centered on the enjoyment of spontaneous feeling and whose feeling, rather than any abstract principle of morality, was the basis of

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the best work, Henri Arvon, op. cit. For Stirner's influence on Marx, see N. Lobkowitz, "Karl Marx and Max Stirner," in *Demythologizing Marxism*, ed. Adelman, The Hague, 1969, also Paul Thomas, "Karl Marx and Max Stirner" in *Political Theory*, Vol. 3, No. 2, May 1975; also my unpublished doctoral dissertation, *The Development of Marx's Conception of Human Nature*, for the University of California, San Diego.

4 Henri Arvon, op. cit., p. 130.

5 Ibid., p. 130.

6 In a letter to J. Duboc in 1861, Feuerbach wrote (L. Feuerbach, Briefwechsel und Nachlass, Leipzig, 1874, Vol. 11, p. 127-28):

I have received the most helpful *Diary of a Materialist* which you sent me and have already read some of it, especially what has to do with me. It is truly amazing that the writer extracts my idea of the species (Gattungsbegriff), the object of his critique, only from *The Essence of Christianity*, as if this work contained the species-idea as it was fully developed by my scholarly activity, as if I had not in the writings that followed criticized precisely this concept as it is there expressed, in the most careful and thorough manner, modified and individualized it, and indeed in such a way that the speculative philosophers have made the opposite charge, namely that I have completely abandoned the idea of the species and have allowed nothing to remain but the individual. Who is there to say in reply to a critic who only repeats in 1860 what already in 1842 [sic] the "Unique" [Max Stirner] brought against the Feuerbach of 1841 [sic], without ascertaining what the same author has said about the matter in subsequent years.

[Feuerbach mis-remembers the dates: Stirner's book was published in 1844, the second edition of *The Essence of Christianity*, in 1843.]

practical activity; yet he also defined the individual in terms of a prescriptive ideal, and re established a rigorous morality in which the interests of the individual were sacrificed to the interests of the species. Finally, Feuerbach was a militant atheist; but he recreated God in the form of Nature, to whose purpose people "ought" to conform; Nature became an authoritative "higher being."

Stirner's critique basically arose from his championing one side of Feuerbach's philosophy against the other.<sup>7</sup> That one side Stirner claimed as his own and developed in an original manner; Feuerbach, meanwhile, was presented as a coherent thinker with opposing views. Only in a few, but striking, passages did Stirner give any indication that the difference between himself and Feuerbach was also a contradiction between the two sides of Feuerbach's philosophy.

## II

### The Debate

In *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach had tried to show that the object of religious devotion is really the capacities which make up human nature. But those capacities were attributed to a Being who was completely 'other,' outside of the world. In comparison with this Higher Being, humanity seemed contemptible. And human spontaneity and development was repressed for the sake of sacrificial service to the Creator.

The recognition that God was the projection of human nature would lift the weight of humanity's self-contempt. Repressed human capacities, especially those of desire and feeling – and more especially erotic emotions – would be allowed expression and development. Expression though can take a myriad of forms, and development a thousand directions. The diversity of the whole human species is required for human potentialities, and so human nature, to become actual. The regard which was formerly directed toward God, and consequently denied to humanity, would be turned toward one's fellow human beings, in whom is embodied the rich diversity of human capacities. Bonds of solidarity would unite the human species in relations of democratic respect.

Stirner's critique, in *The Ego and Its Own*, assailed this line of argument at three points:

**A. *The Essence/Accident or Ideal/Real Distinction:*** If the predicates of God are attributed to humanity, Stirner argued, the result is not human nature as it actually exists. Holy Compassion, Godly Righteousness, Divine Wisdom, for example, are not descriptions of real people; rather they define an ideal of perfection. When

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<sup>7</sup> All of Stirner's key concepts, it can be shown, are parallel to those that Feuerbach developed in his critique of Hegel. Stirner's attack on "Essence," for example, follows the lines of Feuerbach's critique of the mediated abstractionism of Hegel's philosophy. Stirner's argument for the "Uniqueness" of the individual and his conception of "Egoism" mirror Feuerbach's insistence on the particularity of the individual and that the individual's interests are untranscendibly one's own. And Stirner's attack on "the Holy," though better developed, resembles Feuerbach's radical atheism.

Feuerbach used predicates of God to define "real human nature," Stirner charged, he split human nature into an essential and an unessential part, the latter being a residue which is somehow unworthy of human nature and so unreal.

Real human beings, Stirner argued, do not conform to the predicates used to describe God. Human beings are, first of all, different from one another, and so cannot be embraced by a single set of predicates lifted from religion. This is one of the senses in which he called human beings "Unique." Unfortunately, he used this term in a number of different senses. Here, he meant Unique by virtue of describable differences between individuals.

Second of all, Stirner argued, human beings are different in that some are more capable than others, or have developed capacities to the degree that they have distinguished themselves irrevocably from the rest of humanity. Feuerbach had no right to talk of a "common human potentiality" in view of the fact that some individuals have so outstripped their fellows in capacity that they are "Unique." Here Stirner used Uniqueness to refer to a distinction due to a level of excellence.

Thirdly, human beings are free to choose at each moment what they are to be; this freedom puts them beyond any set of predicates that would fix their nature. Stirner also used the term "Unique" to refer to this existential freedom.

Each one of these sorts of Uniqueness makes it impossible to impose on everyone a single set of predicates taken from religion; these predicates would obscure and repress human nature as it actually exists.

**B. *The Species, not the Individual, Becomes the Subject:*** When Feuerbach argued that the attributes of God must be claimed as the nature of humanity, he made the subject of these divine predicates not the individual, but the human species as a whole. I have within me the attributes of humanity in a partial and incomplete form. I am only a particular determination of a general human potentiality. The real nature of the species is given only by all these determinations; and so my potentialities, which constitute my real nature, exist as actualized mainly beyond me, in the whole human species. Thus my real nature, my real self, is not me, but the human species!

Feuerbach's ontological argument leads immediately to his practical morality: If my aim is to be "for human nature," and if human nature exists equally in myself as in others, then my own interests are indistinguishable from the interests of any other person who, like me, is a representative of the human species. The result was, then, a universalistic perspective, from which my interests and that of any other human being are equal.

Stirner attacked Feuerbach's view on both the ontological and practical level. Ontologically, Stirner charged, Feuerbach dissolved the individual into the universal. If my aim were to know human nature, Stirner argues, that aim might be equally served whether I know it in my own case or that of another. The intellectual form of love, courage, wisdom, or even pleasure, might be the same for me as for another. The idea of love, courage, wisdom, and pleasure is universal; but the being who feels love, is courageous, or wise, or who feels pleasure is always particular.

On a practical level, it makes an enormous difference to me, a difference which can never be thought away, whether I am that individual who is in love, who is courageous, or who feels pleasure and pain. I am for example, in an incomparable relation to my pleasure and pain because I feel them; I do not feel those of others (though I may feel sympathy for them). My desires are not satisfied by others' pleasures, but by my own or not at all. And my interests are not interchangeable with the interests of others; they are uninterchangeably mine.

The untranscendable particularity of an individual's existence Stirner called Uniqueness (and so added another meaning to that already over burdened term); and the uninterchangeability of an individual's interests, Stirner called "Egoism." All people, Stirner argued, are Egoists, but most don't realize it.

*C. Feuerbach Resurrects Religion:* If Feuerbach's definition of human nature stipulated that only certain human characteristics are real, and that only a certain moral attitude, a universalistic perspective, is legitimate, Feuerbach presented not an empirical description of human nature, but a prescriptive ideal. This ideal – the species, or MAN – Stirner charged, is just a new form of religion.

Like God, "the species" is ontologically superior to the individual; it stipulates what portion of the individual is "real"; and what aspects are accidental, a deficiency, or failing. Like God, Stirner argued, Feuerbachian MAN is an ideal which has psychological power over the individual. Feuerbach, Stirner was able to show, demanded that people conform to this ideal, that they feel guilt when they violated it. Egoism especially became the unpardonable sin. The power of an "alien" idea, like God or "the species" to psychologically subjugate the individual so that the individual represses his real nature, and lives in respectfulness to "something higher than himself," Stirner called "the Holy."

### III

## Feuerbach's Reply

In the essay which follows, "The Essence of Christianity in Relation to The Ego and Its Own", Feuerbach tried to answer each of Stirner's charges:

*A. The Essence/Accident Distinction:* Stirner had charged that the predicates of God cannot be applied to humanity, because the divine predicates are so exaggerated and idealized that they cannot pretend to be a real description of humanity. Feuerbach replied that the predicates of God are no different from the predicates of human nature.<sup>8</sup> The exaggerated character of these predicates arises solely from the fact that they are applied to an exaggerated subject, viz. to God.<sup>9</sup> When they are no longer applied to God, they became ordinary descriptive terms

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8 Ludwig Feuerbach, "Das Wesen des Christenthums in Beziehung auf den "Einzigsten und sein Eigenthum", in *Samtliche Werke*, edited by Wilhelm Bolin and Friedrich Jodl, Stuttgart Bad Cannstat, 1960, Vol II, 294.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 295.

which precisely fit humanity. But if they describe humanity, then they do not define an essence that is different from empirical nature: they do not split human nature into an essential and unessential part. Feuerbach explicitly denied splitting human nature into an essential and unessential part on the grounds that he included such profane activities as eating and drinking in human nature, and so negated the traditional religious division between spiritual and corporeal parts.<sup>10</sup>

Feuerbach did, however, defend the notion of human essence: certain features of human nature are objectively primary. Feuerbach made the traditional essentialist argument that the essence of a thing is that without which it wouldn't be what it is. On this basis, he argued that the human mind is the most essential part since without a head, a human being wouldn't be human, while without a leg, he would be.<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, he made the much weaker argument for human essence, that if X is Man, and Y is Man, then Man is what X and Y have in common; what they have in common, Man, is the absolute nature of each.<sup>12</sup> Feuerbach also tried to establish human essence on the basis of the inherent teleology of nature:<sup>13</sup> Just as the caterpillar is perfected and fulfilled by actualizing the inner aim of human nature. That inner aim defines the human essence: It is not a matter of conscious intention; it is the aim of Nature as it exists in human form.

Feuerbach's reply to Stirner, then, was that he did not make an essence/accident distinction in a wrong way, e.g. along traditional lines of spirit and body; but he did make what he considered to be a valid essence/accident distinction, and this he tried to justify with a number of different sorts of argument.

**B. *The Species as Subject:*** Stirner had charged that by making reflection on human nature the key human function, Feuerbach turned human nature into an idea; as idea, there might be no difference between human nature in one individual and another. There followed from this the universalistic perspective: one has no greater regard for human nature in oneself than in another. The particular existence of the individual is virtually dissolved.

Feuerbach replied by abandoning the intellectualism of his earlier philosophy. In *The Essence of Christianity*, self-conscious reflection was the key defining feature and the main aim of human nature. In this essay, by contrast, Feuerbach tried to explain away the centrality of self consciousness in his earlier work on methodological grounds: *The Essence of Christianity*, he wrote, is an explanation of religion. In religion, the human subject is separated from human nature, which is conceived as existing outside of oneself. The division between subject and nature in religion can only be explained by a division within the individual, through reflection, between subject and nature. But, Feuerbach insisted, that is not to argue for the objective primacy of reflection as the proper mode of human existence.<sup>14</sup>

Human solidarity, then, was no longer to be based on a universalistic perspective. (So he would avoid one portion of Stirner's critique.) Instead, it would

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10 Ibid., p. 297-8.

11 Ibid., p. 305.

12 Ibid., p. 301.

13 Ibid., p. 304.

14 Ibid., p. 299.

be based on the immediate and spontaneous feeling of love. Love, first between man and woman, then for children, the off-spring of the first love, and then for all of humanity, is the basis of the intense immediate affirmative generosity one feels toward all humankind.<sup>15</sup>

As Feuerbach went on to explain this love, however, it became increasingly less spontaneous and less immediate. First, he made clear, love required reason in order to direct it to its proper object, the human individual as the exemplar of the species-nature, and to keep it from wrong objects, assumably, distorted forms of human nature. Second, Feuerbach made it clear that this spontaneous love that binds the species together is not something felt by everyone. Feuerbach distinguished between selfish and unselfish love. The first is what one has with one's "mistress;" the second what one has with one's "wife." "There I enjoy myself as here, but there I subordinate the essence to the part, here the part, the means, the organ to the whole, to the essence. There I enjoy for that reason only a part of me, but here my self, my whole entire being. In short: in selfish love, I sacrifice the higher to the lower, in the unselfish love, however, the lower to the higher."<sup>16</sup> Whatever the truth of these thoughts, love has clearly ceased to be an immediate and spontaneous feeling which everyone has.

C. *The Resurrection of Religion*: Stirner had charged that "the species" became an ideal, "the holy," which stands over the individual and which, like God, exerts a psychological power which represses one's real nature, Feuerbach replied at one point by trying to trivialize the very notion of this sort of psychological introjection: When I am hungry, my hunger is *uber mich*; after I have eaten, I want to talk with friends, and my convivial urge is *uber mich*; then I want to sleep, and the desire to sleep is *uber mich*, etc.<sup>17</sup>

Taking Stirner more seriously, however, Feuerbach also argued that the idea of human nature is indeed "over" the individual, but not in the sense of being something alien and transcendent. Some individuals, he argued, have abilities which are temporarily beyond the capacity of others, as when a friend, who is healthy, nurses back to health someone who is sick, or a father provides guidance for his child.<sup>18</sup> In these cases, the power of the superior person is not some Holy, intimidating, utterly alien power that looms over the individual, but an ability which the dependent person can also at least potentially exercise.

But Feuerbach also concedes that the idea of the species is something that is utterly transcendent. Individuals, Feuerbach argued, always and necessarily feel themselves to be constricted and limited. Because they are capable of reflection, they can think of things they'd rather do, people they'd rather be – possibilities that they'll never be able to fulfill. The frustration and humiliation that accompanies the individual's realization of limits has to be soothed somehow. It is the idea of the species, Feuerbach argued, that brings deliverance; for the idea of the species allows me to delight in possibilities which are "mine" although I may never realize them. Everything that other people do is also my achievement because they merely actualize potentialities of a human nature which we all share.

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15 Ibid., p. 300-302.

16 Ibid., p 307.

17 Ibid., p. 306.

18 Ibid., p. 297, 303-304.

Unless the sense of limitation is removed by the idea of the species, Feuerbach warned, people will recreate God to alleviate their suffering.<sup>19</sup>

In summary, Feuerbach answered Stirner's charge that the species became a "Holy" essence that transcends the individual first by trivializing the charge, then by trying to explicate a form of superiority which is non transcendent, and finally by conceding that individuals need a power that is greater and more real than themselves or else they will die of suffering from a desperate sense of their own inadequacy. Individuals must delight in the achievements of all humanity, or else they will recreate God in whose glory they will delight. "My Power," "My Activity," "My Self-Enjoyment," to use Stirner's terms, are not objectives of sufficient magnitude to keep me from despair. The only way I can escape my own triviality, this side of religion, is through the idea of the species. The species has, of course, become a subject that is higher and more real than the individual.

Besides these defensive explanations, Feuerbach also made a number of criticisms of Stirner's philosophy.<sup>20</sup> These, however, I hope the reader will agree, were quite weak, and Stirner answered them with sufficient decisiveness that they are not worth reviewing here.

### III

## Stirner's Rejoinder

Stirner replied to Feuerbach in an essay called "Stirner's Critics." The essay is also a response to critiques of Stirner's book by Hess and Szeliga. I have translated only those parts that pertain to Feuerbach. The first part of the essay dealt with charges that all three critics made in common, and consists largely in an explication of the concepts of "Uniqueness" and "Egoism." Three sections at the end were devoted to more specific criticisms of each; I've translated the one entitled "Feuerbach." In this rambling essay, Stirner managed to reply to almost all of the major points that Feuerbach made.

A. *The Essence/Accident Distinction*: Stirner argued that Feuerbach's assertion that the predicates of God and humanity are really the same is simply and obviously wrong. To say that it is the subject, God, that is exaggerated and not the predicates, so that the predicates are still applicable to humanity, is nonsense because the subject only has a nature through the predicates applied to it.<sup>21</sup> But if God's attributes don't fit human beings, then a distinction was, in fact, made between humanity's Godly, essential characteristics, and humanity's lower and unessential nature. It was this distinction that Feuerbach denied making (though he also, as we have seen, tried to justify making it).

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19 Ibid., p. 303.

20 Ibid., p. 296, 299-300.

21 Max Stirner, "Recensenten Stirners," in *Kleinere Schriften*, edited by John Henry Mackay, Berlin, 1914, p. 381.



Stirner then proceeded to answer Feuerbach's arguments for a valid essence/accident distinction, one which is not imposed, but which is somehow objective. First, Feuerbach had argued that the common characteristics of two individuals define the absolute nature of each. Stirner answered this extremely weak argument with a *reductio ad absurdum*: if one person is an animal, and another is an animal, it does not follow that the defining essence of each is animality. What individuals have in common is a contingent fact, and not the basis of definition.<sup>22</sup> Second, Stirner addressed the argument that the human essence is that without which one would not be a human being. Stirner replied ironically by saying that there are many unhuman beings around; many people do not conform to the predominant definition of human essence and "for centuries the prisons have been peopled with un-human types, i.e. with people who did not find appropriate to themselves what is nonetheless appropriate to 'human essence.'"<sup>23</sup> Third, Stirner attacked the notion that human essence is established by an inherent *telos* which is "in" human nature. What defines human nature, he argued, is co-extensive with human beings as they actually exist. Rather than having a *telos* to become human or develop oneself as a human being, one cannot help but be a human being just as one.<sup>24</sup>

**B. *The Species as Subject*:** In *The Essence of Christianity*, we said, Feuerbach based human solidarity on a universalistic perspective. For self-conscious reflection, one's own nature is a particular determination of a common human potentiality, and, grasped in universal concepts, its "mineness" and particularity disappear. In his reply to Stirner, who attacked this intellectualist approach, Feuerbach abandoned this sort of grounding for human solidarity, and tried to establish it anew on the basis of the immediate and spontaneous feeling of love. In this essay, Stirner attacked both bases for human solidarity.

Stirner's attack on the universalistic perspective followed the same lines as *The Ego and Its Own*, but his explication of Uniqueness and Egoism are here much more detailed. Here Stirner developed concepts which clearly anticipate existentialism.<sup>25</sup>

Stirner criticized Feuerbach's discussion of love by showing that Feuerbach talks of "selfish" love as not worthy of a human being. Love, then, is not something that does bind the species together, but something should bind the species together, something that people should feel; it is a prescriptive ideal rather than a definition of reality.<sup>26</sup>

**C. *The Resurrection of Religion*:** Stirner iterated his charge that if the human essence is not the same as actual human beings, and if the dissolution of the individual into the species grounds a morality that is different than the way people actually behave, then Feuerbach's conception of human nature is a prescriptive ideal.<sup>27</sup> When an ideal has psychological power over a person, it becomes something Holy.<sup>28</sup> Feuerbachian humanism was a new religion.

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22 Ibid., p. 383-84.

23 Ibid., p. 386.

24 Ibid., p. 385.

25 Ibid., p. 345-6, 347, 348, 349, 350, 352, 357, 359, 385.

26 Ibid., p. 351-52, 355-56, 359.

27 Ibid., p. 385-86, 381.

28 Ibid., p. 357, 358-60.

## V

In his "Toward a Critique of Hegelian Philosophy," Feuerbach declared himself a radical empiricist on the question of knowledge of the external world: knowledge is the immediate sensuous intuition of particulars. It was on this basis that he attacked the mediated abstractionism of Hegelian philosophy. In *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach presented himself as an empiricist in his investigation of human nature. "I am nothing but a *natural philosopher in the domain of mind*."<sup>29</sup> He constructed his empirical methods to "those philosophers who pluck out their eyes that they may see better,"<sup>30</sup> assumably Hegelians.

Stirner charged that despite Feuerbach's claim to be an empiricist, he ended up with only highly mediated and idealized abstractions. Feuerbach called knowledge of the external world the immediate sense-intuition of particulars, but, Stirner claimed in *The Ego and Its Own*, he completely contradicted his own position:

". . . the reproach is brought up against Hegel by Feuerbach that he misuses language, understanding by many words something else than what natural consciousness takes them for; and yet he too commits the same fault when he gives the "sensuous" a sense of unusual eminence. Thus, it is said, p. 69 [*Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*; in the Bobbs-Merrill edition, translated by Manfred Vogel, New York, 1966, the passage referred to is on p. 59-60. F.G.], "the sensuous is not the profane, the destitute of thought, the obvious, that which is understood in itself." But if it is the sacred, the full of thought, the recondite, that which can be understood only through mediation -- well, then it is no longer what people call the sensuous. The sensuous is only that which exists for the senses; what, on the other hand, is enjoyable only to those who enjoy with more than the senses, who go beyond sense-enjoyment or sense-reception, is at most mediated and introduced by the senses, i.e., the senses constitute a condition for obtaining it, but it is no longer anything sensuous."<sup>31</sup>

In the essay that we have translated, Feuerbach was impaled on the contradictions of his own thought. He struggled first one way and then another to get free, but managed only to make the contradiction more intense and more obvious. "Follow the senses!", he exclaimed again and again, insisting that he had grounded his conception of human nature on an empirical description of human beings. But he ended up again and again with accounts which were as mediated and abstract as those of Hegel.

In the essay below, Feuerbach discarded reflective self-consciousness as the basis for his humanism, undoubtedly under the pressure of Stirner's critique; he sought a new basis in the natural, immediate, and spontaneous feeling of love. But the feeling ended up a highly mediated construct of an idealized individual. Nowhere was he able to make good his claim to be an empiricist (or materialist -- the 2 terms are equivalent in this usage), and this was precisely what Stirner saw

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29 L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, translated by George Eliot, New York, 1957, p. xxxiv.

30 *Ibid.*, p. xxxiv.

31 Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, translated by Steven T. Byington, New York, 1912, p. 359.

more clearly than anyone else. Stirner ended the essay below with a concise statement of the problem with, Feuerbach's philosophy:

"Feuerbach is, to be sure, not a materialist (Stirner never said he was, but described him only as a materialist who bears the properties of idealism); he is not a materialist, for while he imagines that he is talking about actual men, he says nothing about them. He is also however, not an idealist, for while he speaks without ceasing about the essence of man; an idea, he nonetheless imagines himself to be talking about "the sensible human essence"."<sup>32</sup>

It was this charge, that Feuerbach oscillated between a contradictory philosophies of materialism and idealism that made the greatest impression on Feuerbach's contemporaries, including Marx. The original title to the first section of *The German Ideology* was "Feuerbach: Between Materialism and Idealism," a title which came, without much doubt, from the passage by Stirner quoted above. In *The German Ideology*, Marx made the argument that Feuerbach's thought was contradictory along lines that were very close to the argument of Stirner.<sup>33</sup> It is the debate that follows that made the contradictions of Feuerbach's philosophy ineluctably clear.

## VI

Some notes on the translation: Both Feuerbach and Stirner insisted on referring to themselves in the third person, e.g. "Feuerbach thinks...", "Stirner wrote," etc. Feuerbach's essay is complete. In Stirner's essay, I took out all the passages that referred to Szeliga and Hess, save in one place where a reference to Szeliga was necessary to understand what Stirner was saying about Feuerbach. I have translated "der Einzige" sometimes as "Unique," sometimes as "the Unique," and sometimes as "the Unique One."

Bently College

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<sup>32</sup> Max Stirner, "Recensenten Stirners," p. 386.

<sup>33</sup> See Henri Arvon, *op cit.*; and my doctoral dissertation, Chapt. VI, pt. 2.