



## **Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939):**

- **God as a Psychological Projection**
- **Psychotherapy as an Alternative Means to Pursue Well-Being**

### **Prayer**

Almighty God, who taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit: grant to us by the same Spirit to have right judgment in all things and always to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

--Book of Common Prayer, Whit Sunday

In the early nineteenth century the Romantic movement had already begun to raise two very interesting questions:

- (1) What is the origin and significance of culture and of the religious impulse?
- (2) How is the significance of human life related to humanity's ability to create and forge new patterns?

Culture as an organic, unified system of values and practices that reflect ideals for what human life ought to be

G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), idealist philosopher:

- reason is a guide to reality and what is rational is real
- the role of opposites in the process of change and the unfolding of new possibilities in history
  - transcending the limits of the opposed terms=thesis and antithesis resolved in a higher synthesis that more nearly embodies Truth/self-awareness/creative intuition/the perfect realization of Spirit

### **Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872)**

The fourth son of the well-known jurist, Paul von Feuerbach, Ludwig Feuerbach originally studied Protestant theology at Heidelberg but soon moved to Berlin, studying philosophy with Hegel for two years. He belonged to that group of Hegel's followers (the so-called "Left Hegelians") who were more radical in character and found it impossible to reconcile Hegel's concept of the Absolute with a personal god.

In 1830, he published *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*, which argued against personal immortality (i.e. rejected personal survival of death, though he allowed for one's human qualities to be reabsorbed into nature) and against the existence of a transcendent God, which made him a leader among the Left Hegelians but cost him his position at Erlangen (where he had lectured on logic), ending his academic career and leading him to withdraw from

public life (though he still occasionally gave public lectures). (During this retirement, which lasted until the end of his life, he was supported by his wife's fractional interest in a porcelain works.)

With the publication in 1839 of *Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy*, he began to chart a different course and laid more influence upon the human being's material nature as an embodied being. Philosophy must become the naturalistic study of the human person, leading to a kind of physiological materialism (cf. Feuerbach's saying that "Man is [*ist*] what he eats [*isst*]").

Feuerbach vigorously attacked religion. Hegel had tried to reconcile his idealist philosophy of the Absolute Spirit with Christianity by arguing that his philosophy (which he viewed as the universal philosophy) had the same content as the Christian religion but presented the latter in a conceptual form rather than in pictorial imagery. Feuerbach agreed that this latter claim was true: Hegel's transcendent "absolute spirit" was really nothing more than the "departed spirit" of theology, a ghost which need to be exorcised and banished once and for all..

In his best known work *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) Feuerbach begins by arguing that an examination of religion is essential to understanding what man is. Man is in fact the object of his own thought. Religion turns out to be the means by which a human being abstracts the highest feelings, hopes and thoughts from individual, embodied men (e.g. being loving or merciful), objectifying these ideals and projecting them onto some supposed transcendent figure, who is imagined to be an entity distinct from oneself.

#### *Feuerbach's Idea of Projection*

- God is merely the outward projection of man's inward nature.
- Belief in immortality is nothing more than the attempt to project these ideals onto another world.
  - This is based on Hegel's earlier speculation that the "unhappy consciousness" of medieval Christianity projected something of its own stern character onto that otherworldly being before which it abased itself.
- The Trinity is simply a projection into infinity of the human faculties of reason, will and love.

Projection is good insofar as it calls man's attention to important aspects of his own characteristic existence. Projection is bad, however, in that it prevents one from understanding both the limits and possibilities of human existence and is therefore an obstacle to the earthly realization of one's ideals (since one is intent upon projecting them upon some higher, remote being).

- Faith in God needs to be replaced by faith in man.
- Hope in God must be replaced by hope in man.
- Love directed toward God must instead become hope in man.

Man depends upon man alone and not upon God or supernatural forces and this realization should lead one to a unified, whole-hearted pursuit of human welfare.

Needless to say, this was all highly controversial. In his 1844 work *On the Essence of Faith in Luther's Sense*, Feuerbach replied to his Lutheran critics by arguing that an emphasis upon the human subject was already implicit within Protestant theology (an idea already suggested by Hegel) and that his own philosophy was a further

development of this noble theme. He even traced this tendency back to Luther himself, recalling Luther's saying, "If God sat all alone in heaven, like a bump on a log, he would not be God."

- In other words, if he is God and one must be God of someone, then being God depends in some way upon having a certain relation to human beings.
- This means that human beings really are of central importance to any kind of reflection and God can be said to exist only insofar as he is an object of human faith.

Feuerbach's materialistic humanism exercised an important influence over Karl Marx and F. Engels, although Marx later criticized certain aspects of his thought in *Thesen über Feuerbach* (1845). Feuerbach also exercised a significant influence over other critics of traditional Christianity including D. F. Strauss (who published *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* in 1835-1836).

### **Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)**

Born of Jewish ancestry at Freiberg in Moravia but educated in Vienna (Austria), where he spent nearly all of his life. His initial studies were in biology and medicine, then in clinical neurology. Working under J.M. Charcot in Paris, he investigated hysteria, for which no clear bodily cause had been identified, and hypnosis, which Charcot believed had a physical basis. Freud became increasingly convinced of the psychological origin of both of these phenomena (suggestibility).

Freud subsequently returned to Vienna to work with Josef Breuer, who developed the psychoanalytic method as a means to understand and treat nervous disorders. In particular, Breuer was interested in the re-enactment during hypnosis of those stressful and disturbing experiences thought to have precipitated the nervous disorder, allowing for the uninhibited expression of emotion.

Freud felt this was too simplistic because people also had active defense mechanisms that allowed them to repress painful memories, so that these remained unacknowledged. These defenses, he felt could be better confronted when the person was in a normal conscious state through a process of free association.

Freud felt that sexual fantasies played a significant role in the early formation of the personality, being tied up with intense and complicated emotional relationship with one's parents. This allowed Freud to move beyond the description of certain specialized disorders and offer a comprehensive theory of personality. Freud subsequently explored the use of dreams (viewed as products of unformed, infantile wishes and thought processes) in therapy and the proper means of translating these into the patterns of adult, waking thought. The way to do this was through inviting the subject to relax and allow his or her mind to wander freely from elements in the dream to related ideas, recollections and/or emotional reactions, which Freud interpreted as being connected with deeper emotional reactions from one's early life. A dream is thus a carefully disguised form of wish fulfillment expressed as a hallucinatory experience in the course of sleep.

Freud's account of the mind's structure and functions is somewhat complicated.

- The *id*, which is wholly unconscious, embodies those instincts which are related to psychosexual gratification (seeking pleasure) and are able to operate without reference to the dictates of logic or conscious reasoning (and in accordance with regressive, destructive tendencies).
- The *ego*, which is the conscious mind that perceives, learns and adapts to its environment and controls volition (willing) and speech.
- The *super-ego* is partly unconscious and derives its energies from the *id* but is also connected with the conscious mind and is the core of the conscience, serving to monitor conduct and exert control over the latter through repression.
  - This latter plays an important role in the development of both civilization and religion: "We believe that civilization has been created under the pressure of the exigencies of life at the cost of satisfaction of the instincts" (*Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* [1916-1917], lecture 1).
  - An excessively active super-ego, however, can lead to a pathological conscience, leaving one overwhelmed with guilt or a feeling that one's minor transgressions merit punishment.

Freud's theories were extended into a variety of areas--anthropology, sociology and the criticism of art, literature, mythology and religious belief:

- "Religion is an illusion and it derives its strength from its readiness to fit in with our instinctual wishful impulses" (*Civilization and Its Discontents*, lecture 35).
- "At bottom, God is nothing other than an exalted father" (*Totem and Taboo* [1913], pt. 4).
- "Judaism had been a religion of the father; Christianity became a religion of the son. The old God the Father fell back behind Christ; Christ, the Son, took his place, just as every son had hoped to do in primeval times." (*Moses and Monotheism* [1938], pt III, sec. 1).

The reclamation of a more positive role for religion and the transcendent can be found in the works of **Carl Gustav Jung** (1875-1961), who argued for a relationship between certain fundamental patterns of the unconscious (archetypes and primitive pictorial elements) and the representation of these patterns in myth. These archetypes have a semi-autonomous life within us, which is precisely why they can make a claim upon us.