FEUERBACHIAN IMAGINATION AND THE REVERSAL OF HEGELIAN ONTOLOGY IN THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY (1841)

BENJAMIN WILDISH CARTER

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 0-612-93016-5
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 0-612-93016-5

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by

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A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Religious Studies / Faculty of Arts
Memorial University of Newfoundland
September 2003
St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada

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Abstract

This thesis considers the way in which Ludwig Feuerbach, in The Essence of Christianity (1841), attempts a reversal of Hegelian ontology. Principally, it attempts to define the role of the imagination in this reversal. Chapter 1 isolates the forms proper to religious and speculative knowledge in Hegel's philosophy of religion, which supposes the necessity of an ontological concept for thought. Chapter 2 isolates three modes of Feuerbachian epistemology – emotion, imagination, and reason – and contextualizes each with respect to Hegel. The second chapter suggests that The Essence of Christianity is simultaneously a critique of speculative ontology, and marks the way in which the Feuerbachian species-concept attempts a retrieval of the unity that is lost with the annulment of the God-concept of theological-speculative ontology. Chapter 3 considers the ambiguous place of the imagination in Feuerbach's critique, and points to the slippery nature of his claim to have retrieved a pre-reflective concept which preexists the "necessary" concept of theological-speculative ontology. This last chapter shows the way in which Feuerbach esteems the imagination as an essential mode of human self-knowing.

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge the Department of Religious Studies and the School of Graduate Studies at Memorial University, whose financial support made my wonderful time in Newfoundland possible. Above all, I would like to thank my advisor, Kim Parker, for his patience, push, and advice, and for his willingness to meet and speak with me, on a personal level, over pints of amber ale and stout. I extend my warmest thoughts to Bernie Wills and his family.

Introduction

The Young Hegelians: A Preliminary Context

In Germany, the year 1835 brought with it the publication of the contentious work, The Life of Jesus Critically Examined. Its author, 27 year-old David Friedrich Strauss, had inadvertently ushered in a new age of Hegelianism, an age of philosophical-theological inquiry in which the dogmatic and metaphysical dimensions of Christian theology, particularly as they appeared in the Hegelian world picture, were called into serious question.[1] Strauss' influence, at this early stage, spawned a new series of critical "lives" in the search for the historical Jesus. His Life of Jesus was soon present in the currents of French intellectual life, as it was in Victorian England, where the young George Eliot undertook work on its translation. It was soon recognized as a product of "left-

[1] Although Strauss' Life of Jesus was the first book to jolt fiery debate within Hegelian, academic, and even public circles, it is important to note that Feuerbach himself was author to the first recognized work of "young Hegelianism." Thoughts on Death and Immortality, a work which attempted to dispel belief in the illusion of personal immortality and to reorient the spiritual yearnings of human beings to the finite conditions of this world, appeared in 1830. With its publication, Feuerbach was assured a relative degree of notoriety, though almost entirely negative, and as a result of which he was kept from ever acquiring a university post. For the remaining years of his life, he would carry out his writing in a place of relative isolation from the academic world whose philosophical-spiritual convictions he sought to throw asunder, or bring back to earth.

wing Hegelianism," a phrase formulated by the author himself in his defense of the controversial work.[2] The most prominent members of this new Hegelianism were Strauss himself, and eventually, Bruno Bauer and Ludwig Feuerbach, each of whom was concerned, in large part, with the relationship of Hegelian philosophy to the Christian religion. In their mature work, Hegelian and Christian thought were divested of their transcendent aspect and interpreted as expressions of truths immanent in humanity – without the divine, infinite, *other*.

In his Life of Jesus, Strauss attempted a systematic critique of the gospels, and deemed them unhistorical in terms of both supernatural and natural history. He suggested that the gospels of the New Testament were conditioned by a *mythopoetic*, rather than a historical, mode of thought, and that theology had to reexamine its content in light of this mythopoetical form. Strauss concluded, in other words, that the source of religious truth was fashioned by the mythopoetic spirit of pre-scientific humanity, and that the theologians of his day, supernaturalists and naturalists alike, were shortsighted in their credo that religious truth depended essentially upon the historical referent of an eternal God-in-Christ. Bauer, though beginning as a staunch opponent of Strauss, would soon put forth a more liberal position, eliminating, like Strauss, the transcendent guise of the divine being. He, too, endorsed a similarly immanent interpretation of religion in general, and of Christianity in particular. "Religion," suggested Bauer, "in teaching God separate from man, was denying that unity and thus denying the

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[2] David Friedrich Strauss, In Defense of my *Life of Jesus* against the Hegelians, trans. and ed. Marilyn Chapin Massey (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1983).

act of knowledge."[3] And if God was, as Bauer and Strauss would have it, not distinct from the human being, then the object of religious knowledge proper could be none other than humanity itself. It is within this discussion of the relationship between humanity and the divine that Ludwig Feuerbach takes his place in the figuration of nineteenth century, German thought.

Ludwig Feuerbach and *The Essence of Christianity*, 1841

Feuerbach is most often remembered as the author of The Essence of Christianity, first published in 1841. In The Essence of Christianity, Feuerbach, like Strauss and Bauer, reduces the absolute and infinite nature of the divine to a level of human finitude. With Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit as his springboard, Feuerbach does so explicitly in terms of self-consciousness; we do not find in Feuerbach the kind of historical-critical or textual analysis we find in both Bauer and Strauss.[4] Feuerbach, on the contrary, seeks out the essence of Christianity strictly in *human* consciousness, which for him encompasses the human capacity for emotion, imagination, and reason. It is thus, moreover, that he differs from Hegel, in that the latter fashions his understanding of Christianity in terms of consciousness at the level of both finite human and infinite God. For Feuerbach, the study of Christianity is not the study of God or of an absolute philosophical concept, but of the truths immanent in the human species.

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[3] William J. Brazill, The Young Hegelians (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 191.

[4] Feuerbach himself makes this clear. See Ludwig Feuerbach, "Preface to the Second Edition," The Essence of Christianity, translated by George Eliot (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), p. xxii. Moreover, while Strauss effects a "leftist" reinterpretation of Hegelian philosophy,

"Theology," he says famously, "is Anthropology."[5] In The Essence of Christianity, Feuerbach's discussion of self-consciousness is carried out from the perspective of human self-consciousness alone, rather than the self-consciousness of an o*ther*, absolute, and divine being (i.e., the God of Christianity). In Hegel's dialectical model, the Absolute comes to self-consciousness via reason – as mediated by humanity; and humanity, similarly, comes to self-consciousness through the Absolute.[6] God and humanity, infinite and finite: each finds fulfillment in the other; e*ach is an object to the other.* Feuerbach, on the other hand, suggests that the human subject simply misinterprets or *projects* itself as a divine object, which in turn becomes known to consciousness as an active rational subject:[7] "consciousness of the objective is the self-consciousness of man . . . . The *absolute* to man is his own nature."[8] The proper object of consciousness, in other words, has always been the human being; and thus should the proper object of religion, theology and philosophy, be humanity itself.

The Present Investigation

Despite the seemingly provocative and significant nature of these conclusions, Feuerbach has yet to achieve a permanent place in the pantheon of

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Feuerbach attempts the very reversal of Hegelian ontology, and makes no effort to rescue the Hegelian world picture (*Weltanschauung*).

[5] Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, translated by George Eliot (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), p. xvii.

[6] Georg Wilhelm Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, translated by A.V. Miller with an analysis of the text and foreword by J.N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 138.

[7] This "Projection Theory" is central to the discussion in Van A. Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[8] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 5.

western thinkers. Whether he deserves an exalted position therein is doubtful; but it is a matter of relative misfortune that he has been neglected in the study of both philosophy and religion, and has been viewed, often at best, as a transitional figure between Hegel and Marx.[9] Intellectuals, it is true, have not been reticent in their words about Feuerbach. Even the erudite Isaiah Berlin is harsh in his judgment of the young Hegelian, dismissing him as a figure of mere derivative or transitional status. Feuerbach, he writes, is "one of those authors, not infrequently met with in the history of thought, who, mediocrities themselves, nevertheless happen to provide men of genius with the sudden spark which sets on fire the long-accumulated fuel. His own contribution to philosophy is jejune and uninspired."[10] Berlin's vision here is perhaps impaired by the same dark shadow which looms over Feuerbach (here, that of Marx, but often that of Hegel). And this is the darkness into which this study of The Essence of Christianity hopes to cast some kind of light. For, although Marx goes farther in his formulation of a materialistic critique of religion, and although history has made an institutional relic of Marxist thought, Feuerbach's significance for the study of religion should not be underestimated. Feuerbach, indeed, is through-and-through a philosopher of religion. In each of his works, he aims to understand the nature of the religious impulse as a means of human self-knowing, though never letting go of a position that is essentially critical of this impulse, particularly in its rational or "alienated"

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[9] Hans-Martin Sass argues quite neatly that Feuerbach should not be viewed simply as a transitional figure to Marx. In so doing, Sass attempts to overcome a "stereotype" common to many historians of ideas, namely, of viewing developments in thought simply in terms of transition (though the principle of transition, one might add, resembles the pulse of the Hegelian dialectic itself). See Hans-Martin Sass, "The 'Transition' from Feuerbach to Marx: a Re-Interpretation," Studies in Soviet Thought 26 (1983) 123-142. I touch upon Feuerbach's necessary relation to Marx in the conclusion to this thesis.

expressions, theology and speculative philosophy. This tendency is particularly true with respect to The Essence of Christianity.

The present essay attempts to clarify the relationship between The Essence of Christianity and traditional theological-speculative ontology. I do not attempt to sketch out the relationship of The Essence of Christianity to the works of Feuerbach's early or late periods. This has been carried out successfully elsewhere.[11] Neither do I attempt a comprehensive analysis of Feuerbach's appropriation and critique of the western philosophical tradition.[12] Here, I focus exclusively upon the reversal of Hegelian ontology in The Essence of Christianity, so as to shed light upon the complex relationship between Feuerbach's critique of the Christian faith and the ontological presuppositions of the Hegelian philosophy of religion. My ultimate aim is to show how Feuerbach, in the course of this reversal, esteems the imagination in a twofold way: first, as the reflective birthplace of the alienated ontology of theology and speculative philosophy, and as a pre-reflective or necessary mode of human self-knowing

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[10] Isaiah Berlin, Karl Marx (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 75.

[11] See Van A. Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Harvey's book is helpful to anyone encountering Feuerbach. Harvey, however, suggests that the intention and design of The Essence of Christianity – in contrast to that of Feuerbach's later works, in which Hegelian influences give way to a "naturalist-existentialist" explication of religion – is "convoluted" precisely because of its use of a Hegelian design in its critique of Christianity. This Hegelian strand, however, serves as the very basis for the present essay, in which I suggest that the link between Feuerbach and Hegel, in The Essence of Christianity, is exactly that which needs unpacking.

[12] See Marx W. Wartofsky, Feuerbach (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Wartofsky's study is thorough and far-reaching in its attempt to expose the discussion, in the collectivity of Feuerbach's writings, between Feuerbach and the western philosophical tradition. One writer has suggested that Wartofsky's book, "for understanding Feuerbach and assessing his achievement, has by far surpassed more than one hundred years of scholarship." James A. Massey, "Notes to the Introduction," in Ludwig Feuerbach, Thoughts on Death and Immortality, ed. and trans. James A. Massey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 253-54n.

which preexists the place of genesis of the ontological concept.[13] I believe that the presence, in The Essence of Christianity, of these opposing perspectives, stresses the ultimately complex or slippery nature of the theological-speculative ontology that Feuerbach attempts to reverse. It is a level of complexity, as I suggest in my conclusion, that is innate to the ontological concept itself, which in some sense anticipates any attempt to cut short its essential characteristic of ontological necessity. This tension is true of Feuerbach in his attempt to retrieve the human essence in the human species.

In order to bring about this clash of ontological perspectives, in my first chapter, I sketch out the ontological position assumed in the Hegelian philosophy of religion, and frame my discussion within the Hegelian categories of representation and concept (*Vorstellung* and *Begriff*). In an introductory fashion, I suggest that both *Vorstellung* and *Begriff* assume or give expression to the principle of ontological necessity which Feuerbach attempts to overturn in The Essence of Christianity. The ultimately labyrinthine design of Hegelian philosophy impedes, perhaps, any endeavour to chart a straight path through its walls. Ultimately, however, I attempt to analyze the representational and speculative forms of consciousness in terms of the most basic presupposition of the Hegelian philosophy of religion: the principle of ontological necessity as such.[14] *Vorstellungen* are the theological expressions of the God-concept, in each

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[13] While Feuerbach suggests that theological-speculative ontology is a byproduct of rational thought (what I call the "reflective imagination"), Hegel assumes that the ontological concept exists "irrespective of our thinking." This, I think, is the fundamental point of distinction between Hegel and Feuerbach in their analyses of the Christian religion – a point which I stress throughout the chapters of this essay.

[14] Some, beginning with Bauer himself, have attempted immanent or atheistic readings of Hegel. In the writings of the 20th century thinker, Alexandre Kojève, we find what is perhaps the best

case bearing out a kernel of rational truth in the representational form of theology. The representational fabric of Christianity harbours the ontological horizon of speculative thought insofar as theology presents consciousness with a limited but direct encounter with the ontological concept, only in representational guise. According to Hegel, that is, the *Vorstellungen* of the Christian faith share the essential content of the *Begriffe* of speculative philosophy. Their *content* is rational and necessary, their *form* mimetic and contingent. I thus describe the way in which the Christian faith is necessarily propelled, according to Hegel, towards fulfillment in speculative thought, where its representational form is shed, and where its content – importantly, the ontological concept – finds expression in pure speculative form. The overarching suggestion of the Hegelian program is that Christian theology *and* speculative philosophy, representational *and* conceptual thought, give expression to the ontological concept, which necessarily is the object or centre of consciousness. Due to the perceived necessity of this object for thought in Hegelian philosophy of religion, human beings occupy a necessary place at the boundaryline between finite and infinite. My first chapter

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articulation of such an interpretation. Recently, Robert C. Solomon has argued provocatively that Hegel's writings disclose a covert atheism. In response to James Stirling, who in 1865 claimed to have discovered Hegel's "secret" – namely, that Hegel was a Christian, even "the greatest abstract thinker of Christianity" – Solomon writes: "The secret, abruptly stated, is that Hegel was an atheist. His 'Christianity' is nothing but nominal, an elaborate subterfuge to protect his professional ambitions in the most religiously conservative country in northern Europe." (Robert C. Solomon, "The Secret of Hegel [Kierkegaard's Complaint]: A Study in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion," From Hegel to Existentialism [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987], p. 57.) Solomon goes on to say that "Hegel used religion and religious vocabulary as his instruments, as if the last logical consequence to be drawn from Christian doctrine is humanism, and the final meaning to be given to theological terminology is a meaning which refers strictly and exclusively to man's conception of himself" (p. 58). Despite the profound nature of the question posed in Solomon's paper, I here rest on the side that Hegel's work embodies an *ontos* that is too pervasive and all-determining to justify a reading which proclaims the contrary. That Hegel was false to his own "atheistic" convictions, or at best, that he operated under the guise of a philosophical poet –

describes the way in which theology and speculative philosophy, in their respective expressions of the ontological concept as *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*, are forms of consciousness which straddle and work towards the reconciliation of finite and infinite. Throughout, I attempt to articulate the problematical way in which Hegel maintains the necessity of theological consciousness, despite his ultimate view that the process of human self-knowing requires the eventual sublation of theological representation into the pure conceptual medium of speculative thought.[15]

In my second chapter, I attempt to sketch out Feuerbach's view of human self-knowing, which, like Hegel's discussion, meets the human being at the level of consciousness, at the boundaryline of finite and infinite. Yet, I strive to show the precise way in which Feuerbach's epistemological claims entail not only a critique of theology as such, but also a rejection of the theological-speculative ontology essential to the Hegelian philosophy of religion. Whereas Hegel assumes that knowledge of the ontological concept can come only when theological representation has been sublated or elevated into speculative form, Feuerbach rejects the very fabric of speculative philosophy as an abstract expression of the same religious dream.[16] The ground for Feuerbach's simultaneous critique of Hegelian ontology, as we shall see here, rests precisely in the fact that speculative philosophy maintains the existence of an ontologically

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never outright saying what he meant, but instead veiling his thoughts in socially palatable language – is an argument the consistency of which is difficult to sustain.

[15] Insofar as Hegel claims that the *Begriff* of speculative philosophy necessarily supercedes the God of theology, some suggest that, ultimately, Hegel's philosophy is devoid of a veritable "religious" impulse. Whether the coexistence of theology and speculative thought is possible, is the matter in question.

[16] As I discuss in my second chapter, Feuerbach himself makes use of this "dream" metaphor.

distinct *other*, only in abstract guise, veiled in rational terms.[17] Feuerbach, in essence, disintegrates Hegel's notion of objective cognition, or speculative thought, where the ontological concept is comprehended in its pure form. Instead, Feuerbach subsumes the *Begriff* of the Hegelian philosophy of religion under the workings of subjective cognition, where the very notion of a speculative concept is critiqued as a byproduct of consciousness, rather than its objective and necessary centre.

In order to communicate this shift from objective to subjective consciousness, from the principle of ontological necessity to the "fact" of speculative contingency, I frame my discussion within three categories central to Feuerbach's conception of human self-knowing: reason, imagination, and feeling. In each case, I develop my discussion in relation to Hegel, so as to emphasize the precise nature of Feuerbach's inversion of theological-speculative ontology. Like Hegel, Feuerbach considers reason, imagination, and feeling to be modes of human self-knowing, though he inverts their hierarchical schematization to give primacy to feeling as the originary place of unity with the human essence. In his view, feeling preexists the appearance of reason, which effects or abstracts the being of the Absolute, first represented as an *other* by the imagination. It is thus that Feuerbach cuts short the principle of ontological necessity: that is, insofar as he considers the ontological concept to be an outcome of consciousness, rather than its objective beginning point, or the necessarily existent object of which

[17] Whereas D.F. Strauss attempts to rescue speculative philosophy from the briars of theology, Feuerbach recognizes speculative thought as an abstract or absorbed form of theological ontology; and, for this reason, he attempts to cast the speculative dream "in the simple daylight of reality and necessity" (Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xix).

consciousness achieves greatening levels of comprehension.[18] I conclude by discussing Feuerbach's problematical conception of the human species, which he adopts as the object of consciousness proper, first misrepresented as "God" by the imagination and only then given distinct or necessary existence by reason. For Feuerbach, only species consciousness constitutes objective cognition as such. Only species consciousness can reestablish the unity of human consciousness with itself, a unity lost when the predicates of the human species are transmogrified into attributes of an ontologically distinct *other* – be it the God (*Vorstellung*) of theology or the Absolute (*Begriff*) of speculative philosophy. Species consciousness, in this sense, constitutes Feuerbach's attempt to awaken human beings to the dreamlike nature of theological-speculative ontology. As I argue, however, Feuerbach, too, is involved in a discussion of consciousness which attempts a straddling of finite and infinite. Ostensibly, he suggests an empirical object as the point of departure for self-consciousness. Consciousness perceives itself as an *other* in a fellow-member of the human species. Yet, as I point out in my second chapter, this empirical starting point gives way to a phenomenological discussion, the concrete nature of which is difficult to sustain. "I am nothing but a *natural philosopher in the domain of the mind*,"[19] he explains. And, insofar as this is true, there is some sense in which Feuerbach cannot help but fall back upon the "imaginary" apparatus of the theological-speculative ontology he seeks to reverse: here, in the form of an infinite human essence.

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[18] The wording, "greatening levels of *alienation*," better reflects Feuerbach's intention.
[19] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xiv.

My third chapter attempts to locate the precise place of the imagination in the epistemological framework of The Essence of Christianity. On one level, I argue that Feuerbach subsumes reason under the workings of imaginative thought. Here, the imagination is seen as the birthplace of theology, where the divine image, originally an expression of the unity present to consciousness in feeling, is given existence as an ontologically distinct subject.[20] Feuerbach responds strongly to this rational form of the imagination. It is the imaginative mode of which The Essence of Christianity is so critical. Yet, we find that Feuerbach simultaneously considers the imagination a necessary mode of human self-knowing. Rather than suppose that these antagonistic positions render Feuerbach's position irredeemable, I suggest that his critique of theological-speculative ontology reveals what are perhaps two forms of imaginative knowledge. The first is what I call the reflective imagination: the imagination of theological and speculative consciousness; the imagination which gives rise to the Hegelian philosophy of religion, where the representational fabric of Christianity is understood as a vessel, however contingent in form, for the rational and necessary content of the speculative *Begriff*. Feuerbach implies that the entire ontological dream, including that of speculative philosopher, is contingent upon this imaginative framework. Yet, Feuerbach also writes of an imaginative faculty which preexists the emergence of the reflective or rational imagination, the birthplace proper of *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*. I suggest this as the imaginative

[20] In speculative philosophy, the ontologically distinct subject becomes reason itself – still, for Feuerbach, a manifest form of imaginative thought. Marx Wartofsky notes the tendency of the imagination to mistake its images for objects of rational thought. He writes: "The images as objects of feeling are given the status of *thoughts* as objects of reason. This self-deception is the

mode that Feuerbach considers necessary insofar as it cuts short the process by which the imagination becomes reflective, and the formulation of theological-speculative ontology becomes possible. This is the sense in which the ontological position is symptomatic of the reflective imagination: an imagination which steps beyond its pre-reflective, emotive sphere, and which misperceives its pre-reflective object as an existent ontological subject. In order to highlight the essentially creative and necessary nature of the pre-reflective imagination as a mode of human self-knowing, I strike upon Feuerbach's interpretation of the Incarnation. In his brief but crucial reading of the Incarnation, which he views as an expression of the limitless capacities of the human imagination, I suggest that we are presented with what is, in effect, a mirror argument for the imagination as an essential predicate of the human species. The Incarnation, that is, expresses the necessity of the imagination for human self-knowing: the imagination as it pre-exists rational engagement with a projected *other*. In my third chapter, I suggest that reading The Essence of Christianity through these opposing modes of imaginative activity helps to clarify Feuerbach's critique of theological-speculative ontology.

In the pages that follow, I shall suggest that one can argue for two interpretations of the human imagination in The Essence of Christianity: first, an imagination which operates at a pre-reflective level, as the slave of feeling; and second, an imagination which misperceives its emotive objects as objects of reason, as thoughts, and gives birth to the alienated ontology of theology and

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characteristic error of that power of imagination that mistakes itself for reason proper" (Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 231).

speculative philosophy.[21] "Pre-reflective imagination and "reflective imagination" are, indeed, merely words, or abstractions the existence of which I do mean to maintain. Yet, I believe that they are useful in coming to terms with Feuerbach's inversion of traditional ontology, which I suggest as the principal design of The Essence of Christianity. On one level, Feuerbach attempts to usurp the God-concept from its place at the centre of consciousness; on another, he cannot escape the slippery or even hermetic nature of the principle of ontological necessity, which supposes the existence an infinite concept by virtue of its very presence for thought. Feuerbach echoes, at least in sentiment, the general tenor of traditional ontology, but chooses to step beyond its hermetic or circular boundary. In so doing, he does not render religious consciousness meaningless, but puts forward a translation of its images,[22] so as to draw the essence of human existence from the religious mode of being. He attempts, as one writer puts it, "the transformation of the sacred,"[23] while affirming in consciousness an encounter with the infinite. In The Essence of Christianity, the infinite horizon of consciousness is devoid of an ontological concept, the sun of theological-speculative ontology. The present essay takes this ontology as its point of departure.

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[21] In the case of the latter, the imagination is in cahoots with, or is the mother of reason, and constitutes the domain proper to the categories of the Hegelian philosophy of religion, *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*. Desire, as the German proverb claims, is the mother of thought. And to situate this grain of wisdom within the Feuerbachian view of human self-knowing, one could say that the imagination rests somewhere between these two worlds, negotiating a balance between pre-reflective, emotive objects (feelings), and the rational powers which await to give these desires conceptual form (thoughts).

[22] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xiii.

[23] Henri Arvon, La transformation du sacré (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957).

Chapter 1

Vorstellung, *Begriff* and the Necessity of the God-Concept in the Hegelian Philosophy of Religion

In the opening pages of the manuscript for his Berlin lectures on the philosophy of religion, Hegel situates philosophical thought in relation to the religious desire to know God:

> Consciousness or thought is what distinguishes human beings from the animals. All that proceeds from thought – all the distinctions of the arts and sciences and of the endless interweavings of human relationships, habits and customs, activities, skills, and enjoyments – find their ultimate center in the *one* thought of God.... God is the one and only object of philosophy.... Thus philosophy *is* theology, and one's occupation with philosophy – or rather *in* philosophy – is of itself the service of God.[1]

God, then, for religion and for philosophy, is the proper object of investigation and desire; each is connected to the divine by the same golden cord: that of reason (*Vernunft*), in which God becomes the center from which *any* formulation of meaning flows – religious or not. What is ultimately suggested by Hegel is an ontology rooted in the divine, or a philosophical perspective which finds its ground in the fundamental ontological assumption that God *is* – and moreover,

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[1] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion I: Introduction and The Concept of Religion, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. Peter C. Hodgson *et al* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 84. In citations from this and the other editions of the LPR, I have removed Hodgson's editorial markings from the text (with the exception of Italics and bracketed

that with his Being as the central object of thought, so too we *are*. Hegel, elsewhere in the Berlin manuscript, casts light on this very matter. With respect to the God of Christianity, what Hegel deems the consummate or manifest religion,[2] he writes: "Metaphysically it has this form: God is spirit, God has reality; he exists [*existiert*] in virtue of his concept. Proof of the existence of God derives from his concept.... now comes the transition from concept to being. The concept is the presupposition."[3] Within the concept (*Begriff*) of God rests the ultimate unity of subjective consciousness and the divine being, of finite and infinite in the pure medium of thought. This, it can be said, is the ontological framework within which Feuerbach situates himself. Feuerbach, however, does not answer to the question regarding the ontological necessity of the concept of God, and supposes for thought a center of being that is solely human. In this sense, one can hardly come to terms with Feuerbach's critique of the Christian faith without first attempting some preliminary understanding of Hegel's philosophy of religion. For, in the very act of inverting the theistic stance of his "master," Feuerbach supposes for Hegelian ontology a moment of dialectical priority, carrying out, in effect, the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of the divine, Absolute into the notion of an absolute humanity.[4]

German words). They are useful within the framework of the LPR volumes themselves, in order to highlight source material, but are here not needed.

[2] In both English translations of The Phenomenology of Spirit, Christianity is called the "revealed" religion. I follow H.S. Harris in his use of the term "manifest." See H.S. Harris, Hegel's Ladder II: The Odyssey of Spirit (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), p. 649: "*The Christian Spirit has come out into the open, so that it is now 'manifest.' The history of its 'revelation' has already been dealt with in the evolution of finite spirit... the* offenbare Religion *is* beyond *the stages that were 'revealed.'*"

[3] Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion III: The Consummate Religion, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. Peter C. Hodgson *et al* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 65-6.

[4] The *theistic* nature of Hegel's system, and the corresponding notion of a transcendent, divine Absolute, is still a point of fiery dispute in Hegelian circles, and the central concern of many,

In what follows, however, I shall consider Hegel's philosophy of religion in a sphere of relative isolation from Feuerbach, so as to develop our sense for the Hegelian vision to which Feuerbach responds in his 1841 critique of Christianity. For in Hegel's terms, religion and philosophy – even Feuerbach's dialectical stream of fire – give expression to the same impulse to truth, an impulse which finds its centre in the "one thought of God." It is thus that I shall carry out a discussion of religious and speculative truth, religious representation (*Vorstellung*) and speculative concept (*Begriff*), the two ultimate shapes of consciousness manifested by the Absolute Spirit in its ascent towards Absolute Knowing, or pure identity in thought. As a brief matter of conclusion, I shall then consider the place of the Incarnation in Hegel's system, so as to highlight the centrality of Christianity in the epistemological and ontological suppositions of Hegelian thought. For it precisely in the realm of Absolute Knowing that we find the realization the Hegelian ontological concept that is later rejected by Feuerbach, and in the Incarnation that humanity is confronted with the Infinite Spirit as an object of consciousness.[5] In The Essence of Christianity, Feuerbach reinterprets Hegelian ontology and points to the presence of an infinite human essence, a human self-consciousness (species consciousness) which pre-exists the ontological concept.[6] Indeed, while for Hegel, "philosophy *is* theology," for

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whose works in some way echo the trumpet sounded, in the years following Hegel's death in 1831, by Feuerbach and the young Hegelians of the "left."

[5] In The Essence of Christianity, as I shall show in chapter 3, the Incarnation represents the necessity of the imagination in human self-knowing.

[6] This, again, constitutes Feuerbach's assumed rejection of the ontological necessity of the concept of God, put forth by Hegel. Whether this rejection is justified – or even, on Hegel's terms, logically possible – is the point in question.

Feuerbach, "Theology is Anthropology."[7] Yet each assumes an ultimate condition in which self-consciousness is characterized by a state of *infinitude*: be it a self-consciousness shared by humanity and by the Absolute (as in Hegel) or by members of the human species (as in Feuerbach). In this sense, for *this* master and slave, the horizon of self-consciousness is seemingly without limit. Each thinker grounds his ontology in terms of an infinite consciousness. And, what is more: each gives representational form to this concept of an infinite, and claims it as the object proper of ontology. It is thus that I turn to the nature of religious *consciousness* in Hegel, so as to come to terms with the ontological horizon towards which Feuerbach, too, casts his gaze. For, in Hegel's words, it is consciousness which marks the essential difference between "the human beings and the animals;" and for Feuerbach, too, it is consciousness which distinguishes "man and brute,"[8] and which situates the human being in relation to his or her ultimate conception of what it means to *be*.

Religious and Speculative Forms of Consciousness: *Vorstellung* and *Begriff* in the Hegelian Odyssey of Spirit

Throughout his writings, Hegel distinguishes between representational and conceptual forms of knowledge, shapes of consciousness which mark the endpoint of Absolute Spirit's odyssey towards self-consciousness in the pure medium of thought. Representation and concept, *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*,

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[7] Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), p. xvii.
[8] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 1.

constitute the fundamental modes of knowing characteristic to religious and speculative consciousness, respectively. The question regards the essential identity *and* difference of these religious and speculative modes of thought: whether, that is, the representational aspect of religious consciousness requires a shift to pure philosophical thought, or whether one can stop at the level of religious representation posited by Christianity, the "manifest religion," whose representational form (*Vorstellung*) shares in the essential content (*Begriff*) of speculative philosophy. The question, however, is perhaps unanswerable insofar as either reading can be justified in terms of Hegel's writings. Yet the push of Hegel's words, it seems, is to acknowledge the necessity of the move from a religious to a speculative form of consciousness, while affirming the necessity of representational truth as revealed in the Christian mode of knowing. This tendency is marked throughout his writings, particularly in his chapters on "Revealed Religion" and "Absolute Knowing" in the Phenomenology of Spirit of 1807, in sections 451-458 and 564-577 of his Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830), and in his Berlin Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, delivered four times in an eleven-year period, 1821-1831. The very negativity which characterizes the dialectical ascent of the Absolute requires the latter's shift from religious to speculative knowing. This principle of negativity, indeed, is fundamental both to the representational shell *and* to the essential content of Christianity, the manifest religion, by virtue of the very death of Christ – that moment of negativity which rests at the centre of its revelation, and which gives rise to the Absolute Spirit as an object of consciousness, as the centre of Hegelian

ontology. This essential drive of the Absolute, what Hegel deems "the labour of the negative," assumes the necessary status of representation, or form, in the Being of the Absolute: "Just because the form is as essential to the essence as the essence is to itself, the divine essence is not to be conceived and expressed merely as essence, i.e. as immediate substance or pure self-contemplation of the divine, but likewise as *form*."[9] It is in this way that the representational fabric of Christianity constitutes the revelation of the Absolute; for only through its revealed form is the divine essence, reason, "conceived and expressed as an actuality," so as to know itself as this truth and to become Spirit.

Indeed, Spirit resides in the representations (*Vorstellungen*) of religious consciousness in general, which find their centre in "the one thought of God;" yet for Hegel, it is only in the forms of Christian revelation that we find the self-consciousness of Absolute Spirit itself. While religion, "as consciousness of *absolute Being* as such, has indeed made its appearance," it has done so strictly "from *the standpoint of the consciousness* that is conscious of absolute Being; but absolute Being in and for itself, the self-consciousness of Spirit, has not appeared in those 'shapes'."[10] It is thus only in the representational "shapes" of Christian consciousness that we find the consummate expression of the Absolute: that is, *Vorstellungen* in whose form Spirit attains self-consciousness, and whose content is identical with the speculative *Begriffe* of speculative philosophy. It is precisely this process of self-examination and self-realization that constitutes The Phenomenology of Spirit. The question, in this general context, remains whether

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[9] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), section 19, pp. 10 and 11.

Christian consciousness requires a self-surpassing of its forms into the pure concepts of speculative philosophy, or whether it can remain content in its content: satisfied in its representational husk while embodying a dynamic principle of negativity and mediation.

In terms of ontology proper to Hegel, we must remember, this principle of mediation is constitutive of consciousness possessed by the Absolute itself, and not an attribute of human consciousness alone, as Feuerbach holds. Yet we are still left with the dilemma as to whether or not the representational form of Christianity can, in fact, mark the consummation of an infinite self-consciousness. Is the infinite not in some way encumbered by the baggage of finite, figurative form, despite Hegel's claim that the representational shell of manifest religion shares its content with speculative truth? Hegel, in his Berlin lectures, addresses the very relationship of the sensuous to religious representation (*Vorstellung*), the latter of which he contrasts with image (*Bild*): "The image is sensuous, derives from what is sensuous; it is myth. Representation is the image elevated into its universality: it is thought, full of thought, and is a form for thought too."[11] Thus, representational forms proper to religion are conditioned by a principle of negativity which raises their sensuous aspect to the level of thought, their figurative guise to the level of universality. In this sense, Hegel claims that religion is essentially polemical since its "content is not grasped immediately in

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[10] Hegel, Phenomenology, section 672, p. 310

[11] Hegel, LPR I, p.238. From this arises D.F. Strauss' fundamental mistake in the "Concluding Dissertation" of his Life of Jesus Critically Examined trans. George Eliot, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1994), pp. 777-81. Though a student in these very lectures, Strauss conflates Hegel's conceptions of "myth" and "representation," and fails to acknowledge the principles of negativity and mediation which characterize religious representational form according to his teacher.

sensuous intuition or figurative [*bildlich*] fashion but as mediated by the process of abstraction, through raising the figurative or sensible into the universal."[12] Religious representation of the infinite, then, is by its nature far more kinetic than one might initially assume; it challenges the sensuous aspect of its own form.

Vorstellung, in effect, stands at a middle point between the finite and infinite, and in this sense mirrors the ontology of the human being, who, "by virtue of his thinking universality occupies the existential boundaryline between finite and infinite."[13] In keeping with this ontological condition, the truth which humanity seeks via reason is, for Hegel, relational, and necessarily assumes for its dialectical principle of ascent an interplay of finite and infinite. Thus, in contrast to Kant, who posits an infinite *beyond*, a thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*) that cannot be penetrated by the understanding, Hegel's *Vorstellung* is a vehicle for thought which is at once dependent upon, and independent of, finitude. In that Kant supposes an unbridgeable divide between the phenomenal and noumenal realms (the finite and the infinite), he deems the latter *beyond* pure reason and, in effect, "limits" or finitizes the infinite. Yet for Hegel, "to recognize a limit is to posit a beyond, to reveal and generate an opposition; and that is precisely the movement of the dialectic, the implication of which is the *immanence* of that whole, that end and objective, which is the drive... of the movement."[14] Hence his critique of Kantian epistemology, where the infinite is exiled to the realm of the noumenal, while humans are bound to life in the phenomenal realm of shadows. In the

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[12] Hegel, LPR I, p. 239.
[13] James Yerkes, The Christology of Hegel (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 61.

Hegelian view, ontology supposes no state of exile – either for the human or for the Absolute – but supposes their identity in difference, their limitlessness in the overcoming of limitation: "I know my boundary because I am unlimited, because I have consciousness,"[15] says Hegel. It is in this way that *Vorstellung*, a shape of this very consciousness, is fundamental to Hegel's dialectical ontology. It sustains that immanent middle where the forms of the finite work towards self-fulfillment through consciousness, the ground for the essentially "polemical" nature of religious representation.

The polemical aspect of the religious *Vorstellung*, it can be said, resides in its essential tendency to elevate its figurative form to the level of universality, to raise the sensuous to the level of the universal *through* thought, the ground and premise of Hegelian ontology. As Hegel writes: "insofar as religious opinion was bound up with the figurative; and the figurative, the beautiful, has precisely the signification that the universal, the thought, the concept is not separated from its image [*Bild*]." Thus, any transfiguration of the representational, any elevation of religious form, by nature concerned its content.[16] This tension between the form and content of *Vorstellung*, between the universality and actuality of the Absolute, propels Christian consciousness to greater modes of self-knowing. As noted by Paul Ricoeur, "if Christian figurative thought has a unique significance it is because the Absolute has equated itself with actuality, with presence,"[17] thus

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[14] Errol E. Harris, The Spirit of Hegel (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993), p. 18. Italics added.
[15] Hegel, LPR I, p. 281.
[16] Hegel, LPR I, p. 239.
[17] Paul Ricoeur, "The Status of *Vorstellung* in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion," in Meaning, Truth, and God, ed. Leroy Rouner (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 77.

bridging the Kantian divide between finite and infinite. This bridge, what Ricoeur calls "presence," establishes the ontological condition of the human being. In Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, knowledge of Being – and, for that matter, any meaning at all – begins with the one thought of God, or with the concept (*Begriff*) of God present in thought.

In the Phenomenology, moreover, Hegel echoes this point. He writes: "If... meaning of the objective is not to be mere imagination, it must possess intrinsic being, must originally appear in consciousness as stemming from the Notion and must come forth in its necessity."[18] Christian *Vorstellung* simply affirms the "intrinsic being" of this "Notion," the divine Absolute, and is essential in Hegel's creed that human ontology finds its ground only in an ontology of the Absolute. The representational level, indeed, is essential to the development of consciousness, which can only reach self-knowing within its pure speculative concept through the sublation of the contingent husk of religious representation. With respect to Feuerbach's interpretation of self-consciousness in The Essence of Christianity, it is important to note that, according to Hegel, the immediacy or presence of the Absolute appears to consciousness in representational form as an *other*; and that this *other*ness is no mere predicate to be annulled, but a figurative

[18] Hegel, Phenomenology, section 757, p. 458. Miller consistently renders *Begriff* as "Notion," rather than "concept" – as is carried out by Hodgson *et al* in their translation of the Berlin Lectures. With respect to our discussion, however, it is helpful to remember that "Notion" and "concept" are the selfsame principle: the ontological category in which all thought and meaning finds its ground. Additionally, from the quoted words arises a fundamental question with respect to Hegel's ontological argument: Does Hegel, in his belief that "objective meaning" *cannot* be purely of the "imagination," assume a credo that is more *necessary* than his belief in the fundamental ontological category itself? Thus the essentially "chicken-or-egg?" nature of any ontological "proof."

form to be transfigured and elevated into a higher moment of spiritual or speculative otherness:

> Consciousness... does not start from its inner life, from thought, and unite within itself the thought of God with existence; on the contrary, it starts from an existence that is immediately present and recognizes God therein. The moment of *immediate being* is present in the content of the Notion in such a way that the religious Spirit, in the return of all essentiality into consciousness, has become a simple positive Self.... [The Self of existent Spirit] is posited neither as something thought or imagined, nor as something produced.... On the contrary, this God is sensuously and directly beheld as a Self, as an actual individual man; only so *is* this God self-consciousness.[19]

God does not only *appear* to consciousness as an object, as an *other*; his concept (here "Notion") presupposes the essentiality of his existence, and is that from which consciousness itself begins to appear. The existence of the Absolute is not merely a predicate that Christian consciousness represents, but is the very ground of representational thought.[20] The God-concept, in other words, is a necessarily existent subject: "that consciousness which primordially belongs to the Christian religion... is consciousness not simply of predicates attributable to the divine being, but more fully of the divine Self of which those predicates are determinations."[21] The predicates of God constitute *Vorstellungen* of religious consciousness, while the existence of God constitutes the essential nature of thought itself, the drive which draws thought out of the finite and into the infinite. It is thus in the manifest religion that humanity finds the basic affirmation that

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[19] Hegel, Phenomenology, section 758, pp. 458-9.
[20] In my second chapter, I show how Feuerbach inverts the subject-predicate relation of theological-speculative ontology.
[21] Martin J. De Nys, "Mediation and Negativity in Hegel," Journal of Religion, 66/1 (January 1986): 51.

God *is*, and through V*orstellung* that it achieves self-consciousness and becomes inherently mindful of the Absolute.

Within the framework of ontology proper to Hegel, then, "given the fact man is essentially a religious being because a thinking being, he is already *implicitly* aware of the Infinite as the ultimate horizon of all being and meaning when he becomes reflectively self-conscious."[22] This, in essence, is a formulation of Hegel's ontological supposition that humanity rests at the boundaryline between finite and infinite. It is at this ontological centre that *Vorstellung*, and so the *religious* consciousness of which it is a shape, finds its home; there, the mediation of infinite and finite occurs. In this process of mediation, says Hegel, the representational fabric of the *Vorstellung* is dissolved by consciousness: "in its departure from the finite, the mediation negates this finite in the elevation, does not allow it to subsist. The finite has a negative determination; the affirmative element is the infinite, absolute being."[23] The finite horizon of consciousness, however, is not entirely transgressed, but is elevated by the process of mediation that is required of its content, which embraces the dialectical coexistence and resolution of finite and infinite. This mediation, indeed, is the teleological mode by which finite human spirit, which receives revelation of the infinite through

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[22] Yerkes, Christology, p. 73. Implicit in this ontological formulation, of course, is a critique of Feuerbach's understanding of consciousness in The Essence of Christianity. For, although Feuerbach echoes Hegel's belief that "consciousness or though is what distinguishes human beings from the animals" (LPR I, 84), he does not hold for the existence of an absolute being. In this sense, he provides a new rendering of the Hegelian concept, "Being," and reinterprets the nature of the position which *Vorstellung*, particularly that of the Incarnation, holds in the thought system of his master and in human consciousness generally. This is the subject of my next chapter, which considers Feuerbach's understanding of self-consciousness in Christianity, and will receive preliminarily mention below, with respect to the place of the Incarnation in Hegel's philosophico-religious system.

[23] Hegel, LPR I, p. 422.

thought or consciousness, is propelled towards resolution or union with the infinite "Spirit." This process of elevation [*Erhebung*], this "passing over" [*Übergehen*] of finite to infinite,[24] is constitutive of the ontological identity of humanity and God, of finite and infinite. It occurs *in* and *through* thought: that which separates humans from animals; the realm where revelation of the infinite finds finite form, and that which echoes Hegel's point once more: namely, that, at the level of *being*, "[human spirit] is essentially oriented to the infinite, to 'knowing' God."[25]

This essential orientation of the finite spirit to the infinite rests in consciousness or thought, which is propelled above and beyond its religious mode by the revelation of the infinite spirit to thought. The desire to know God through *Vorstellung* is characteristic of religious consciousness; yet this ontological thirst, inherent to the content of *Vorstellung*, pushes thought beyond its representational form, beyond religious consciousness. And insofar as representational truth is presented *in the form of* thought, but not *as* thought,[26] the process of mediation continues. Therein, finite spirit is elevated [*erhoben*] from religious to speculative knowing, to the pure medium of thought where it achieves unity with the Absolute, its ontological beginning *and* end:

> What stems from the mediation shows itself to be the ground and truth of that from which it has stemmed. The philosophical cognition, the progression is a stream *flowing in opposite directions*, leading forward to the other, but at the same time

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[24] Yerkes, Christology, p. 55.
[25] Quentin Lauer, S.J., Hegel's Concept of God (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), p. 43.
[26] Hegel, LPR I, manuscript note 149, p. 241.

> working backward, so that what appears to be the *last*, founded on what precedes, appears rather to be the *first* – the foundation.[27]

Hegel adopts the Heraclitean river-image as a symbol for the process of mediation which elevates finite spirit from religious representation to speculative concept, *Vorstellung* to *Begriff*: God *in the form of* thought to God *as* thought. Whereas, for Heraclitus, flux is the ground of Being itself, Hegel's process of mediation reflects the push towards and from this ground. His, too, is a process of becoming, but specifically a process of religious thinking becoming speculative thinking, representational thought becoming pure thought. With respect to this, Hegel notes elsewhere that finite spirit or mind, as religious consciousness, "pierces through the seemingly absolute independence of things to the one, infinite power of God operative in them and holding them all together; and as *philosophical* thinking, it consummates this idealization of things by discerning the specific mode in which the eternal Idea forming their common principle is represented in them."[28]

In this sense, speculative thinking shows an awareness of the sensuous shapes which are raised to the level of universality in representational thought. Ultimately, it exhibits a greater degree of self-consciousness than does its predecessor, religious consciousness. Hence the term "speculative," which, as Gadamer points out, derives from the Latin word for "mirror," *speculum*. In speculative thinking we find "'the action of the subject matter itself' (*das Tun der*

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[27] Hegel, LPR I, manuscript note 115, p. 227.
[28] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830), trans. William Wallace, *Zusätze* trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1971), *Zusatz* to section 381, p. 12.

Sache selbst),"[29] which, for Hegel, is thought (*Gedanke*). In speculative thinking, therefore, thought finds reflection in itself, free of the forms of pictorial thinking. This latter form of consciousness, the pre-philosophical mode of "reflective thinking," is that characteristic of religious representation, and "is the universal mode for dealing with finitude, a mode which we have adopted and made the universal medium for our ideas." [30] It is thus only in speculative thought that the finite, the domain of *Vorstellung*, is elevated entirely to the level of the infinite, that "abstract reflection begins to regard this [pictorial] mode of thinking as a veil behind which the truth is supposed to be hidden and concealed."[31] And from the ashes of *Vorstellung* rises the *Begriff*.

It is here, then, that we see the transfiguration of religious representation into speculative concept. As I emphasize above, however, this "passing over" [*Übergehen*] of the finite to the infinite is required by the very content of the *Vorstellung*, which in the manifest religion is identical to that of the speculative concept (*Begriff*). Yet according to Hegel, the principle of negativity which determines the form of religious representation, the restless coexistence of finite and infinite at the level of finite spirit, requires a shift to philosophical thinking, which alone can capture the existence of the infinite in the pure medium of thought. In an attempt to elaborate upon the identity and difference of representational and conceptual forms of truth, Hegel says:

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[29] Hans Georg Gadamer, Wahrheit und Methode, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1965, pp. 439-42. Cited in Peter C. Hodgson, "Hegel's Approach to Religion: The Dialectic of Speculation and Phenomenology," Journal of Religion 64/2 (1984): 160.

[30] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy, trans. T.M. Knox and A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 33.

[31] Hegel, Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy, p. 35.

> It is the distinctive task of philosophy to transmute the *content* that is in the representation of religion into the *form* of thought; the content itself cannot be distinguished. Religion is the self-consciousness of absolute spirit: there are not two kinds of self-consciousness – not both a conceptualizing self-consciousness and a representing self-consciousness, which could be distinguished according to their content. There can only be a diversity in form, or a distinction between *representation* and *thought*, and we can presuppose a more detailed acquaintance with that.[32]

In that the *content* of religious and philosophical concept is identical, each shares the same essential object: the infinite or Absolute, figured representationally by religious consciousness as "God." It is precisely with respect to this Hegelian motif that Kojève puts forth his interpretation of the relationship between philosophy and religion, human being and God, in large part echoing Feuerbach's words of more than a century before: "While in fact talking about himself, religious Man believes that he is talking about a God. This lack of self-consciousness, this imaginative *projection* of the spiritual or human content into the *beyond* (V*or-stellung*), distinguishes religious (*theo*logical) thought from philosophical (*anthropo*logical) thought."[33] For Kojève, then, religious thought signals a lack of self-consciousness on the part of the individual, whereas speculative thought involves the fulfillment of human self-knowing: the return of God, the infinite *other*, to "man." To recall Gadamer's etymological remark

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[32] Hegel, LPR I, p. 333. Hegel's suggestion here – that the "*form* of thought" constitutes the highest expression of Absolute content – is discordant with his contention, earlier in the lectures, that manifest religion does in fact express this essential content *in the form of* thought, but not *as* thought (see note 24 above). It is most likely that this discrepancy can be accounted for in terms of a variance in sources, or even in terms of a slip on Hegel's part. Ultimately, however, it reveals the delicate nature of Hegel's conceptual apparatus.

[33] Alexandre Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University press, 1980), p. 71. Similar "non-supernatural" (Kaufmann, p. 275n) interpretations are put forward by other prominent philosophers of the twentieth century. See J.N. Findlay, Hegel: A Reexamination (New York: Collier Books, 1958), and Walter Kaufmann, Hegel: Reinterpretation, Texts, and Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965).

concerning *speculum*, according to Kojève, man sees himself, the thinking subject, *mirrored* in thought – *not* some other being, à la Lacan. God, precisely, constitutes a belief, an "imaginative *projection*," of the individual; and the finite self achieves a fuller form of self-consciousness when it divests itself of this illusory, supernatural *other*. Ontology for Kojève, then, consists in a "passing over" of infinite to finite, God to human – a reversal of Hegel's view, which supposes this *Erhebung* of the infinite to finite only insofar as the infinite makes a parabolic return to itself. For Hegel, in other words, religious thinking *is* transmuted into a higher form of self-consciousness, though in the sublation of *Vorstellung* into *Begriff*, the content of the original remains unchanged. Spiritual or human content is not drawn back to the finite from some projected *beyond* of religious consciousness. Instead, the content of speculative concept is identical to that of its figurative source, which is neither "something thought or imagined, nor something produced."[34]

Indeed, the content of speculative concept is revealed in the content of its religious-representational source: Absolute Spirit, or "absolute mind." Truth finds its ground in an infinite *other*, and does not require the return of finite consciousness to itself, in the sense that Kojève suggests. Rather, its ascent towards the infinite entails a return to itself in the sense that this ontological ground is laid bare by and in God. Religious consciousness, this revelation to finite consciousness, "to know what God as spirit is... includes, in its forefront, the propositions: God is God only so far as he knows himself: his self-knowledge is, further, a self-consciousness in man and man's knowledge *of* God, which

[34] See corresponding citation to note 18 above.

proceeds to man's self-knowledge *in* God."[35] Thus, God's self-knowledge is dependent upon the human being's consciousness of God, but only insofar as the religious consciousness of the latter assumes form *in* the Being of the Absolute, which is necessarily (better: ontologically) *other*.[36] To reformulate this with respect to our current discussion: philosophical thought, which absorbs and transmutes the forms of consciousness of the revealed religion, assumes *its own* form in the ontological necessity of the Absolute, an Absolute which is essential to the *content* of the manifest religion itself. It is with respect to this common ontological ground, to the necessity of the concept (*Begriff*) of God, that religion and philosophy are both carried out in "the service of God."[37] As Lauer remarks, "Religion cannot, it is true, institute a *critique* of philosophy's thinking of God – religion is not critical thought – but it contains within itself the *criterion* for the adequacy of philosophy as authentically rational."[38] Indeed, philosophy constitutes a "rethinking" [*Nachdenken*] of a content that is presented in a form inadequate to thought. "It follows upon other, inadequate, forms of thought, not, be it noted, to eliminate them but to raise them up to a form adequate to their content."[39] The *content* of the manifest religion itself – that is, the content of *Vorstellung* – undergoes no change. According to Hegel, it can be said, the speculative *Begriff* does not retrieve this content from some represented *beyond*, as Kojève claims, but affirms the ontological necessity of the divine through the

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[35] Hegel, Philosophy of Mind, section 564, p. 297.
[36] Thus runs one possible critique of Kojève. I do not mean to cheapen his fullness of thought. It is simply that the matter requires far more attention than I am able to give here.
[37] See note 1.
[38] Lauer, Hegel's Concept of God, p. 58.
[39] Lauer, Hegel's Concept of God, p. 62.

very process of "rethinking" which pushes thought beyond the representational fabric of religious consciousness.

The Ontological Domain of *Begriff* and Absolute Knowing; and, as a Means of Conclusion: The Ground of Human Ontology

This last point is what James Yerkes suggests, I think, when he claims that "'God' is a content-object of 'pure' thought in the sense that he is the ontological ground for the *possibility* of all thought."[40] Yerkes stresses the ambiguous nature of the boundaryline between *Vorstellung* and *Begriff* in Hegelian thought. In cognitive or psychological terms, *Vorstellung* is prior to *Begriff*; yet *Begriff* is essentially prior to *Vorstellung* in that the latter is strictly an instantiation of the *Begriff*, but in representational form.[41] This echoes the general tenor of my argument: that the fluidity which characterizes the phenomenological divide between representation and concept in Hegel's thought is reflective of the ontological ground that they share. The ontological priority of the philosophical concept, and the phenomenological priority of religious representation, are expressions of a unified ontology which supposes for consciousness a God-thought centre. The *possibility* of all thought, therefore, resides in the *necessity* of the concept of God, the very "content-object of 'pure' thought" itself.[42]

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[40] Yerkes, Christology, p. 84.
[41] Ibid., p. 92-5.
[42] The question, again, regards whether the concept of God evidences *any* "labour of the negative"; in other words: whether the concept of God requires, but resists, elevation to the level of the Absolute Idea, or whether they are the equivalently consummate expressions of ontological fulfillment.

It is in this sense that, in the domain of the concept, in the medium of pure thought, the ontological necessity of God is affirmed. There, *Vorstellung* passes over into *Begriff*, or returns to its essential mode of Being – or better: the very possibility of its *being*. Yet the nature of *Begriff* is too dynamic for one to simply assume that it achieves a position of unbridled unity in its condition of Absolute Knowing. As has been noted, on one level, *Vorstellung* possesses a negative power which belabours finite consciousness in its attempt to rise beyond representational thought. The speculative content meets resistance from the representational shell.[43] But it is not sufficient to regard the *process* of sublation alone; for, even at the level of the *Begriff*, in the medium of pure thought, we hear echoes of the dialectic between finite and infinite. These echoes are heard, despite the fact that, in the realm of *Begriff*, the realm of speculative thought or absolute knowing, we cannot mark a "distinction between knowledge and its truth," what Hegel calls "'the internal opposition of the concept,'"[44] in the sense proper to phenomenological development heretofore. In the stage of absolute knowing – where Absolute Spirit finds, or begins to return to its home – the *Begriff* marks as "pure" a mode of thought as the odyssey of the Phenomenology will allow. Yet with the ground of Being laid bare, Spirit is faced by its unmediated content, or substance. And so begins the radical, consummate stage of introspection wherein Spirit comes anew into contact with all of its previous forms: forms, posited and annulled in the trails of experience, which have led it to its point of consummation. Hegel writes:

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[43] Paul Ricoeur, "*Vorstellung* in Hegel," p. 83.

> For experience is just this, that the content – which is Spirit – is *in itself* substance, and therefore an *object* of *consciousness*. But this substance which is Spirit is the process in which Spirit *becomes* what it is *in itself*; and it is only as this process of reflecting itself into itself that it is in itself truly *Spirit*.[45]

Thus, though the dialectical tension of experience has been transmuted, it remains present in muted form: in that it remains self-aware of a union of knowledge and being, Spirit has sublated, and contemplates its previous forms of knowing, but from the perspective of Absolute Knowing. Here, Spirit still *knows* – in and through experience – the content of Spirit. It is simply that the dialectical tension of experience – the distinction between knowledge and truth which characterizes all forms of knowing, including that of the manifest religion – appears in a sublated or dampened form. Even in this consummate stage of speculative or "Absolute Knowing," it is only upon contemplation of experience (in this case: already mediated experience) that anything is "given [to Spirit] as an inwardly revealed eternal verity."

The entirety of experience thus remains *in* and *for* the Absolute, but in a sublated or elevated form. The Absolute entails *being* in its fullest sense; it is the very object of the phenomenological dialectic put forward by Hegel. And although the echoes of this dialectical experience are *essentially* heard at its core, the Absolute is conceived only in terms of itself. Hence the supposed ontological "purity" of *Begriff*, the expression of the Absolute in the "pure" medium of thought, and the ground that it puts forth for the very possibility of the dialectic which precedes it. With respect to the fluidity which characterizes the

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[44] Jean Hyppolite, Genesis and Structure of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 576.

boundaryline between *Vorstellung* and *Begriff* in Hegel's "philosophico-religious quest,"[46] however, argument can be made as to the ontological purity or *universality* of the represented "God" itself – or, reciprocally, as to the essentially *particular* nature of the concept of the Absolute. Herein lies the importance of the God-concept, even within the framework of the fulfilled ontology supposed by the final section of the Phenomenology.[47]

In the Berlin Lectures, which are characterized by a markedly more sympathetic reading of the God-concept in its relation to Absolute Knowing, Hegel emphasizes that the distinctions which mark the dialectical reconciliation of God with himself (his concept) are not "external" in nature, but "are the activity, the developed vitality, of the absolute spirit itself. It is itself its eternal life, which is a development and a return of this development into itself."[48] Within the framework of the consummate religion, then, we find the internal comprehension of the concept. How, then, does Hegel's Phenomenology differ with respect to the Absolute Idea, which achieves a similar, internal comprehension of its concept only *after* having sublated the tension and toil inherent in its forms of experience? And if Spirit, in its activity of engaging its internal substance (or experience), endures the labour of the negative within itself, as Hegel suggests above, then the

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[45] Hegel, Phenomenology, section 802, p. 487.

[46] I take this phrase from R.P. Singh, "Spirit, Estrangement and Unification: Hegel's Philosophico-Religious Quest," Indian Philosophical Quarterly 20/2 (April 1994): 161-172.

[47] Indeed, Hegel's Science of Logic begins at this level of ontological fulfillment inferred by the Phenomenology's concluding chapter, "Absolute Knowing." It carries out an exposition of this ontological ground *in terms of itself* – i.e., in the supposed medium of "pure" thought – and, consequently, remains ambivalent to the terms proper to Hegel's phenomenological ontology (where the opposition between knowledge and being, between certainty and truth, is overcome), let alone to the relevance of religion therein. See Hyppolite, "Conclusion," Genesis and Structure, pp. 571-606. In the Science of Logic, Hegel attempts "the presentation of God as he is in his eternal essence, before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit" (Hegel, Logic, p.31; cited in Hyppolite p. 582).

unity of which he speaks would somehow involve a disunity: a disunity of the *Begriff* itself. Yet conversely, in that this "labour of the negative" operates *within* the Absolute on a "pure" level of *internal* comprehension, the very nature of its dialectical tension is transmuted, and suggests a view similar to that put forward by Hegel in his late lectures. As I suggest above, at the level of the Absolute Idea, Spirit experiences the labour of the dialectic (the formal contingency of *Vorstellung*) in the same manner that it hears an echo: as a sound of that which *has been* sublated; a trace of that which *has been* transmuted; a sound not contained by its mark of activity, its source. The Absolute "hears" the "echo" of the concept of God in the medium of its content, where representational figurations have *already* undergone sublation. In that the Absolute is the ground for the very *possibility* of Being,[49] we are somehow left with the understanding that forms of phenomenological experience (including religious consciousness) are not simply sublated by the Absolute, but that the possibility of their existence finds its determination in the Absolute, the *Begriff* as it exists in the pure medium of thought.[50] There, in the realm of Absolute Knowing, the Absolute entertains religious *Vorstellungen* as part of its content, but only insofar as they have already been sublated, insofar as their representational husk has already been shed.

This is the sense in which I suggest earlier that the speculative *Begriff* does not retrieve its content from some represented beyond, but instead affirms the ontological necessity of the concept of God through the very process of

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[48] Hegel, LPR III, p. 274.

[49] Find similar discussion of the Absolute as the ground for the very *possibility* of being in J.N. Findlay, "Hegel as Theologian," in Meaning, Truth, and God, ed. Leroy Rouner (Notre Dame, IN:

"rethinking" which pushes thought beyond the representational fabric of religious consciousness. In the realm of absolute knowing, philosophy is unencumbered by the representational surface of religious, pictorial thinking, which it has elevated to the level of speculative concept; religion, moreover, is not entirely absent, but remains as *the* essential moment in the ultimate transfiguration of the concept of "God," the "Absolute." Indeed, the Absolute in the realm of pure thought is the *Begriff* to which Hegel refers above as "the activity... of the absolute spirit itself," the very reconciliation of God with himself (his concept). We propose something similar when we stress, not only the relatedness, but also the fluidity of representational and conceptual forms of knowledge, despite the consummate nature of the *Begriff* which characterizes Spirit in the realm of absolute knowing. And Findlay does the same thing by suggesting a multifarious collection of *Begriffe*, all of which are subsumed under, or find consummation in, the Absolute *Begriff*.[51] Over and over we find affirmation of the religio-philosophical tenets which give momentum to Hegel's dialectic: that "only a knowing which is infinite and has as its final object infinite reality is in the final analysis knowing at all," and that in God we find the "paradigm of infinity."[52]

The God-concept, therefore, is constitutive of the Absolute Idea in its consummate form, which, in the medium of pure thought, can be conceived only in terms of itself. It is thus that the fluidity which characterizes the *phenomenological* divide between religious representation and speculative

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University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 177-194. See Yerkes, Christology, p. 84, with respect to God: "the ground for the logical the *possibility* of all thought."

[50] This restates once more the ontological necessity of Hegel's *Begriff*.

[51] Findlay, "Hegel as Theologian," pp. 185-90.

concept reflects the *ontological* ground shared by God and Absolute in the realm of Absolute Knowing. There, "God" is not a contingent representation of the divine but is an ontologically *necessary* concept, elemental to the internal comprehension or self-consciousness of the Absolute. To elaborate, "*Vorstellung* is bound to the dualism between the here and the beyond so that the divine is never fully present for the believer's experience.... This is why *Vorstellung* is associated with consciousness in opposition to the self-consciousness of *Begriff* in which, subject and object being identical, no such rift or absence is possible"[53] – hence the centrality of the concept of God in the realm of absolute knowing. The representational object of religious consciousness is transfigured so as to become the subject and object of speculative self-consciousness. In the process of elevation from the finite to the infinite, God is divested of his representational aspect, and becomes a speculative concept necessary to the internal comprehension of the Absolute. The represented "beyond" is overcome.

It is thus that the God-concept is central to the speculative framework, the ontological ground, which marks the beginning and end of Hegel's Phenomenology. In the realm of Absolute Knowing, in the medium of pure thought, we are reminded of the necessary place that "God" holds therein. The God-concept, driven by an essentially speculative thrust, births the state of self-consciousness fully realized by Spirit. Throughout the voyage of the phenomenology, "on the one hand [Spirit] is what is essential, substantial, or has being *in itself* (consciousness); on the other hand, it relates itself to itself, it knows

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[52] Lauer, Hegel's Concept of God, pp. 168 and 167.

itself as subject in relation to an object recognized to be other than itself, it has being *for* itself (self-consciousness)."[54] In the stage of speculative knowing, however, the distinctions between the *in* and *for* itself, consciousness and self-consciousness, dissolve. Differentiation, a mark of the contingent guise of Spirit, is altogether effaced as Spirit makes its consummate move into the realm of ontological necessity. There, the God-concept is comprehended as a transfigured and necessary speculative concept.

Indeed, on the plane of the internal comprehension of the Absolute, God is not a *Vorstellung* contingent upon the sensuous aspect of experience, but an ontologically necessary *Begriff.* His concept achieves an identity with the Absolute in terms of form and content; or in other words, the Absolute is comprehended only in terms of itself. This is the sense in which the God-concept, in the stage of absolute knowing, finds affirmation through the very negation of the "God" who is revealed in religious representation. The existence or *being* of God is affirmed by his elevation to the level of speculative concept; he becomes, moreover, the ontologically necessary ground for *human* thought. To draw from Hegel's words, with which open this essay: "All that proceeds from thought" finds its "ultimate center in the one thought of God." And, in that God is the content which spirit finds within itself, "consciousness and this content are inseparable."[55]

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[53] Merold Westphal, History and Truth in Hegel's *Phenomenology* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1979), p. 204.
[54] Peter C. Hodgson, "Introduction: G.W.F. Hegel: Theologian of the Spirit," G.W.F. Hegel: Theologian of the Spirit, edited by Peter C. Hodgson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 8.
[55] Hegel, LPR I, pp. 84 and 88.

The inseparability of God from finite, human consciousness finds its parallel in the realm of Absolute Knowing, where Spirit overcomes all internal dualism and achieves a similar unity with the speculative concept of God; rather, it achieves knowledge of its concept in and for itself. The phase in which Spirit divests itself of the *Vorstellung*, "God," and comprehends itself as the speculative *Begriff*, finds parallel design with respect to the central event-turned-concept of the manifest religion: the Incarnation. This I put forth as a means of conclusion, so as to emphasize the centrality of the manifest religion in the ultimate consummation of the Absolute Idea. For it is in the Incarnation that we find instanced the shift of a historical event or *Vorstellung* to the level of necessary, universal concept or *Begriff*, much in the manner that in the medium of pure thought we find the elevation of a sensuously *contingent*, representational God to the level of *necessary* speculative concept. We are brought back once again to the distinction between representational and speculative forms of truth:

> In addition to these contrasts between absence and presence, consciousness and self-consciousness, *Vorstellung* means viewing the incarnation as an event, a contingent happening, while *Begriff* means viewing the incarnation as the expression of necessity. What this distinction between event and necessity means is indicated by the final contrast, that of individual and universal self-consciousness. The incarnation means that God is present as observable human self-consciousness. But seen in the form of *Vorstellung* this refers uniquely to the historical event and the historical individual known as Jesus of Nazareth. To see the unity of the human and divine as a necessity, and thus in the form of *Begriff*, is to see the human self-consciousness in which God is present and united with man as the universal self-consciousness of the congregation which, in principle at least, incorporates all of humanity.[56]

[56] Merold Westphal, History and Truth, p. 204.

The transmutation of the incarnate Christ from historical figure into universal concept "mirrors" the sublation, in the realm of absolute knowing, of a representational God into the speculative concept of God. Moreover, while the Incarnation, as concept, marks the necessary union of finite and infinite, of human and divine, the consummate "knowing" of the Absolute in the medium of pure thought marks the union or sublation of religious concept into speculative concept. Each movement constitutes, by degrees, an elevation or passing over of finite to infinite.

This being so, it is important to remember that the Incarnation, even as an object of consciousness to the Christian community – as Spirit – remains belaboured by the toil of the negative. It is not until the stage of Absolute Knowing that the universal concept, the content of the Incarnation, is transfigured into its purely speculative concept. If we remain mindful of the essentially fluid nature of the division between representational and conceptual forms of truth *before* the stage of Absolute Knowing, the transmutation of the Incarnation as a historical event into a necessary universal concept does not suppose, for the middle point of Christianity, the status *Begriff* in its consummate sense. Rather, we are left with a universal and necessary *Begriff* that is still to some degree encumbered by its own form – a sensuous object universalized in thought: what we have elsewhere called *Vorstellung*.[57] One should here remember Hegel's distinction between "image" [*Bild*] and "representation" [*Vorstellung*], the latter

[57] It is my view that the Incarnation can be understood both as representation *and* as concept, if we keep in mind that this concept is not the selfsame concept that emerges at the end of the Phenomenology – a point which emphasizes the ontological fluidity of these two forms of religious knowing before Spirit internally comprehends itself in the medium of pure thought. For

being an object of pictorial thinking elevated to the level of universality through thought.[58] This is the sense in which *Vorstellung* rests between finite and infinite, between the sensuous world and the speculative *Begriff*. Moreover, like the theological claims made for the Incarnation, *Vorstellung* mediates finite and infinite, and makes the one *known* to the *other*; the Absolute is present to humanity *through* thought. Or, thought, that which distinguishes human beings from animals, finds its centre in the Absolute, in the concept of God. To recall Ricoeur's words, "the Absolute equates itself with presence."[59]

It is in this sense that the Absolute sets forth the ontological ground for human thought, and in the incarnation that we find this ontological ground figured historically and then elevated to the level of universality as an object of thought. For, "consciousness... does not start form *its* inner life, from thought, and unite *within itself* the thought of God with existence; on the contrary, it starts from an existence that is immediately present and recognizes God therein."[60] Thus reads the presupposition of Hegelian ontology in phenomenological terms. "Metaphysically it has this form: God is spirit, God has reality; he exists [*existiert*] in virtue of his concept. Proof of the existence of God derives from his concept.... now comes the transition from concept to being. The concept is the presupposition."[61] It is in this sense that the journey of Spirit in the Phenomenology is prefigured by the concept of God. That towards which Spirit makes its ascent, the *Begriff*, preexists all forms of consciousness by virtue of its

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a consonant interpretation of the Incarnation as *Vorstellung*, even after its elevation as Spirit, see Harris, Hegel's Ladder II, p. 697ff.

[58] Hegel, LPR I, p. 239.

[59] Ricoeur, "*Vorstellung* in Hegel," p. 77.

ontological necessity. The existence of the ontological concept is confirmed by its presence to finite spirit, in Christian and speculative consciousness. With respect to this ontologically necessary beginning and end, it is worthwhile to cite from one of the most cryptic sections in the Phenomenology. Here, Hegel speaks of Spirit in its final stage of Absolute Knowing, where, in the pure medium of thought, time and space are projected outwards and Spirit begins its odyssey anew:

> As its fulfilment [*sic*] consists in perfectly *knowing* what *it is*, in knowing its substance, this knowing is its *withdrawal into itself* in which it abandons its outer existence and gives its existential shape over to recollection. Thus absorbed in itself, it is sunk in the night of its self-consciousness; but in that night its vanished outer existence is preserved, and this transformed existence – the former one, but now reborn of the Spirit's knowledge – is the new existence, a new world and a new shape of Spirit. In the immediacy of this new existence the Spirit has to start afresh to bring itself to maturity as if, for it, all that preceded were lost and it had learned nothing from the experience of the earlier Spirits. But recollection, the *inwardizing*, of that experience, has preserved it and is the inner being, and in fact the higher form of the substance.[62]

This final stage of Spirit – the Absolute, the concept of God – is the beginning and end of being, the alpha and omega of thought. With respect to this ascent of the Absolute, J.N. Findlay writes: "The most perfect being of Anselm seems to be slowly constituting itself by stages, though at the end it becomes clear that it was always there from the beginning, whole and entire."[63] It is here that humanity finds its ontological ground in the concept of God; here, the circle finds completion. This point of ontological connection between humanity and God, the

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[60] Hegel, Phenomenology, section 758, p. 458.
[61] Hegel, LPR III, pp. 65-6.
[62] Hegel, Phenomenology, section 808, p. 492.

historical and the divine, is mirrored in and represented by the doctrine of the Incarnation. In the figure of Christ, as in the stage of Absolute Knowing, we find a condition in which human and divine are bound by a principle of ontological necessity.

In Hegel's terms, indeed, the Incarnation puts forth, in representational form, the ontological necessity of the Absolute for human thought. As Findlay reminds us, "for Hegel, God is the truth that knows itself; the self-knowledge that man has of God cannot exist outside divine life."[64] It is thus that the Incarnation marks the very ground of human ontology, and serves as a mirror reading of the voyage of Spirit in the pure medium of thought. It is the meeting place of finite and infinite modes of thought: at once the domain proper to *Vorstellung* and the place of genesis (for finite spirit) of the speculative *Begriff*, the principle of inner-dynamism which spurs consciousness on to greater levels of self-actualization. Despite its implicitly dynamic quality, the Incarnation remains limited to the representational language of day, to the realm of consciousness. In Hegel's terms, it has not yet "sunk in the night of its self-consciousness." Yet it is precisely through the Christ event that the pathway towards this night of absolute self-consciousness is mapped out, that the infinite is made an object of thought for finite consciousness. In the consciousness of the community of believers, the particularities of history are elevated to the level of philosophical thought; consciousness gives way to self-consciousness, and (ostensibly) *Vorstellung* to *Begriff*. Merold Westphal remarks:

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[63] Findlay, "Hegel as Theologian," p. 191.
[64] Hyppolite, Genesis and Structure, p. 543.

> From its name, *Begriff*, and from its evident link with Absolute Knowing, there is nothing surprising in the discovery that this new form of consciousness is the philosophical. The Christian congregation can become the bearer of this new mode of experience (which cannot strictly be called a form of consciousness) and of the Absolute Knowledge it makes possible only by radically transcending itself and ceasing to be what it has historically been.[65]

It is in this way that the move from history to ecclesiology, brought about by the apprehension of the Incarnate Christ as an object of thought, mirrors the shift which takes place in the realm of Absolute Knowing: namely, from externally to internally comprehended experience, religious *Vorstellung* to speculative *Begriff*, the unity of thought and Being.

The Incarnation initiates the elevation of the Absolute from the level of historical and representational form to the level of philosophical thought. But, as I have shown in the preceding pages, for Hegel, the pure speculative concept cannot be comprehended until the Absolute fulfills its condition of radical self-transcendence in the medium of pure thought. Until then, the place held by the Absolute in the consciousness of the community of believers remains enveloped in a representational husk. It remains, strictly speaking, in the domain of theology. In some sense, it is to this theological framework that Feuerbach responds in his Essence of Christianity of 1841. Yet with respect to Hegel's supposition that philosophical thought brings the conceptual core of theological inquiry to its necessary fulfillment, Feuerbach's work casts the end of the speculative task itself in a new light. What religion recognizes as "God," what theology rationally comprehends as "God," and what speculative thought

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[65] Westphal, History and Truth, pp. 205-6.

abstracts as the "Absolute" – *all* are reevaluated by Feuerbach in his examination of self-consciousness. In essence, Feuerbach reinterprets religious and speculative consciousness proper to Hegel in terms of the human being's self-relation. The relation of human and God, finite spirit and infinite spirit – indeed, the very nature of Hegelian self-consciousness itself – is restated in terms of a new understanding of human self-knowledge. For Feuerbach, the Hegelian centre cannot hold: the ground of theological-speculative ontology, the one thought of God in which all thought "finds its centre," is displaced. It is to this new centre that we shall turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

The Theological-Speculative Dream: Feuerbach's Reversal of Hegelian Ontology in The Essence of Christianity

If Hegel's Phenomenology describes the voyage of Spirit to the stage of Absolute Knowing, where "it is sunk in the night of its self-consciousness,"[1] Feuerbach's Essence of Christianity of 1841 beckons a new dawn. According to Feuerbach, in other words, Hegel's speculative philosophy carries out the nocturnal vision of religious consciousness and, like religion, "is the dream of the human mind." Moreover, Feuerbach stresses that it is a condition peculiar to religious persons to be ignorant of the baseless fabric which absorbs them. As Feuerbach writes:

> But even in dreams we do not find ourselves in emptiness or in heaven, but on earth, in the realm of reality; we only see real things in the entrancing splendour of the imagination and caprice, instead of in the simple daylight of reality and necessity.[2]

It is within this dream alone that religion, theology, and their consummate speculative form, come into being. For it is through the exercise of imagination

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[1] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), section 808, p. 492.

and reason that humanity loses sight of the internal origin of religion, namely, feeling. Feuerbach reinterprets the Hegelian conception of religious knowledge, outlined in my last chapter. Initially, religious *Vorstellung* (for Feuerbach) appears as a result of the imagination's response to the feeling or intuition of an infinite *other*. Theology makes of this *other* a unified object of the understanding, a "God," while speculative philosophy, to which the God of theology appears in the abstract guise of an "Absolute," effects the synthesis of Christian ontology and absorbs the dreamer into his religious dream. For Feuerbach, the journey of Spirit towards the stage of Absolute Knowing, by which Hegel assumes an overcoming of the contingent form of religious representation, merely restates or veils religious ontology in the abstract terms of speculative thought.[3] In this sense, the very principle of dialectical development which characterizes the move from religious to speculative knowledge in the Hegelian philosophy of religion, can be read as the first principle of Feuerbach's own critique of speculative philosophy – the presumed place for the pure or emancipated expression of religious ontology. Insofar as speculative thought does not divest thought of an ontological centre but merely attempts to liberate the ontological principle from the contingent forms of religious representation, its pure concepts (*Begriffe*) remain bound, to use Blake's penetrating phrase, by the "mind-forged manacles" of religious ontology.

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[2] Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), p. xix.

[3] This theme is most prominent in Feuerbach, "The Preface to the Second Edition," Christianity, pp. xiii-xxiv.

The Essence of Christianity, therefore, suggests an inversion of the speculative ontology put forward by Hegel at the end of the Phenomenology of Spirit (1807) and which governs the trajectory of the Science of Logic (1812).[4] In it, Feuerbach concerns himself not with Being as such, but with the human being. In light of the passage quoted above, Feuerbach remains rooted to the "earth," and thus challenges the place of the God of theology, the Absolute of speculative philosophy, in the dialectic of *human* self-consciousness. He further explains self-consciousness in terms of the individual's self-relation as a sensuous being, his relation to an *other* in the form of his species. Feuerbach eradicates the notion of a single infinite being as the ground of thought, and suggests that any conception of a singular ontological subject distinct from the world of sense "is evolved by his [human's] self-consciousness, by the activity of his thought."[5] For Feuerbach, therefore, the phenomenological shift of finite spirit from religious to speculative consciousness, from *Vorstellung* to *Begriff*, does not entail an awakening to the core of earthly reality as such, but a deepening of the conceptual dream in which the imaginative forms of religion are enforced, first in a theological, then in a speculative, guise. Thus, the essence of Feuerbach's critique of Hegelian ontology is that the Absolute, the infinite spirit, is not the root of all thought, but is a product of thought's self-activity. In Feuerbach's view, neither God nor his essential *Begriff* is a subject unto itself, but rather is a

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[4] In his Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Hegel restates the centrality of the religious ontology in his thought. See Merold Westphal, "Hegel's Theory of Religious Knowledge," in Beyond Epistemology: New Studies in the Philosophy of Hegel, ed. Frederick G. Weiss (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), pp. 30-57. Westphal deals primarily with Hegel's "Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God," which he considers to be a "microcosm of his [Hegel's] systematic thought" (p. 30).

[5] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 18.

"phantasm" of the religious dream. Self-consciousness, according to the Essence of Christianity, is not dependent upon some greater ontological principle. Instead, any conception of an *ontos* distinct from the human being – be it God or the Absolute – is exclusively symptomatic of *human* self-consciousness.

In what follows, I would like to accentuate the place of the Essence of Christianity in relation to Hegel's philosophy of religion, and with respect to Feuerbach's problematical formulation of species consciousness. Although it is widely accepted that Feuerbach's work of 1841 works within a Hegelian frame of reference, the Essence of Christianity is understood, first and foremost, as an exposition of the phenomenon of religious consciousness and as a critique of its rational form, theology. Rarely does its implicit critique of *Hegelian* ontology operate as the exegetical ground of its readers.[6] This, of course, can be attributed to two possible assumptions: first, that Feuerbach's reaction to Hegelian ontology comes into fruition only in Principles for a Philosophy of the Future;[7] and, second, that in Principles Feuerbach puts forth his most mature critique of Hegelian ontology as it appears in its fullest form, in the Science of Logic.[8] Yet here I shall read Feuerbach's conception of self-consciousness in the Essence of Christianity as a response to Hegelian ontology as established on the terms of my previous chapter, i.e., with special reference to the forms of religious

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[6] Marx Wartofsky is here the exception. The degree to which Wartofsky emphasizes the centrality of Hegelian philosophy in The Essence of Christianity is notable, and the strength with which he carries out his analysis of Feuerbachian epistemology, lucid and thorough. See Marx Wartofsky, Feuerbach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 196-292.

[7] Principles appeared in 1843, two years after the first edition of The Essence of Christianity.

[8] See Gert Hummel's strong overview of Feuerbach's philosophical project: an exposition of Feuerbach and his relation to Hegelian thought, particularly with respect to the former's *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*. Gert Hummel, "Sensibility in the Experience of God:

consciousness per se, particularly as they appear in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, Philosophy of Mind (of the Encyclopaedia), and his Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. My general point is that Feuerbach's explicit critique of Christianity contains an implicit critique (and *not* merely a selective appropriation) of Hegel's philosophy of religious and speculative consciousness, which, as argued in my last chapter, asserts the God-concept (*Begriff*) as the ontological ground of all thought.[9]

Van A. Harvey, who distinguishes between two distinct strands of thought in the Essence of Christianity, the "naturalist-existentialist" strand and the dominant Hegelian strand, deems the latter an "arcane and speculative theory of consciousness," a sphere of "entanglements," the home of a "convoluted argument."[10] Indeed, *a* Hegelian theory of consciousness is the leitmotif which appears most frequently throughout the pages of Feuerbach's work of 1841. Importantly, the leitmotif also lies at the root of Feuerbach's problematical conception of species-ontology. This point, however, need not be attributed to the abstract nature of the Hegelian theory of consciousness which Feuerbach

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Ludwig Feuerbach's Philosophy as a Challenge to Today's Theology," Dialectics and Humanism, 10/4 (1983): 117-133.

[9] The possibility that The Essence of Christianity constitutes a critique of speculative thought is supported by much of Feuerbach's writing prior to 1841, which takes a critical view of Hegel's position. See most notably, Feuerbach's *Kritik der Hegelschen Philosophie* of 1839.

[10] Van A. Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 21, 33, 55. Harvey's distinction is most useful for those attempting to make sense of the discrepancy between Feuerbach's early (Hegelian) and late (naturalist-existentialist) works. Harvey's analysis, which makes use of what Richard Rorty calls the method of "rational reconstruction" (see Harvey, pp. 16-21), favours the latter over the former. In light of Harvey's estimation that Feuerbach's early works are marred by Hegelian motifs, and that the naturalist-existentialist language of Feuerbach's later writing is more pleasing to the modern ear, one must wonder whether Harvey plays audience to the religion of which Feuerbach calls himself the listener, or whether each evidences a distinct *Zeitgeist*.

reformulates,[11] but perhaps to the problems inherent in the latter's conception of the species-being itself: that the essence of human being is located somewhere between natural finite life and the infinite horizon of thought. "I am nothing but a *natural philosopher in the domain of the mind*,"[12] claims Feuerbach. Hence the ultimately problematical nature of Feuerbach's "science."

In what follows, and through an examination of Feuerbach's conception of self-consciousness in the Essence of Christianity, I shall argue that Feuerbach reformulates ontology proper to the Hegelian philosophy of religion, particularly with respect to *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*, as discussed in my last chapter. For Feuerbach, roughly speaking, representation and concept become epistemological rather than ontological categories: i.e., keys to the self-knowledge of human beings rather than forms of consciousness attributable to an ontologically distinct subject (here: God or the Absolute). They distance humans from what Feuerbach puts forth as the original space of the religious impulse: feeling, which is given representational form by the imagination.[13] It is precisely through his placement

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[11] Recall Josiah Royce's reminder that the historical and political forces of the early 19th century were shaped by the works of their philosophical contemporaries, to an extent that is hard to fathom today. See Josiah Royce, "Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*," Lectures on Modern Idealism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 136-160.

[12] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xiv.

[13] Here, some might like to draw the visible link between Feuerbach and Schleiermacher, a point of connection upon which Robert Williams has reflected. Williams suggests that Schleiermacher goes further than Feuerbach in providing us with a more tenable, existentialist interpretation of religious consciousness. He claims, moreover, that Schleiermacher achieves this through a reinterpretation of Anselm's ontological principle, which, unlike that put forward by Feuerbach, does not reduce Anselm's axiom to a mere "anthropologism," to a level of subjective psychology. See Robert Williams, "Schleiermacher and Feuerbach on the Intentionality of Religious Consciousness," Journal of Religion 53/4 (October 1973) 424-455. Williams' references to Anselm and the ontological proof in some sense anticipate my own contention regarding the implied centrality of the ontological claim in Feuerbach's critique of religion and speculative thought. Insofar as Williams claims that Feuerbach is lacking in a tenable existentialist alternative to traditional religious ontology, the author anticipates even Van A. Harvey's thesis, twenty years later, that The Essence of Christianity lacks the coherent "naturalist-existentialist" interpretation of religion, common to Feuerbach's later writings.

of feeling – and not an ontologically necessary God-concept – at the source of religious consciousness that Feuerbach reverses Hegelian ontology. In order to make my point clear, I shall examine the relationship, implicit in Feuerbach's book, between feeling, the imagination and the understanding – modes of which religious and speculative consciousness engender specific forms. This, of course, is to accentuate the peculiar nature of Feuerbach's inversion of Hegelian ontology. Feuerbach's inversion denies the existence of an ontologically distinct, infinite *other*, and through its critique of self-consciousness, reverses the subject-predicate relation of this *other* – an elemental component of theological reflection about God, and its synthetic appropriation by Hegelian speculative philosophy. Through his reversal of this subject-predicate relation, and through the concept of the species as the proper object of consciousness, Feuerbach attempts to retrieve the original unity of feeling which is intuited by human being *prior* to the appearance of the religious imagination, which represents this state of emotive disunity and provides the misrepresentational apparatus of reflective thought, specifically, theology and speculative philosophy.[14] Feuerbach's species concept (*Gattungsbegriff*) attempts to reestablish the unity of human beings with their essence as members of the species, a pre-reflective essence that exists prior to the emergence of the infinite *other* of traditional theological-speculative ontology.

Thought as the Ground of Being: Hegel's "God" Reconsidered

[14] I shall consider the place of the imagination in Feuerbachian epistemology below, and in greater detail in chapter 3, where I discuss Feuerbach ambivalent position, that the imagination is at once

As I mention above, while Hegel stresses the ultimate unity of thought and Being, Feuerbach understands belief in the great ontological category (God or *Begriff*) as a product of thought's self-activity. "Faith," be it in God *or* in the speculatively transfigured God-concept, "arises out of the structure of self-consciousness itself."[15] Furthermore, if there is an implied unity in the relation between Being and thought, it can be attributed to the fact that the intellect fashions the consummate ontological category in its own image. Thought does not, in other words, find its ground in the pervasive ontological category as such – in God or the God-concept (the Absolute) – but creates and puts forth (or represents [*stellet vor*]) the very ground of Being. Feuerbach, however, remains united with Hegel in his estimation that thought or consciousness distinguishes "human being" from "brute." To restate a portion of the passage with which my last chapter began:

> Consciousness or thought is what distinguishes human beings from the animals. All that proceeds from thought – all the distinctions of the arts and sciences and of the endless interweavings of human relationships, habits and customs, activities, skills, and enjoyments – find their ultimate center in the *one* thought of God.[16]

Although Feuerbach displaces God from the centre of all thought, he still considers consciousness that which distinguishes the human being from the animal. It is simply that consciousness does not reflect an ontologically distinct and infinite *subject*. "Man thinks – that is, he converses with himself."[17] If, as Hegel claims, all "proceeds from thought," Feuerbach implies that so too does the

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a destructive and a necessary mode of human self-knowing.

[15] Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion, p. 31.

concept of God or the Absolute. On his terms, consciousness grounds the God-concept, not vice versa. No form of the ontological category, in the theological or speculative sense, can be exempt as something other than a manifestation of the fundamental structure of self-consciousness. The ontological centre of religious and speculative consciousness is simply a notional[18] expression of consciousness' self-activity. The ontological principle is the mirror image of Feuerbach's thinking "human," of Hegel's "finite spirit," and is not the extant reality that acts as the necessary centre of self-consciousness.[19]

It is in this manner that Feuerbach casts theological – and also speculative – ontology in an altered light. Let us witness the way in which Hegel sets up his own discussion of Anselm's axiomatic question:

> The ontological proof has the concept as its starting point. . . . The concept of God is set up, and it is shown that it cannot be grasped except as including being within itself; to the extent that being is distinguished from the concept, the concept exists only subjectively, in our thinking. As thus subjective, it is what is imperfect, what falls only within finite spirit. That it is not just *our* concept but also *is*, irrespective of our thinking, has to be demonstrated.[20]

For Hegel, it is not that the concept is "set up" as a ghostly chimera of religious or speculative consciousness, but that the very act of "setting up" is dependent upon the ontological priority of the concept (*Begriff*) itself. Thus, the concept cannot

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[16] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion I: Introduction and The Concept of Religion, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. Peter C. Hodgson *et al* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 84.
[17] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 2.
[18] With respect to the term "notional," I do not mean to suggest any connection with "Notion," employed by some (principally British) scholars, largely until the middle of the twentieth century, as an effective rendering of Hegel's *Begriff*.
[19] Feuerbach, interestingly, refers to God as "the mirror of man" (Christianity, p. 63).

be set up by finite spirit without the absolute presence of infinite spirit: existence of the concept, that is, not simply for "finite spirit" (which would imply a subjective or imperfect existence), but in and for itself (*an und für sich*). Indeed, the ontological priority of the concept is implied in Hegel's credo regarding the essential unity of thought and Being. For Hegel, the ontological proof steps beyond the limits of an argument regarding the existence of a divine being; it constitutes the very foundation for the meaningfulness of speculative philosophy, of human thought. The ontological proof establishes the existent *Begriff* in which human consciousness finds its centre.

For Feuerbach, however, God and "His" correlative *Begriff* in speculative philosophy possess all the reality of a "phantasm."[21] In this sense, he cuts short Hegel's ontological argument, and calls into question the ontological priority of the God-concept, that which, for Hegel, *necessarily* grounds human consciousness. Indeed, Hegel reckons that the God-concept which "exists only subjectively, in our thinking," or "falls only within finite spirit," constitutes an inadequate expression of its essential content, the absolute perfection of which *requires* Being or existence. Feuerbach, however, remains content with the proposal that the God-concept of speculative theology is only an illusion of "unrestricted subjectivity," a construct which *is* not, as Hegel claims above, "irrespective of our thinking." God, that is, is a being *respective of* and *exclusive to* the activity of thought. In his words, "I do not generate the object from the

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[20] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "The Ontological Proof According to The Lectures of 1831," Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion III: The Consummate Religion, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. Peter C. Hodgson *et al* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 352.
[21] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 17.

thought, but the thought from the object; and I hold *that* alone to be an object which has existence beyond one's own brain."[22] That upon which any formulation of the ontological proof rests (namely, perfection), is not an attribute of the subject, God, but a predicate transposed "elsewhere," upon an illusory, divine *other* by means of the intellect.[23] The categories of theological or speculative ontology are objects whose conceptual genesis occurs in the realm of thought alone; they do not represent the independent existence of an ontologically necessary being. God, the Absolute, the Idea – whatever the term: none possesses ontological necessity *in and for* itself. Each is an object derived from thought reflecting upon its own infinite nature.[24]

It is thus that Feuerbach redefines the theological and speculative understandings of ontological *necessity*. The theologian or speculative philosopher, who holds for the necessity of an absolute *other* – be it in the form of the God-concept or the speculative *Begriff* – spins out of nothing the baseless fabric of his dream. "But what is dreaming?" asks Feuerbach. His answer: "The reversing of the waking consciousness. In dreaming, the active is the passive, the passive the active; in dreaming, I take the spontaneous action of my own mind for an action upon me from without."[25] What can be said of "dreaming" can, for Feuerbach, be said of the speculative theologian in search of an ontological proof,

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[22] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xiv.
[23] This will be expanded below with respect to Feuerbach's claim that the species is the proper object of self-consciousness.
[24] For Feuerbach, reason is a necessary mode of self-knowing, while its hypostatization as an existent, infinite *other* is the first-principle of the alienated ontology proper to theology and speculative philosophy. As Wartofsky remarks, "the necessity of reason is represented as the necessary existence, the necessary Being of God" (Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 296).
[25] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 140.

or of the one who assumes the ontological claim as the ground of thinking.[26] For it is precisely through the reversal of wakeful thought that the speculative theologian first derives "the object from the thought," and then carries out his or her thinking under the assumption that this object (the God-concept or *Begriff*) necessarily *is*. Within the framework of this "dream," Feuerbach asserts, the God-concept *appears* as the necessary existent put forward in the ontological proof, when in reality it is but a product of thought reflecting upon the infinite nature of its own horizon.[27] "The object of the intellect is the intellect objective to itself."[28]

For Feuerbach, who derives "the thought from the object," the only ontologically *necessary* sphere can be that of physical, earthly life, where objects confront us prior to rational activity. The speculative theologian, who encounters the passive object (God-concept) of his thought as an active subject, must be shaken from his dogmatic slumbers, and the object of his dream laid open in "the simple daylight of reality and *necessity*." [29] For even in dreams we remain chained to the earth; it is simply that we misapprehend our dreams as places of necessary existence, and their objects as ontologically necessary existents (the mistake, according to Feuerbach, of the theologian or speculative philosopher).[30]

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[26] With this in mind, and through the substitution of "dreaming" with "thinking about God," Feuerbach's point is all the more direct.

[27] Whether or not thought, due to its essentially hypothetical nature (when beheld in light of the God-concept), assumes a level of contingency that *cannot* be contained in the God-concept is perhaps the fundamental point of support for the ontological proof.

[28] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 9.

[29] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xix. Italics added.

[30] For a preliminary but interesting analysis of the "dream" metaphor in The Essence of Christianity, see Paul Gallagher, "Feuerbach and Nietzsche on the Significance of Dreaming," Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association 67 (1993) 87-95. There, Gallagher claims that Feuerbach is an heir to the tradition of French Enlightenment philosophy, which pitted truth against illusion, but that Feuerbach finds in the divine illusion "the most

Hegel, interestingly, defines "sleep as the state in which the soul distinguishes itself neither inwardly nor from the outer world." He notes, moreover, that "the vitality of the waking state requires... the opposition and the unity of mind with its object."[31] Other than Hegel's use of "soul" as the operative agent, neither point contradicts Feuerbach's general remarks regarding dreaming as such. Feuerbach's discussion of the dream-state, however, is metaphorical in nature, and is descriptive of theologians who carry out their rational inquiry while, in fact, "awake." It is thus that even the wakeful state of which Hegel speaks is subsumed under Feuerbach's metaphorical category, "dream," and that the God-concept in which speculative thought finds its centre is put forth as the product of reflective thought itself.

So runs one formulation of Feuerbach's inversion of ontology proper to Hegel, contingent upon the former's creed that thought and Being *do not* possess essential unity. The God-concept does not possess necessary existence in and for itself, but "is evolved by his [human's] self-consciousness, by the activity of his thought."[32] On such terms, and "to the extent that being is distinguished from the concept, the concept exists only subjectively, in our thinking"[33] – something which Hegel deems both a *logical* and an *ontological* impossibility. According to Feuerbach, thought does not find its "ultimate center in the *one* thought of God,"[34]

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significant content." He writes: "It is precisely here that Feuerbach goes beyond the purely negative criticism of the French Enlightenment thinkers, for he tells us that lodged within the phantasm of the divine is the essence of man" (p. 88).

[31] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830), trans. William Wallace, *Zusätze* trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1971), section 381, *Zusatz*, pp. 68, 69.

[32] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 18.

[33] Hegel, "The Ontological Proof," LPR III, p. 352.

[34] Hegel, LPR I, p. 84.

which, on the terms of Hegelian ontology, includes the attribute of necessary existence. Rather, the existent principle of theological or speculative ontology proceeds from thought – including the necessity of the concept, the principle correlative to the essential unity of thought and Being. Yet, although Feuerbach cuts short Hegel's ontological premise, he maintains an infinite horizon for thought in its self-activity. The difference, however, rests in the fact that he does not deem it necessary to suppose from this infinite horizon the existence of a unified and infinite *other* as a subject. As I shall expand below, Feuerbach's reformulation of Hegelian ontology is articulated with reference to the human species, a category which keeps the human being rooted to the earth, in the realm of sensuous existence, while allowing him to come to terms with his essential nature in terms of an infinite self-consciousness. Thus Feuerbach's concept of species-ontology remains problematical insofar as it refutes the unified *subject* at the core of speculative theology (the God-concept) but still maintains the encounter of human beings with an infinite *other* (their essential nature, reflected in the consciousness they have of themselves as members of the human species). That upon which Feuerbach's ontological proof rests (namely, perfection), is not an attribute of the subject, God, but is a predicate of the species that is transfigured into a subject and transposed "beyond one's brain," upon an illusory, divine *other* by means of the intellect. The ontological centre of the Hegelian philosophy of religion is given new form, principally through Feuerbach's essential tenet that "the divine activity is not distinct from the human."[35]

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[35] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 30.

The Epistemology of Religious Consciousness and the Emergence of the Species-Concept

Feuerbach's conception of species-consciousness can be understood as the epistemological corollary of his species-ontology, in which the *other* of theological or speculative thought is understood as a veiled form of the species. As established in the previous chapter, while Hegel's *Vorstellung* and *Begriff* constitute phenomenological-epistemological categories for finite spirit (the human being), they are simultaneously phenomenological-ontological forms of infinite spirit (the Absolute). In Feuerbach's estimation, with the centre of Hegelian ontology now displaced, the phenomenological-ontological forms of *Absolute* self-consciousness should be understood as phenomenological-epistemological forms of *human* self-consciousness alone. The God of religion, the perceived ontological *other*, is in fact a form of the human being's self-knowing. "[R]eligion is man's earliest and also indirect form of self-knowledge."[36] Similarly, the Hegelian God-concept (the *Begriff*) upon which all thought is predicated, constitutes the speculative version of the God of religion, and again is a mode of *human* self-knowing. "The *absolute* to man is his own nature."[37] The thought-objects of religious and speculative consciousness – respectively, God and *Begriff* – constitute forms of human self-knowing insofar as both result from the individual's encounter with an infinite object, the species, which is misapprehended and then projected "beyond" the mind as a unified, infinite subject. Species-consciousness explains the experience of the infinite

[36] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 13.
[37] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 5.

other in terms of humans alone, and locates the origin of religious and speculative *mis*representations of this *other* in terms of humans' nature as emotional, imaginative, and rational beings. This is the sense in which Feuerbach shifts the ontological centre of Hegel's philosophy of religion from God to human and, by extension, the way in which he explains the forms of religious and speculative consciousness (*Vorstellung* and *Begriff*) in terms of a human-centred ontology.

Feuerbach, indeed, supposes that the nature of theological and speculative consciousness is predicated upon a wayward conception of Being, an ontology, furthermore, which gives rise to a misguided epistemology: one which points to the heavens as the place of human self-knowledge, and to earth as the place of God's self-knowledge.[38] "God," that is, cannot have self-knowledge, for his being is a product of thought's "self-activity." This runs counter, of course, to Hegel's understanding of self-consciousness, which presupposes the existence of an Absolute that is incarnate as a subject in human beings: "To know what God as spirit is... requires careful and thorough speculation. It includes, in its forefront, the propositions: God is God only so far as he knows himself: his self-knowledge is, further, a self-consciousness in man and man's knowledge *of* God, which proceeds to man's self-knowledge *in* God."[39] In some sense, Feuerbach holds to Hegel's belief that God's self-knowledge is human being's "knowledge *of* God,"

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[38] *Religious* consciousness, by contrast, arises unintentionally, at a level where feeling and imagination are the governing modes of self-knowing. Theological-speculative ontology, on the other hand, is actively governed by reason, and consciously effects the synthesis of the religious illusion, while remaining blind to its emotive source. It is thus that Hegelian ontology distances human beings from an encounter with their essential nature. Wartofsky puts the matter succinctly: "Religion is the *alienated form of man's recognition of his own nature*. Theology, on the other hand, is *the theoretical alienation of man's nature, as not yet his own*" (Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 200).

[39] Hegel, Philosophy of Mind, section 564, p. 298.

but *only* insofar as "God" is understood as a self-representation of human being, the singular epistemological agent, in relation to his species. He echoes: "Consciousness of God is self-consciousness, knowledge of God is self-knowledge."[40] And, in this sense, Feuerbach brings the incarnational nature of the Hegelian dialectic, in which God is present to humans in and through self-consciousness, to a particular stage of fulfillment; i.e., he considers human being the incarnate place of knowledge by stripping the God-concept of its independent existence, and by reconfiguring it in terms of the human species. While religion is, for Hegel, an "essential relation which is epistemologically and ontologically dependent on God,"[41] for Feuerbach religion is epistemologically and ontologically dependent upon the individual's consciousness of himself as a member of the species. Religious or speculative consciousness, that is, is in fact a manifest form of species-consciousness, and is characterized by a tripartite relationship between human being and his infinite object (the species): the emotional, the imaginative, and the rational.[42] The ultimately problematical nature of Feuerbach's species-ontology comes to light upon consideration of the epistemological framework within which he examines religious consciousness. While he claims to deal with "concrete man" – that is, the human as an individual,

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[40] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 12.

[41] James Yerkes, The Christology of Hegel (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 64.

[42] The trinitarian motif of feeling, imagination, and reason, runs like a golden cord throughout The Essence of Christianity – a point, which, on some level, enforces the representational weight of the theological categories that Feuerbach seeks to overturn. This is a point to which I turn in the conclusion to this thesis. For Feuerbach, Wartofsky remarks (importantly), "man's essence consists in feeling, willing, and thinking." He states, moreover, that "Feuerbach considers this human essence to be man's consciousness; that thinking, feeling, willing are activities of man's essence as a conscious being" (Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 262). Wartofsky goes on to say that this inconcrete formulation of consciousness (i.e., feeling, willing, thinking) as the essence of human

sensuous being – his notion of "species" as the object of human consciousness presents us with intimations of an infinite essence of human being. This, indeed, is forewarned by my thesis, that Feuerbach's discussion of religious or species consciousness is, in essence, an epistemological reformulation of Hegelian ontology.

Feuerbach's fundamental premise is that human beings confront their species as the infinite object of consciousness. It constitutes, in effect, the essence of humans, who are themselves "real beings." No divine or speculative being (*in* and *for itself*) exists *for* consciousness, but *in* consciousness. He writes:

> This philosophy has for its principle... no abstract, merely conceptional being, but a *real* being... – man; its principle, therefore, is in the highest degree positive and real. It generates thought from the *opposite* of thought, from Matter, from existence, from the senses; it has relation to its object first through the senses, *i.e.*, passively, before defining it in thought.[43]

In that the object of this "philosophy" exists for thought only through the senses, Feuerbach inverts the *a priori* ontological model put forward by Hegel. No more can "God" or the God-concept, in which thought finds its centre, hold. Both the *Vorstellungen* of religious consciousness and the *Begriffe* of speculative consciousness are here deemed "passive" objects, according to Feuerbach, for whom "the essential attributes or predicates of the divine being *are* the essential attributes or predicates of speculative philosophy."[44] This critique, as we have seen, rests upon the postulate that thought and Being do not express an essential

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being "has understandably led to much confusion and misunderstanding of The Essence of Christianity" (ibid., p. 262).

[43] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xv.

[44] Ludwig Feuerbach, Principles of the Philosophy of the Future, trans. Manfred H. Vogel (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company), p. 12. Italics added.

unity. But it is not simply that "Being" – the representational God or the speculative *Begriff* – springs from thought, but that the content of thought is constituted fundamentally by *a posteriori* knowledge. Thought is the principal active agent; and it is through its self-activity that conceptions (on Feuerbach's terms: *mis*conceptions) of the God-concept are engendered in the human mind. Hence the relevance of the dream image, in which passive objects are misapprehended, misrepresented and encountered as active objects. The likening, indeed, is not surprising, in light of the inversion of Hegelian ontology put forward by Feuerbach, whose interpretation of religious and speculative consciousness assumes, at least explicitly, an empirical footing. Yet, despite the concrete or "empirical" ground upon which Feuerbach establishes his critique of religious-speculative ontology, we find that the terms upon which species-consciousness operates do not lend to hermetic empirical analysis. For it is precisely through the epistemological fabric that Feuerbach supposes for religious consciousness (i.e., an obscure interrelationship of thought, imagination and feeling) that the nature of the individual as a species being is rendered in its full form.[45]

This is the sense in which it is reductive to call Feuerbach an empiricist, or, what is more common, a materialist.[46] Indeed, though Feuerbach calls himself "a natural philosopher in the domain of the mind," his "science" cannot be called "natural" in the sense that we consider the natural sciences today. Feuerbach's

[45] The question regards whether or not Feuerbach argues successfully for an *infinite* human essence that can be drawn from *empirical* existence, without recourse to categories that are elemental to traditional ontology.

method embraces categories which assume existence only *in* consciousness, and do not constitute empirical objects as such; but in that they subsequently assume form *for* consciousness, they can be subjected to what we would now understand as phenomenological or quasi-scientific analysis.[47] This is the problematical milieu of Feuerbach's "science." It is not simply that the forms of religious consciousness are hard to subject to scientific analysis, but that religious consciousness is not confined to the "domain of the mind," is constituted fundamentally by epistemological-emotional experience. For Feuerbach, that is, "religion is essentially emotion." In other words, "feeling is the organ of religion."[48] Feeling, moreover, is the place of genesis of the forms of consciousness that are elemental to Hegel's philosophy of religion, namely, *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*. According to Feuerbach, Hegel, who suggests that all *thought* finds its centre in the *one* thought of God, fails to acknowledge the fundamentally unified quality of the feeling which first gives rise to this thought of God.

Hegel, one might suppose, critiques feeling as the essential mode of religious consciousness so as to avoid the implied slip into Kantian subjectivism, which denies reason entry into the realm of the infinite and explains the religious

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[46] This point finds elaboration in Marx W. Wartofsky, "*Homo Homini Deus Est*: Feuerbach's Religious Materialism," in Meaning, Truth, and God, ed. Leroy Rouner (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 154-173.

[47] This, I think, in part explains Van A. Harvey's dismissal of Feuerbach's Hegelianism as irrelevant to contemporary life. Feuerbach's "science" (*Wissenschaft*), largely a reformulation of Hegelian "science," is a term of far different scope than that which we use today with respect to the natural sciences, and would be better rendered perhaps as "philosophical science." Similarly, in his translation of Hegel's Science of Logic, A.V. Miller renders *Wissenschaft* either as "science" or as "philosophy." George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Science of Logic, trans. A.V. Miller (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1998).

[48] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 9.

impulse in terms that are exclusive to the practical domain of the finite human being. In his Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Hegel associates the essentially subjective aspect of emotional content with contingency in the sense that, "if God's being is attested in our feeling, it is there in the form of complete contingency, as being, in principle, a particular content, one that takes no precedence over any other content, for the status of being a feeling can belong to the other just as easily as to it."[49] Hegel recognizes that "people speak of religious feeling and say that our faith in God is given to us in feeling," and that this feeling implies the certainty "that two kinds of being are posited in reflection as one form of being."[50] Yet he does not consider the heartfelt presence of the infinite other as an adequate means of expressing the ontological necessity of the God-concept, which can only be fully accounted for in terms of its presence at the centre of thought. According to Hegel, the *contingent* nature of emotive content does not do justice to the necessary being or concept upon which his philosophy of religion rests. In our hearts, we can be "certain" of many things; but the content of this "certainty" is essentially contingent, and necessary only for the heart, while the God-concept is the ontologically necessary centre of thought itself.

Feuerbach, who disputes Hegel's ontological principle, articulates a different interpretation of human feeling. For him, as I have quoted, "religion is the organ of feeling" – a statement which does not, at first glance, contradict Hegel's words above. Feuerbach's claim, however, is that the genesis of the

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[49] Hegel, LPR I, p. 272.
[50] Hegel, LPR I, p. 270.

religious impulse occurs in the domain of the heart – *not* in "the domain of the mind." Hence his fundamental point of divergence from Hegel, who establishes thought or consciousness as the place where God is affirmed as an ontologically *necessary* concept. Feuerbach infers that religion is a pre-reflective form of encounter for the human being – "pre-reflective" in the sense that the individual confronts or feels the *other* of the I-Thou encounter strictly in terms of his or her own feeling. "Feeling is only acted on by that which conveys feeling, *i.e.*, by itself, its own nature.... Feeling is atheistic in the sense of the orthodox belief, which attaches religion to an external object; it denies an objective God – it is itself God."[51] On these terms, he differs from Hegel, who maintains that the unity (between finite spirit and infinite spirit) implicit in the content of feeling is necessarily contingent, and that it is only in thought that the infinite spirit with which finite spirit feels unity can exist as an ontologically necessary concept. Feuerbach, in fact, claims the heart as the only place of a unified encounter between human and God (insofar as God is the very essence of feeling itself).[52]

In light of Feuerbach's supposition that the heart is the place where the individual initially achieves unity with herself (and in this sense only, with "God"), the mysteries of religion are "not foreign, but native mysteries, the mysteries of human nature." It is in this sense that Feuerbach refigures the place of emotion or feeling in the epistemological framework of "human being." The unity of the individual and God in feeling is not a contingent relation, as it is for

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[51] Feuerbach, Christianity, pp. 6, 11.

[52] This unified encounter is maintained in the images of the imagination, which is the slave of feeling. It is only when these images become vessels for rational truth (as in the *Vorstellungen* of

Hegel, but an essential one. Feuerbach elaborates: "I show that religion takes the apparent, the superficial in Nature and humanity for the essential, and hence conceives their true essence as a separate, special existence... or makes objective the true nature of the human word."[53] Indeed, despite the human origin of the sense of unity between human and divine, it is a trait peculiar to religious persons that they posit an *other* that is ontologically distinct from them. This disruption of the unity of feeling, however, does not arise *within* the content of feeling itself, but intervenes from *without*. This is the sense in which Feuerbach considers religion a "superficial" rather than an essential condition of human being. The essential unity of feeling, insofar as feeling is acted on by its own nature, is upset by a counter-feeling, that of fear, which rises in the heart when it faces its essential content: "Thou art terrified before the religious atheism of thy heart. By this fear thou destroyest the unity of thy feeling with itself, in imagining to thyself an objective being distinct from thy feeling...."[54] It is thus out of the feeling of terror that the epistemological framework of human consciousness comes into light. With the initially unified content of man's emotion disrupted, the imagination comes onto the scene.[55]

In The Essence of Christianity, Feuerbach fails to outline the precise place of the imagination in relation to feeling, sensory experience, and thought. This, in

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the Hegelian philosophy of religion) that contradiction arises. This point is reinforced in Wartofsky, Feuerbach, pp. 232-233.

[53] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xviii.

[54] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 11.

[55] This point stands in relative contradistinction to Wartofsky's claim that contradiction does not arise until reason has effected the synthesis of the other which is intuited or felt and then represented by the imagination. Emotion, indeed, cannot engender or perceive contradiction in the sense proper to logic. Yet I believe that there is a real sense, in the opening pages of The Essence

fact, is a place of ambiguity common to all of his writings.[56] Yet it is something with which one must come to terms if one is to understand the way in which these epistemological forms arise in and for consciousness. For Hegel, *Vorstellung* and *Begriff* are both ontological forms of infinite spirit *and* epistemological forms whereby this infinite spirit is apprehended in the consciousness of finite spirit. For Feuerbach, on the other hand, they pertain only to the consciousness of finite spirit, concrete human being. While the Hegelian system begins from consciousness or thought and attempts a return to itself through a transfiguration of its representational forms into pure speculative objects, Feuerbach conceives this movement as a distancing from the original emotive source of the religious impulse. Thus, implicit in his discussion of the imagination as the form of consciousness which bears out the disruption of the unity of feeling by representing the nothingness that lies in the heart as an object distinct from human being, is a critique of the Hegelian *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*.[57]

Both Feuerbach and Hegel carry out their discussions of consciousness under the assumption that it is the state of being which distinguishes "man from brute," and include the imaginative capacity of human beings as an essential

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of Christianity, in which the pre-reflective terror parallels the ontological rift that is synthesized by speculative theology and philosophy.

[56] This ambiguous concept, the imagination, constitutes the subject of my next chapter. Here, I discuss its place in the epistemological framework suggested in The Essence of Christianity, and in so doing, attempt to situate it in relation to the forms of theological and speculative consciousness, outlined in the previous chapter.

[57] This can be said insofar as the imagination provides the representational framework of which theology and speculative philosophy effect the dogmatic systematization and synthesis, respectively. Garrett Green notes that Feuerbach employs the terms *Einbildungskraft*, *Phantasie*, and *Vorstellung* in an indiscriminate but synonymous manner, and that George Eliot renders them all accurately as "imagination." See pp. 57-58 of Garrett Green, "Who's Afraid of Ludwig Feuerbach? Suspicion and the Religious Imagination," in Christian Faith Seeking Historical Understanding: Essays in Honor of H. Jack Forstman, eds. Duke and Dunnavant (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), pp. 45-65.

component of what constitutes religious experience as such. According to Hegel, the imagination takes hold of, and gives form to the God-image – which, reason later ascertains, appears *necessarily* to thought or consciousness. For Feuerbach, however, the God-concept does not appear as the dawning point of thought, but is first encountered in feeling. Subsequently, terror seizes the human subject; the initial unity of feeling (i.e., feeling acting upon itself) is disrupted; the emptiness of the heart (to which "terror" arises as a response) is represented as an *other* by the imagination, and *only then* is taken up as an object of thought. Therein lies Feuerbach's reversal of Hegelian ontology. A pre-reflective unity engenders religious consciousness. Thought appropriates the represented *other* of the imagination and hypostatizes it, in speculative form, as an ontologically necessary object. Confronted by Feuerbach through Marx, Isaiah Berlin puts the first's central thesis thus:

> that "the abstract understanding can only give things names" not create entities; empirical characteristics are first transmogrified into mysterious metaphysical entities, and then used to account for their own original empirical selves, which they are held, in some sense, to have generated.[58]

Feeling and the imagination, Berlin neglects to mention, arise prior to the operation of thought by which, on Feuerbach's terms, "the object arises from the thought"[59] – a point of neglect upon which many critiques of Feuerbach (including Marx's) are predicated. Yet Feuerbach's claim that thought and Being do not share essential unity can only be understood in light of his presupposition

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[58] Isaiah Berlin, "Reply to Orsini," Journal of the History of Ideas 30/1 (Jan-March 1969), p. 92. This article constitutes Berlin's defense of the short analysis of Feuerbach, which appears in his biography of Karl Marx. See Isaiah Berlin, Marx (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948).
[59] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xiv.

that feeling and the religious imagination engender the object which reflective thought takes for its ontological centre. The feeling of terror which first seizes the human subject, and so, too, the imagination which arises as a representational extension this state of seizure, exist prior to reflective thought, where belief in ontological necessity of the God-concept takes root.[60]

It is thus that thought, according to Feuerbach, protracts the state of disunity first aroused by the feeling of terror, and which is then represented by the religious imagination as an infinite "God." Hegel, too, maintains that the imagination brings about an internal state of disunity in representational form, insofar as it represents feeling, whose content is purely subjective. The "*reproductive imagination*," he insists, is the place "where the images issue from the inward world belonging to the ego."[61] And although these images may have empirical objects as their referents in terms of the *form* they assume in the mind, their unity of content is essentially contingent upon the inward, subjective world of the ego. As such, a person can imagine the existence of a thing to the point that it possesses unity of content *in the mind*; but this unity remains purely subjective in that the object does not possess necessary existence. Such, too, is the nature of recollection. (We can be mistaken in the recollection of our past.) The nature of imaginative content changes, however, with respect to religious consciousness, which has for its object a divine being that has existence in and for itself. In religious consciousness, the unity of content is not one-sided, but requires the

[60] This is a point that I would like to take up in a future paper on Feuerbach. Whether or not one can in fact retrieve what lies before the formation of the ontological concept – i.e., whether or not anything *can* precede a *Begriff* which exists necessarily for thought – is the (perhaps circular) question, and is the issue towards which I point in the conclusion to this thesis.

necessary and objective existence of the God-concept present in thought. Hegel writes, "What we are conscious of... is not only that we have this object as our representation but also that it is not merely representation, that it *is*. This is *certainty* of God, *immediate knowledge*."[62] This necessary existence is assumed in the religious *Vorstellung*, which expresses the God-concept in its own fashion, but possesses the same content as the speculative *Begriff* – and includes, therefore, the principle of ontological necessity.

For Hegel, then, the imagination presents finite spirit with subjective or *mediate* knowledge, save when it operates as a mode of religious consciousness, when it engenders representational forms of the God-concept, which has necessary existence *an und für sich* (i.e., objective existence). Religious *Vorstellung*, in other words, provides finite spirit with *immediate* knowledge of what necessarily *is* as an object of thought. The representational forms of the imagination, therefore, mediate the world of sense for the world of thought, and are limited to the subjective or inward nature of finite spirit – except when they embrace, as part of their content, the objectively and ontologically necessary concept of God. In the *Vorstellungen* of Christianity, the manifest religion, knowledge of Being is *immediate* for thought; thought and Being share an essential unity. Hence the essential unity, in terms of content, of *Vorstellung* and speculative *Begriff*, which differ in terms of husk but envelop the same kernel. Feuerbach, for whom the original state of unity takes place in feeling rather than in an Absolute that is necessary for thought, consequently critiques the Hegelian

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[61] Hegel, Philosophy of Mind, section 455, p. 206.
[62] Hegel, LPR I, p. 386.

conception of the imaginative faculty, not in general, but for religious consciousness itself. With respect to the representational God of Christianity, he writes, "God is a being conceived under the forms of the sense, but freed from the limits of sense, – a being at once unlimited and sensational. But what is the imagination? – limitless activity of the senses."[63] Feuerbach strips the God-concept of its necessary existence in thought, and restricts it to the realm of contingent existence: to the world of sense and imagination, the latter of which *mediates* sensory data for thought. Thus God, the ontologically necessary object of religious consciousness, belongs to the subjective world of "man," and can only be an object of mediate knowledge.

Hegel, to recall, suggests that the unity of feeling exists for finite spirit only subjectively or contingently, and that imagination and thought must mediate its content if the "God" intuited therein is to become an object of immediate knowledge, an ontologically necessary concept. Moreover, it is not that the process of mediation is required in order to *bring about* the ontological necessity of the God-concept, but that the God-concept is *already* manifest to consciousness as its necessary centre. The dialectical mediation of the imagination and thought is required by the content of the religious *Vorstellung*, "God," in which the unity or necessity of the Absolute is already confirmed. In that Hegel's *Vorstellung*, which "is a medium between sense and thought, and correspondingly between a mere subjectivity and a true objectivity,"[64] shares the content of the speculative *Begriff*, it is an object of immediate or necessary content. The dialectical push

[63] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 214.

(i.e., "the labour of the negative"[65]) impelled by the immediate content of *Vorstellung* entails a mediation of its subjective form, so that it expresses unity with the necessary concept it veils – thus the nature of the represented God for Hegel.

Feuerbach, as I have delineated, reverses this ontological framework in that he considers feeling the primal space of immediate knowledge. Both the religious imagination, which represents the nothingness of the heart as God, and speculative thought, which affirms the ontological necessity of the God-concept, distance human being from the initial unity of feeling. Whereas Hegel claims that the content of feeling is subjective and contingent, that it requires realization in thought, Feuerbach believes it objective and necessary: an ontological ground in and for itself. "God is pure, unlimited, free Feeling." "God," here, refers to the human subject *before* it steps beyond feeling to represent the immediate unity within itself as an *other*. "Feeling is thy own inward power, but at the same time a power distinct from thee, and independent of thee; it is in thee, above thee; it is itself that which constitutes the objective in thee – thy own being which impresses thee as another being; in short, thy God."[66] One must here recall that the difference between Hegel and Feuerbach, in their assessment of feeling, fundamentally regards the ontological question. Hegel, indeed, supposes a unity for feeling; but, so long as this feeling exists only subjectively, or contingently, so long as it remains a one-sided unity, it demands fulfillment in thought, where the

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[64] Malcolm Clark, Logic and System: A Study of the Transition from "Vorstellung" to Thought in the Philosophy of Hegel (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), p. 26

[65] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), section 19, p. 10.

necessary God-concept is apprehended by finite spirit. God "is a content that belongs to thought, for thought is the soil in which this content is both apprehended and engendered alike." With respect to the unity of feeling, "content belongs to my actuality… and then what we say is that 'I have it in my heart,' for this *is* 'my heart.' In other words, then content is within my own self-certainty…."[67] Yet the self-certain intuition of God (in feeling) takes places only with reference to the ego; it is mediate knowledge which necessarily undergoes transmutation – in that finite spirit becomes conscious of God, who necessarily *is*, in representational form – until the God-concept is apprehended as an object of pure thought, of immediate knowledge. I must step beyond the contingent unity of feeling (in "my heart") in order to achieve necessary unity with the God-concept that is already present to thought. Hence the emergence of the religious imagination, and its *Vorstellung*, which spurs finite spirit from the place of emotive, subjective unity onwards, to a proper apprehension of the objective God-concept.

In Feuerbach's estimation, however, the God-concept is not a unity *already* present to thought, but is an abstract expression of the human being's disunity with himself. The heart, for Feuerbach, is the first true place of unified or immediate knowledge, thus deflating the Hegelian claim for the necessity of the movement from the mediate knowledge of feeling to the immediate knowledge of the God-concept in thought. The movement of religious consciousness (from feeling, to imagination, to thought) is not propelled by, does

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[66] Feuerbach, Christianity, pp. 10-11.
[67] Hegel, LPR I, pp. 394-395.

not seek unity with, an ontological concept that necessarily *is* for thought. Instead, it distances the individual from his original place of unity by rendering the void of his heart in representational and then in conceptual form. The God of religious consciousness, conceived by the imagination, *represents* the disruption of this original state of unity, in that it does not arise until fear "destroyeth" the unity of feeling acting upon itself. Feeling – both in the sense of the original state of unity *and* in the sense of the terror which disrupts it – is *essentially* prior to the ontological principle with which Hegelian thought begins; it does not require fulfillment in the God-concept. The imagination, a slave to feeling, paves the road of despair that leads to Hegel's necessary *Begriff*; i.e., it first steps beyond the world of the human subject and represents the fear-inciting nothingness as an *other*. On these terms, God has no objective or necessary existence, but "is the manifested inward nature, the expressed self of man."[68]

Feuerbach, then, affirms the emotional state of disunity as the ground of religious consciousness, and "fear" or "terror" as a *necessary* reaction to the nothingness present in feeling acting upon itself. But he does not affirm the necessity of religious consciousness itself, which actualizes the original state of emotive disunity in forms of the imagination and thought. For Hegel, on the other hand, fear is *necessarily* contained in religious *Vorstellung* so as to bring about the universal *Begriff*, the content of representation, as an object of consciousness. It is thus that the latter incorporates fear into his discussion of religious consciousness:

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[68] Feuerbach, Christianity, pp. 12-13.

> Religious sensibility as such itself contains *both* the contrast between the determinacy of empirical self-consciousness and that of universal thought or intuition *and* their relation and unity.... In the determinacy of separation, together with the fact that the universal is the substantial against which the self-aware empirical consciousness also feels its essential nothingness – indeed that of its still positive volitional existence – this representation, this determinacy in general, is the sensation of *fear*. Being aware of one's own inner existence and conviction as of no account, along with self-consciousness on the side of the universal condemning the former, results in... the higher unity of my self-consciousness generally with the universal.[69]

"Determinacy" here refers to a quality of the object as it is apprehended in thought by empirical self-consciousness. As discussed above, the imagination, which mediates empirical objects for thought, is restricted to this domain; its content is contingent and subjective. "Universal thought," on the other hand, entails a level of indeterminacy or immediacy that is free from the limitations of "empirical self-consciousness." This is the realm of the *Begriff*. Religious *Vorstellung* (the object of "religious sensibility") is unique in that it shares the indeterminate content of the universal thought-object while being conditioned by determinate form. Faced by the indeterminate or immediate universal thought (infinite spirit), finite spirit is seized by fear, which is engendered in *Vorstellung*. The form of *Vorstellung*, in other words, is "the sensation of fear."[70]

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[69] Hegel, LPR I, p. 220.

[70] The connection between fear and the representational fabric of religious knowledge, in the Hegelian interpretation of religion, is an interesting one, and one which deserves further analysis elsewhere. (For Feuerbach, I here argue, fear precedes the formation of the ontological concept itself.) Despite the lucidity of his analysis, and his contextualization of Feuerbach within Hegelian philosophy, Wartofsky does not comment upon the centrality of fear in the Feuerbach's epistemological framework, and so does not attempt to achieve a point of connection, in this regard, with Hegel. Hence Wartofsky's place of relative absence in the current discussion. Van A. Harvey, for whom the Hegelian-strand of The Essence of Christianity constitutes a great impasse to a clear interpretation of religion, here truly remains mute.

Feuerbach, for whom *Vorstellung* is also a manifest form of fear, appropriates this aspect of religious sensibility proper to Hegel. He addresses his reader: "Thou art terrified before the religious atheism of thy heart. By this fear thou destroyest the unity of thy feeling with itself, in imagining to thyself an objective being distinct from thy feeling...."[71] According to Feuerbach, then, fear arises as a direct response to the unity or indeterminacy of *feeling*, and not when faced by what Hegel perceives as a indeterminate or universal *thought*-object. *Vorstellung* does not express the essential nothingness of finite spirit, which is aware at once of its determinate objects of consciousness and of the universal object that necessarily *is* for thought. Rather, the nothingness which engenders fear, and which spurs on the imaginative faculty, is bound strictly to the domain of the heart. Thus, implicit in Feuerbach's examination of consciousness is the suggestion that religious sensibility and its *Vorstellungen* proceed from fear of the emotional unity which confronts the individual, and *not* from an indeterminate ontological *other*, which, according to Hegel, necessarily *is* for consciousness of finite spirit.[72] For Feuerbach, the state of terror engenders God; for Hegel, the God-concept engenders the state of terror. In this sense, Feuerbach's claim, that feeling comes first, entails an inversion of the ontological question as such. Unity of feeling, which for Hegel constitutes a subjective, determinate, and contingent unity – i.e., a one-sided unity which requires fulfillment in that the universal *Begriff* necessarily *is* as an object of consciousness for finite spirit – is for Feuerbach an immediate form of knowledge which requires no process of

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[71] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 11.

speculative synthesis or reconciliation. The unity of thought and Being need not be reestablished.

Yet, as I have remarked, Feuerbach maintains that this state of unity is *necessarily* disrupted by a counter-feeling, terror; but he does not affirm the process whereby the religious imagination misapprehends and represents the object of fear as an ontologically distinct *other*, God, of which speculative thought effects the synthesis as the Absolute *Begriff*. How does Feuerbach resurrect from this "heap of broken images" a coherent vision of what essentially constitutes the human being? The answer (and as I shall expand in the following pages): through his problematical notion of the species being, which implies an inversion of the subject-predicate relation of Hegelian ontology. For, with respect to religious consciousness proper to Feuerbach, we are presented with a seemingly fragmented vision. On the one hand, Feuerbach claims that feeling expresses the essential "unity" of human being, in that through feeling we are presented with our own essence as an object. On the other hand, Feuerbach calls feeling "the dream of nature,"[73] the very thing which establishes the epistemological horizon of religious consciousness, and which puts forth the ground upon which reason misapprehends the object of feeling as an ontological *other*, thus distancing the human subject from its original state of unity. Similarly, Feuerbach views the imagination as the human faculty which makes concrete the disruption of the unity of feeling, while also regarding it as an essential mode of human consciousness. For Feuerbach, "the imagination," as Marx Wartofsky puts it, "is

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[72] According to Hegel, this is something that reason simply confirms (or can know), though the ontological concept necessarily *is* before thought comes onto the scene.

not 'imaginary.' It is the real reflex of human existence – of *that* existence which constitutes the distinctly human. It is the expression of human needs, human desire, human feelings. What makes this distinctively human is that it is the consciousness of an object of feeling."[74] The imagination, insofar as it expresses needs or feelings that are essentially human, is not an inherently corrupt epistemological mode of consciousness, but is a *necessary* instrument of human self-knowing. One will here make greater sense of Feuerbach's claim that "the imagination is the faculty which alone corresponds to personal feeling, because it sets aside all limits, all laws which are painful to the feelings, and thus makes objective to man the immediate, absolutely unlimited satisfaction of his subjective wishes."[75] Yet it is the manner in which the religious person perceives that these needs should be fulfilled – at the level of *self-consciousness* – which distances him from his original state of unity: i.e., "the unreality of the image *as it is reflectively conceived or thought about*."[76] So long as we remain conscious of the fact that we are in the presence of an object of feeling, and not some ontological *other* that *is* for thought, the imagination does not alienate us from our essence as members of the human species.

This is the sense in which the imagination can be called an "existential" mode of human consciousness, though it becomes the instrument by which religious sensibility objectifies feeling as an object that is *other* for thought. In its purest form, the imagination communicates the essence of human being, and is an

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[73] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 140.
[74] Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 217.
[75] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 131.
[76] Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 219.

instrument of self-knowing which casts into representational form the object of feeling. Wartofsky explains, indeed, that the question which regards the nature of feeling is one which regards the human essence. Feeling, in the sense that Feuerbach suggests, does not involve consciousness of a particular feeling or need, but consciousness of the nature of feeling in general.

> This self-conscious feeling has the nature of feeling itself as its object, that is, the *species* nature of feeling. Such a feeling is given only to human beings who are at the same time the subjects and the objects of the feeling. It is a feeling toward that which is *human* in another, and thus entails, unknowingly, the species concept of humanity itself. It is feeling toward another who is like oneself, and thus it transcends the particularity of mere sensibility; it has a universal as its object – that is, an *essence*.[77]

Feeling, in other words, has the human essence as its object (viz., the species concept), but in pre-reflective form. As discussed in the first section of the present chapter, Feuerbach's belief in a pre-reflective encounter allows him to distinguish between religious consciousness on the one hand, and theological or speculative modes of consciousness on the other. One should recall Feuerbach's credo, "feeling is the organ of religion,"[78] or, insofar as the imagination is slave to feeling, in that it represents "God" in the face of a disuniting terror, that it, too, is "the original organ *and essence* of religion."[79] In each case, religious feeling and imagination suppose a pre-reflective object of consciousness,[80] a level of

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[77] Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 218.
[78] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 9.
[79] George Eliot neglects to include "and essence" in her English rendering of Feuerbach's text, and writes, "The imagination is the original organ of religion" (Christianity, p. 214). See Green, "Who's Afraid of Ludwig Feuerbach," p. 59.
[80] The problematical question regards whether this object is in fact another member of the species (which constitutes the ground for Feuerbachian "materialism") or whether this object is the nature of feeling in general, which confronts the individual on a pre-reflective (and, thus, perhaps pre-social or pre-material) level. The former reading is the most often held, though here I attempt to show that Feuerbach's troublesome treatment of the internal genesis of the "God" concept also intimates the latter. In either case, the end result is fear in the face of an *other*.

encounter which exists prior to the formation of the ontologically necessary God-concept that theological or speculative consciousness adopts as its object of inquiry, as the beginning and the end, as the "centre," of all thought. Feuerbach supposes a pre-reflective object of feeling and the imagination in that the first constitutes the human being's direct encounter with himself, with his "essence," before reflective consciousness can fashion the *other of feeling* as an ontologically distinct *other for thought*. In that he adopts the species concept as the proper object of consciousness, Feuerbach acknowledges the essential role of feeling and the imagination, while explaining the *other* in terms that are solely human. His claim, indeed, is to return to "concrete" human. In this sense, Feuerbach's species concept constitutes his attempt to reestablish the unity of feeling, lost in the God-concept of theological and speculative consciousness, and to invert ontology proper to Hegel by positing a human object or essence which preexists the ontological category of speculative philosophy and theology.

The Retrieval of Unity: Species-Consciousness and the Reversal of the Subject-Predicate Relation

Feuerbach, as has been discussed, contends that the divine object – be it the God of theology or the Absolute of Hegelian philosophy – has purely subjective existence: imaginative existence, that is, is engendered in response to consideration of the nature of feeling in general. The central place which Feuerbach accords feeling entails an inversion of Hegelian ontology, and alters the theological-speculative conception of what can be considered ontologically

necessary. Hegel assumes that the God-concept possesses necessary existence for thought, that the progressive rendering of God in terms of *Vorstellung* and *Begriff* is the necessary means of achieving unity of Being and thought, and that emotion merely provides finite spirit with a unity that is contingent in terms of content. In this way, it can be said that Feuerbach applies the Hegelian reading of feeling to the concept of God that stands at the centre of the Hegelian philosophy of religion. A person might hope or reason, that is, for an ontological principle to the point that it achieves unity of content, or exists immediately, in his or her mind; but this unity is engendered strictly within the world of the ego, and possesses no necessary existence in and for itself (*an und für sich*). Its content is contingent or one-sided. Here Feuerbach differs from Hegel and the latter's belief that thought resolves this disunity through its dialectical engagement with an ontological *other*. Feuerbach, however, does not take rest in the unified space of feeling, but contends that this feeling is indeed disrupted by fear, a disruption with which the human subject must come to terms as an *other*. Feuerbach establishes an object for the human being, which he calls the species. "Man is nothing without an object,"[81] he says in The Essence of Christianity; and, in this sense, he does not differ from Hegel, who also assumes that the human being requires an object for consciousness. But in keeping with the general tenor of this chapter, one should hold fast to the axiom that Feuerbach and Hegel differ precisely with respect to the nature of this object. Feuerbach's species concept – which, as I shall expand below, hovers somewhere vaguely between the world of sense and the world of thought – embraces the emotional and imaginative faculties of the

[81] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 4.

human being as essential instruments of human self-knowing. Hegel, whose philosophical voyage assumes that the subjective nature of emotive and imaginative content, requires a dialectical shift towards the universal thought object which exists necessarily in and for thought, suggests that unity can only be achieved when the ontologically necessary *other* of consciousness is apprehended in its pure speculative form. Hence the basic but essential comment that Hegel differs most fundamentally from Feuerbach – and, moreover, from Kant before him – with regard to the ontological assumption as such: for it is not a mere proof, on Hegel's terms, but a position or standpoint required by the structure of consciousness itself.

Feuerbach, indeed, supposes that "faith" (be it in God as an image and as a speculatively transfigured concept) "arises out of the structure of self-consciousness itself."[82] But in no way does Feuerbach claim that the emergence of this ontological *other* for consciousness, as an object of faith, is in fact necessary.[83] Rather, these objects are misconstrued forms of the species concept, which is first intuited by feeling, then falsely represented by the religious imagination, and lastly contemplated by theological and speculative consciousness as an object of pure thought. This triadic progression (or digression) is consistent with Feuerbach's view that thought absorbed in its own activity cannot function as the sole basis of reality:

> God, as a metaphysical being, is the intelligence satisfied in itself, or rather, conversely, the intelligence, satisfied in itself, thinking

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[82] Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion, p. 31.

[83] One must mark the distinction between the statements: 1) that *faith in the ontological concept* arises out of the structure of self-consciousness (e.g., for Feuerbach); and 2) that *the ontological concept itself* arises out of the structure of self-consciousness (e.g., for Hegel).

> itself as the absolute being, is God as a metaphysical being. Hence all metaphysical predicates of God are real predicates only when they are recognised as belonging to thought, to intelligence, to the understanding.[84]

To elaborate, the predicates that theological and speculative thought attribute to God find their basis in human intelligence, in reason; but, in that we are principally concrete or sensuous beings, we conceive of this thought-relation in terms which govern our empirical life: namely, by supposing that the thought of God arises from an object which has independent existence. So conditioned are we by our relationship with external things that we conceive the God-object, which arises strictly *in* consciousness, to share in the objective and necessary existence of the physical world. This basic misapprehension, that the relationship of empirical consciousness to the world transfers over to the world of thought acting upon itself, sews the fabric of the theological or speculative dream, and entails what was cited earlier as "the reversal of waking consciousness." The species concept, in effect, constitutes Feuerbach's attempt to bring humans back to wakeful consciousness, and to cast their encounter with the *other* in the light of day.

With respect to the precise nature of the religious dream, Feuerbach remarks elsewhere, "In the perceptions of the senses consciousness of the object is distinguishable from consciousness of self; but in religion, consciousness of the object and self-consciousness coincide." This is the sense in which "dreaming is the key to the mysteries of religion."[85] Once the religious vision is understood as a dream, then interaction with its images and doctrines becomes the measure of a

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[84] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 37.

person's self-knowing rather than a measure of his knowledge of a necessary *other* that necessarily exists for consciousness as a unified subject. The more a person attempts to understand the dream from within its weave, from the perspective of religious or speculative consciousness, the deeper he is submerged into fantasy, the more he misinterprets the passive object of thought (God or the Absolute) as an active object which possesses existence apart from him. This is the way in which Feuerbach disrupts the unity of the ontological assumption at work in religious and speculative consciousness, a unity which exists strictly through the "reversal of waking consciousness." For Feuerbach, indeed, Hegel's ontological assumption constitutes a reversal of wakeful thought precisely in that it first supposes the thought (or *Begriff*), then assumes its ontological necessity as an object, and then conditions an entire system of thought upon this illusory *other*. We move from thought, to object, to thought – an ontological circle that Feuerbach likens to the act of dreaming. Thus, although the religious and speculative modes of knowing assume a necessary ontological principle as their ground, and a unified engagement with it through consciousness, Feuerbach reinterprets the claim of *necessary* existence as nocturnal fancy, and puts forward his own vision in which the religious and speculative object is grasped "in the simple daylight of reality and *necessity*,"[86] as the species – the only concept which

[85] Feuerbach, Christianity, pp. 12, 141.
[86] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xix. Italics added.

grounds consciousness proper to human being, and which clarifies the nature of the disrupted state with which the religious dream begins.[87]

The species, indeed, constitutes the object of what Feuerbach calls "consciousness in its strict sense."[88] In the sense that he requires an object for thought, and that this object distinguishes "the man from the brute," Feuerbach does not differ from Hegel, for whom the God-concept is the necessary object of all thought, and that which grounds human consciousness. And, moreover, Feuerbach agrees with the Hegelian supposition that "religion is 'a fact' there to be accounted for."[89] Yet, as is suggested above, Feuerbach holds that we are more than beings whose reality can be explained for strictly in terms of our relation to an object of pure thought. The God-concept, or speculative *Begriff*, remains strictly an object of pure thought – with no objective or necessary existence independent from us. Hence Feuerbach's explanation (see above) that the metaphysical attributes of God are strictly reified predicates of human intelligence. There is no rational or speculative subject of which human thought necessarily achieves progressive knowledge. For Feuerbach, this is made evident through the phenomenon of religion, a relation which is epistemologically and ontologically dependent on human being alone, and specifically, on his consciousness of himself as a member of the species: his species nature. In this sense, and in this sense alone, religion is "identical with self-consciousness" – the "self-consciousness" of human being rather than that of an ontologically distinct

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[87] Harvey affixes the label, "objectification-alienation-reappropriation," to the dialectical process by which the individual represents and misperceives an infinite ontological subject, only then to retrieve or realize his essence through the recognition of his species nature.
[88] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 2.

subject that exists necessarily in *and for* thought. On Feuerbach's terms, no longer can "the philosopher" be "said to investigate, not the reality of any particular state of affairs, but Reality as such, as though this were an independent existing Subject."[90]

With the elimination of the *other* as subject, then, Feuerbach disrupts the principle of ontological unity which governs theological and speculative thought. Yet, in that he eradicates belief in this ghostly "chimera," he attempts to retrieve the unity which initially presents itself to consciousness through feeling – an emotive unity, the content of which Hegel deems subjective, mediate, and contingent.[91] The species, indeed, replaces the ontological God-concept of speculative theology, but is not an immediate or indeterminate subject in the sense of the *Begriff* formal to Hegel. It is present to thought, *not as a subject* that expresses essential unity with consciousness, but as an object, *the predicates* of which constitute the unified essence of the human subject. These predicates – Reason, Will, Affection (or Love) – are perfections of the human species, which are simply misapprehended and then reified as attributes of an ontologically distinct subject by the religious imagination.[92] There is, in other words, no subject – be it the represented God or the *Begriff* of pure thought – without the predicate. As Feuerbach writes:

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[89] Yerkes, Christology of Hegel, p. 52.
[90] D.Z. Phillips, "Feuerbach: religion's secret?" in Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 89.
[91] We must mark Wartofsky's claim that consciousness (and, thus, the human essence) is constituted by our nature as feeling, willing, and thinking beings (Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 262). My point is that the rift which occurs between the individual and his essence is largely an emotive one, and that the imagination gives representation to the intuited or emoted *other* which engenders the state of fear.
[92] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 3.

> What the subject is lies only in the predicate; the predicate is the truth of the subject – the subject only the personified, existing predicate, the predicate conceived as existing. Subject and predicate are distinguished only as existence and essence. The negation of the predicates is therefore the negation of the subject.[93]

This entails Feuerbach's inversion of the subject-predicate relation elemental to theological and speculative ontology. Nietzsche, of course, would later suggest that without the subject, God, the whole *Weltanschauung* must fall; and Sartre would put forth his famous dictum, "existence precedes essence." Feuerbach does not go as far as these thinkers do; yet, in that he suggests the death of the religious-speculative subject, God, his work invokes the end of the Passion story. Christ, God, the speculative *Begriff* – none is the subject of Feuerbach's drama. Religion is the "self-consciousness of man," and the absolute, "man's own nature." And as such, the predicates of the human species make up the genuine objects of religious consciousness.

Although the species concept is more earthbound than the God of religious consciousness or the Absolute of speculative consciousness – initially, at least, in that it constitutes a totality of flesh-and-blood, empirical beings, and does not seek to establish a necessary subject "elsewhere" – it cannot be considered a hermetic empirical category in and of itself (despite Feuerbach's claim that he is nothing but a "natural philosopher in the domain of the mind"). This, moreover, is due precisely to Feuerbach's understanding of human consciousness, for which he supposes an *infinite* horizon, a quality that one can easily claim to be *beyond* the reach of natural philosophy. Yet he attempts to bring this "beyond" to the level of empirical science, in supposing that this infinite horizon of consciousness is in

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[93] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 19.

fact a genetic marker of what it means to be human. Within the scope of his "genetic-critical" method, the infinity of consciousness is likened to the infinity experienced, though in a relative sense, by all living creatures.[94] His most famous statement in this respect regards "the leaf on which the caterpillar lives [which is] for it a world, an infinite space."[95] Yet what distinguishes species consciousness ("consciousness in its strict sense") from other modes of animal being is precisely that it is not limited strictly to the physical needs of "man;" rather, its object, the species, presents man with his unlimited essence. For in Feuerbach's terms, a limitation involves a reduction of consciousness to the level of "instinct," while consciousness in its strict sense is equivalent to consciousness of the infinite, insofar as the predicates of the species are *necessarily* infinite in scope.

In this sense, Feuerbach does away with the problematical Hegelian supposition of an ontologically distinct *subject* that exists for consciousness, but puts forward the equally troublesome notion that the species, the principal *object* of consciousness, presents human being with his objective and infinite essence. He writes:

> Consciousness consists in a being becoming objective to itself; hence it is nothing apart, nothing distinct from the being which is conscious of itself. How could it otherwise become conscious of itself? It is therefore impossible to be conscious of a perfection as an imperfection, impossible to feel feeling limited, to think thought unlimited.[96]

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[94] See Wartofsky, Feuerbach, pp. 91-94, for a discussion of the genetic concept in Feuerbach's works prior to The Essence of Christianity; and Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion, pp. 161-229, for a review of Feuerbach's later works, in which the genetic-critical method is realized in a manner that is free from the trappings of the Hegelian theory of consciousness.

[95] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 8.

[96] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 6.

Species consciousness, therefore, and in contrast to the consciousness of "the brute," entails more than being conscious of the limited domain in which one's physical needs and instincts take manifest form. It entails the individual's consciousness of the unlimited or perfect nature of his species. This is the sense in which Feuerbach distinguishes between the individual person and the universal species concept: namely, that the latter is present to the former as an object of consciousness, insofar as it presents the former with its unrestricted essence in a form that is distinctly human. He maintains the infinite horizon implied by the ontological framework of theological or speculative consciousness (which situates finite spirit in relation to infinite spirit through reason), *without* supposing the need for an ontologically distinct subject. Hence Feuerbach's controversial statement, "Consciousness, in the strict or proper sense, is identical with consciousness of the infinite,"[97] which supposes that the infinite is indeed an object of consciousness but not a necessarily existent subject. Species consciousness, as I cite above, necessarily supposes the human essence as the proper object of consciousness in that it "[this consciousness] is not distinct from the being which is conscious of itself." The species concept is engendered by the structure of self-consciousness itself, and only misapprehended and misrepresented by the religious imagination as an ontologically distinct subject.[98] And in this sense, the object of the religious-speculative dream can be called

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[97] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 2. Wartofsky's translation of the same sentence is even stronger in tone: "Consciousness, in the strict and proper sense, and consciousness of the infinite are indivisible." (In Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 273).
[98] Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion, p. 31.

"active" only insofar as it is a veiled form of the active essence of human being, the active presence to consciousness of the predicates of his species.[99]

Despite the abstract nature of his own discussion of species consciousness, Feuerbach's claim, indeed, is "to unveil existence, to see properly."[100] Yet the predicates which he claims to be the proper objects of consciousness, implied by the species concept, are better viewed, neither as empirical, nor as conceptual – but as existential categories. This can in part be attributed to the fact that humans are by nature physical, empirical beings, though their essence transcends the limitations of finitude when it is met on the infinite horizon of consciousness. The predicates of the species can be considered existential categories, moreover, in that the infinite nature of the horizon on which they emerge is first encountered in feeling, and not in a conceptual or speculative vacuum. They entail an understanding of the individual which supposes more for him than an ontological condition that can be realized fully only in thought – or, what is more, in the thought of something which is other than human. Wartofsky remarks:

> Unless feeling and willing are included, man's essence becomes abstractly intellectual. Man represents his essence to himself as much as an object of feeling and of will, as an object for thought. Under each of these modes, because it is a representation of his own essence and not of some other, man's consciousness is infinite.[101]

In this way, Feuerbach's vision of human being is not bound by the briars of speculative thought, which denies the essentiality (better: finality) of any mode or form of consciousness that has not yet conceived of the ontological *other* in the

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[99] Subject and predicate are one; or, as I say earlier, the theological-speculative subject has no real or necessary existence apart from the predicates which we assign to it when none properly belong.
[100] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xiv.

concepts of pure thought. On the other hand, that Feuerbach chooses what are in essence positive predicates – and more particularly, that these positive predicates must be Reason, Will and Affection (or Love) – is a supposition that tends toward the arbitrary.[102] Yet, in light of the Hegelian ontological category, which renders inadequate all forms of knowing that do not capture it in the medium of pure thought, Feuerbach's species consciousness better comes to terms with what he calls "flesh-and-blood man," particularly in that the objects which confront species consciousness are in fact representations of the essence – be it emotive, volitional, or rational – of fleshly human. In other words, they are representations of the inner world of human being, which, in the idealistic tradition, was considered the domain of the infinite.[103]

The perfect predicates of the species, indeed, as representations of the infinite essence of human being alone, undercut the subject-predicate relation of Hegelian ontology, which deems necessary for consciousness the presence of an ontologically distinct subject. But, as Harvey notes, in that Feuerbach is concerned principally with the inner world of human being, he "is preoccupied only with that aspect of consciousness that is conscious of the unlimited and infinite nature of consciousness itself,"[104] and not with consciousness in its relation to the objects of the external, empirical world. A symptom of this,

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[101] Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 272.

[102] See Essence of Christianity, pp. 21-25. One of Feuerbach's more dubious propositions with respect to "the species" runs thus: that the infinite perfection of the predicates, though not met in any one individual, is realized when the perfections of finite human subjects are totaled. (The sum is greater than the parts.)

[103] Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion, p. 37. "In the idealistic framework, finitude was basically taken to refer to whatever is determined by something external to it, whereas infinitude meant self-related or undetermined by another.... Consciousness could then be said to be infinite if it were determined by nothing beyond itself."

perhaps, is his infrequent slip into language typical of traditional ontology. "Reason, love, force of will, are perfections – the perfection of the human being – nay, more, they are absolute perfections of being,"[105] he says. This being so, Feuerbach never assumes that Being is a category which implies a unified existence of an ontological subject distinct from human being. Even in this last-quoted sentence, "being" refers strictly to what is essentially human, to the predicates of the human species that exist prior to the formation of an ontological *other*, which is first represented by the religious imagination, and then adopted as the governing principle of religious and speculative consciousness. Feuerbach confronts being at the level of human consciousness, *before* the point at which "'Being', that most general predicate, is reified by Hegel into an independent Subject."[106] This is the manner in which Feuerbach, through his conception of species consciousness, assumes an inversion of the subject-predicate relation central to theological and speculative ontology, and establishes the ground for his claim: "I do not generate the object from the thought, but the thought from the object." His species concept, that is, stops short the ontological argument implied in the Hegelian discussion of religious and speculative consciousness; "it recognises as the true thing, not the thing as it is an object of the abstract reason, but as it is an object of the real, complete man, and hence as it is itself a real, complete thing."[107]

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[104] Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion, p. 37.
[105] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 3.
[106] Phillips, "Feuerbach: religion's secret?" p. 90.
[107] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xv.

The object of the "real, complete" human being can be said to be real and complete insofar as our modern eyes view it as an existential category.[108] It is clear that species consciousness takes as its objects various representations of the human essence – the emotive, rational, and so on – without supposing that these representations must undergo transmutation so as to mirror or comprehend the speculative *Begriff* which, according to Hegel, necessarily exists as an *other* for thought. The predicates of the species, in other words, are not limited to the abstract realm of the intellect alone (as is the case with Hegel, insinuates Feuerbach). Yet it is difficult to determine the extent to which Feuerbach believes that his species concept is an object of *empirical* consciousness, an object that is determined in relation to the external world. The species concept, indeed, reflects a particular understanding of the human being as an empirical being, insofar as it makes empirical human – and *not* the God-concept – the subject proper of religious consciousness; but, more significantly, it implies that the individual is confronted with his own essence in a manner which cannot be deemed "empirical." "Consciousness," as I cite above, "consists in a being becoming objective to itself...." Similarly, elsewhere Feuerbach writes that "the consciousness of the infinite is nothing else than the consciousness of the infinity of the consciousness; or, in the consciousness of the infinite, the conscious subject has for his object the infinity of his own nature."[109] Thus, although Feuerbach divests religious consciousness of an ontological *other* that is distinct from "man," he proclaims for the latter an objective essence which cannot be viewed as a

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[108] This, as I have shown, is Harvey's supposition.
[109] Feuerbach, Christianity, pp. 2-3.

category of empirical knowledge as such. These intimations of infinity mark the problematical milieu of Feuerbach's species concept.[110]

It is in this respect that Feuerbach's species concept recalls the epistemological framework suggested by my earlier discussion of religious consciousness. For Feuerbach, one will recall, feeling and the imagination, neither of which can be an object of hermetic empirical (only perhaps phenomenological) analysis, express the original encounter of the human being with its own infinite essence. This runs counter to Hegel's claim that the ontological subject, which necessarily exists for thought, requires a passing over of the contingent unity, manifest in feeling and the imagination, to the necessary unity achieved through the speculative comprehension of the *other* in its pure form. While Hegel suggests that reason is the means through which finite spirit can be reconciled with the speculative "centre of thought," Feuerbach supposes that it distances the human subject concentrically from his original, anthropocentric state of unity. Reason intrudes so as to effect the hypostatization of the *other* represented by the religious imagination, the original *Vorstellung* of the human essence. In this way, Feuerbach puts forth an anthropocentric interpretation of reason: i.e., the reduction of "Reason" to "reason," of Reason (or Thought) as a subject to reason as a predicate of human being, a *Vorstellung* of

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[110] In light of the seemingly metaphysical nature of Feuerbach's conception of an infinite human essence or consciousness, Harvey asks: "Why does he [Feuerbach] identify the species idea with consciousness alone? Why is consciousness taken to be the 'essence' rather than embodies subjectivity?" See Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion, p. 49. I identify with Harvey's questions, insofar as Feuerbach does not provide a clear answer to them in The Essence of Christianity. I bring to the fore matters of the same nature in my next chapter, where I discuss Feuerbach's ostensibly ambivalent stance toward the imagination as a mode of human self-knowing

the human essence. He displaces the Hegelian centre, the essential unity of Thought and Being, with which all thought seeks progressive reconciliation.

Feuerbach, as has been suggested, does not suppose an ontological unity of human (what Hegel calls finite spirit) and Absolute, infinite subject. Yet, implicit in his species concept, through which the essence of human being is present to consciousness, is an implied unity of finite and infinite: the ontological unity of subjective, empirical human subject with its infinite and objective essence. This is implied in Feuerbach's claim that he considers "*universal* man... as the criterion of truth."[111] Thus, although Feuerbach holds that the unity implied in Hegel's understanding of religious and speculative consciousness entails a "reversal of waking consciousness," he supposes for wakeful thought a similarly unified ontological ground. Species consciousness, or wakeful consciousness, reflects the ontological unity of "man" with *himself*, the unity of concrete human with his objectified essence – a unity which recalls the original state that marks the beginning of human self-knowing: namely, the unity of feeling with itself. For it is only in response to this original unified state that fear takes hold of the human subject and initiates the emotive collapse, the state of seizure that is first misapprehended and represented by the religious imagination, and then hypostatized as a rational subject by theological and speculative consciousness. In that he supposes the necessity of fear in the pre-reflective stages of human consciousness, and in that he acknowledges that a wayward conception of ontology has been engendered as an expression of this fear, Feuerbach secures the proper place of his species concept in his overarching

conception of self-consciousness. The species concept is a necessary reflective concept, posited in order to bring about the original state of unity between the individual and his infinite essence through a reversal of the subject-predicate relation of ontology proper to theological and speculative thought. For Feuerbach, the species concept reflects, and is a means of retrieving the essential unity of human being. It is a means of achieving self-consciousness: namely, through a reversal of the state of disunity which necessarily constitutes the *represented* ontological condition of human being.

Implicit in Feuerbach's species concept, therefore, is an appropriation of the Hegelian assumption that the individual "is already implicitly aware of the Infinite as the ultimate horizon of all being... when he becomes reflectively self-conscious."[112] Species consciousness, although it entails a fundamental reversal of the ontology proper to religious and speculative consciousness, assumes a similar horizon for the human being: namely, the boundaryline of finite and infinite. As examined in the previous chapter with respect to Hegel, this is the boundaryline which distinguishes the human from the animal, and the region where the ontological concept arises necessarily for thought, first in a representational, then in a speculative garb. Feuerbach, however, cuts short the ontological assumption of religious and speculative consciousness by supposing that thought conceives of this unified subject only after the religious imagination has misrepresented (as an *other*) the unified object of feeling. Hence his epistemological critique, implicit in The Essence of Christianity, that the

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[111] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xxii. Italics added.
[112] Yerkes, Christology of Hegel, p. 73.

Vorstellungen of Christianity, and their transmuted speculative form (*Begriffe*), distance the human from his original place of emotive unity. Yet Feuerbach's position, despite his critique of religious consciousness and the ontology which rests at its base, supposes a unified ontology. His discussion of species consciousness, which implies an ontological unity of concrete human being with his own objective and infinite essence, gives rise to the possibility that the "atheism of [the] heart"[113] may have other ways of satisfying its yearnings for an *other*: the species concept being one more representation conjured by the imagination. For our purposes, it is not a matter of whether the species concept or the God-concept (or either) constitutes the proper object of consciousness. The greater suggestion, or at least the suggestion which lies beneath the surface of each ontological formulation, is that the human being requires an object, and that this object is infinite. "Man is nothing without an object,"[114] says Feuerbach.

Feuerbach's object, the "species," like the *Vorstellung* of religious consciousness, rests on the boundaryline of finite and infinite; and, like the imagination that gives rise to the representational forms of religious consciousness, "it solves the contradiction in an existence which is at once sensational and not sensational."[115] The contradictions inherent in Feuerbach's species concept, therefore, reflect the contradictions inherent in human existence, "which is at once sensational and not sensational," at once governed by one's encounter with the world and by thought. Thus, with respect to Feuerbach's

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[113] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 11.
[114] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 4.
[115] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 203. Feuerbach's words reflect upon the nature of the imagination, not that of the species concept.

claim, that "only the imagination is the preservative from atheism,"[116] the same thing can be said of his species-concept, which straddles that intangible wall between finite and infinite (perhaps this is what Hegel and Feuerbach call "consciousness"). I shall explore this possibility in greater depth in what follows, where I consider the place of the imagination on the road toward human self-knowing, as put forward in The Essence of Christianity.

[116] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 203.

Chapter 3

Feuerbachian Self-Knowing: The Imagination Reconsidered

In The Essence of Christianity, Feuerbach's position with respect to the imagination can be viewed as ambivalent, at best. Van A. Harvey shows great insight in his claim that it is not always clear how, in Feuerbach's view, the imagination and feeling are related to species consciousness, the principal concept of his work of 1841.[1] As outlined in the previous chapter, The Essence of Christianity puts forward a critique of reason as the epistemological mode which first distances humans from their original emotive mode of self-knowing, by abstracting the *other* (the species concept) as a distinct and unified subject which presents itself to human consciousness.[2] Yet Feuerbach also claims that the imagination is an essential attribute of human being; as Marx Wartofsky points out, the imagination is in no way an "imaginary" instrument,[3] but rather a mark of that which distinguishes human being and "the brute,"[4] namely, species consciousness. As was outlined in the previous chapter, Feuerbach reevaluates

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[1] Van A. Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 39.
[2] In this chapter, I shall suggest that Feuerbach considers "reason" itself to be a mark of imaginative representation.
[3] Marx Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 217.
[4] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 1.

theological and speculative knowledge as subjective (or imaginative) epistemological forms. Each finds its first root in feeling, the object of which it misapprehends and misrepresents reason as an *other*, and is, in this sense, an imaginative form, a *Vorstellung*. Feuerbach substitutes this subjective intuition with an objective essence, the species – for him, the only object of consciousness which cannot be subsumed under the rubric of feeling or the imagination, insofar as it is based on the interrelation of concrete human beings. This is the sense in which Feuerbach's species concept exists prior to its theological and speculative representational forms, and that in them it exists only in a veiled fashion, in a form transfigured by the imagination and systematized by reason. In the following chapter, I would like to expand upon Feuerbach's ambivalent position with respect to the imaginative faculty of human being, as represented in The Essence of Christianity. I follow Harvey in his belief that Feuerbach is not consistent with respect to his interpretation of imaginative thought, and take this as my point of departure for a closer reading of the place of the imagination in Feuerbach's view of human nature, circa 1841. Ultimately, I hope to illustrate, via Feuerbach's consideration of the Incarnation, the problematical way in which the imagination can be considered an infinite predicate of the species and, as such, the way in which Feuerbach's species concept is in some sense haunted by the unity and grandeur of the ontological concept he hopes to *inter*.

The extent to which the imagination fulfills or is detrimental to human self-knowing is the matter in question, and a matter which The Essence of Christianity leaves open to question. In one of its key passages, Feuerbach writes:

> To the immediately emotional man the imagination is immediately, without his willing or knowing it, the highest, the dominant activity... To him feeling is an immediate truth and reality; he cannot abstract himself from his feelings, he cannot get beyond them: and equally real is his imagination. The imagination is not to him what it is to us men of active understanding, who distinguish it as subjective from objective cognition; it is immediately identical with himself, with his feelings; and since it is identical with his being, it is his essential, objective, necessary view of things. For us, indeed, imagination is an arbitrary activity.[5]

The "immediately emotional" human, therefore, is absorbed entirely by the unity of feeling which exists within him, and responds blindly to its pull. Similarly, the objects of the imagination, the slaves of feeling, are experienced with an equivalent level of immediacy; the *Vorstellungen* exist for theological consciousness as manifestations of an active subject. The piquancy of Feuerbach's critique rests in the fact that speculative thought, too, is subsumed under the workings of the immediate imagination – the "dream" of which I spoke in the opening of my last chapter. The speculative concept, in Feuerbach's view, is not an end in which the contingencies of imaginative content find their essential resolution, but is itself a product of the "dominant activity" of the imagination. ("The *absolute* to man is his own nature."[6]) While it would seem that Hegel's finite spirit does "abstract [itself] from [its] feelings," in that it distinguishes between emotive and rational content, Feuerbach suggests that the act of speculative abstraction is symptomatic of the imagination's misapprehension of

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[5] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 133.
[6] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 5.

the initial unity of feeling which presents itself to consciousness – that speculative abstraction, too, is a form of subjective cognition.[7]

One can surmise that Feuerbach does not consider Hegel's thought to be that of an "immediately emotional" person in the sense cited above. For Feuerbach suggests that there is in fact a formal distinction between unity of feeling and unity of the intellect.[8] It is simply that speculative thought *imagines* the unity of the intellect with itself as a unity with an ontological other, and so is removed from species consciousness, or the objective essence of human being. Moreover, in that the workings of the intellect arise only in response to the initial emotive unity which confronts human being – and, moreover, in that the intellect effects the synthesis of what are first *imaginative* representations of feeling – Feuerbach implies that Hegel's speculative enterprise is twice removed from the emotive source of the religious impulse. If the speculative God-concept appears as the "essential, objective, [and] necessary" reality, it is only because it is itself a representational casting of the imagination, which is in turn only a servant of the heart, the omnipotent reign of feeling. This is the sense in which Feuerbach implies that Hegelian ontology reflects a dependence upon the initial unity of

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[7] As I state in my last chapter, however, the imagination is largely a pre-reflective mode of self-knowing (a slave of feeling). Yet there is a sense in which Feuerbach considers the imagination an active mode of reflection, insofar as it misperceives itself as reason and marks the genesis of theological and speculative philosophy, which attempt to systematize and overcome the contingent forms imposed upon this "rational" kernel by imaginative or representational thought. In this sense, the "reason" of theological-speculative thought, the *Begriff* of theological-speculative ontology, does not constitute the object of "consciousness in its strict sense" (Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 2), but is an object of subjective cognition.

[8] "The power of the object over him [man] is therefore the power of his own nature. Thus the power of the object of feeling is the power of feeling itself; the power of the object of the intellect is the power of the intellect itself; the power of the object of will is the power of the will itself" (Christianity, p. 5). In each case, the "object" of which Feuerbach writes is the human essence itself. Here one should recall Marx Wartofsky's insight that consciousness is constituted by

feeling, and that the mind of the philosopher finds its first home in the heart, from which it flees, with the imagination as its guide.

This is not to say that Feuerbach, who suggests that human beings are subjects to the omnipotence of feeling, puts forward a view of religious experience which runs parallel to that suggested by Schleiermacher. German Idealism in its broadest sense, in fact, is challenged by Feuerbach's critique of religion. In one of his more revealing passages, Eugene Kamenka suggests that religion, for Feuerbach, arises as a result of "man's recognition of his helplessness." He points out that Schleiermacher, too, supposes that religion finds its ground in human "dependence" upon something *other*:

> The concept of dependence in Feuerbach, however, as he himself emphasizes, is "no theological, Schleiermachian, mystical, indeterminate, abstract feeling".... It is not Schleiermacher's vague metaphysical "dependence", as felt by the finite when confronted by the shoreless infinite. It is the concrete empirical dependence of man on nature and other men.[9]

What separates the human from the animal is precisely that "man is *conscious* of his dependence." In other words, species consciousness, what Feuerbach calls "consciousness in its strict sense," can be distinguished from religious consciousness insofar as it assumes that humans are aware or conscious of their species nature.[10] As suggested above, however, Feuerbach does not suppose that a person is necessarily conscious of his or her species nature. Religion, indeed, is

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feeling, willing, and thinking; and that consciousness, thus understood, constitutes the essence of human being (Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 262).

[9] Eugene Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), p. 41.

[10] "Religion is the *alienated form of man's recognition of his own nature*. Theology, on the other hand, is *the theoretical alienation of man's nature, as not yet his own*" (Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 200). Species consciousness, or objective cognition, constitutes a retrieval of the human essence, unimpaired by the lens of religious self-knowing or theological-speculative self-alienation.

symptomatic of a lack of human self-knowing: the earliest and also indirect form of self-knowledge." For, "when religion – consciousness of God – is designated as the self-consciousness of man, this is not be understood as affirming that the religious man is directly aware of this identity; for, on the contrary, ignorance of it is fundamental to the peculiar nature of religion."[11] For Feuerbach, then, feeling and its subaltern, the imagination, indirectly reflect the dependence of humans on their empirical surroundings. The "real world," so to speak, is the originative domain of the species concept, which is for him the proper object of "consciousness in its strict sense." Yet it is an attribute unique to the religious person that he remain unaware of the precise way in which his consciousness is conditioned by the empirical world; and so, too, is he unconscious of the source of the omnipotent feeling which reigns over him.[12] The religious person, to whom Feuerbach refers above as "immediately emotional man," is seized between the world of sense and the world of feeling, a condition which finds its epistemological corollary in the imagination, whose "entrancing splendour"[13] absorbs the dreamer into his dream.

As I have noted earlier, however, Feuerbach critiques speculative theology for carrying out the selfsame dream, though in a more involved fashion, in that its operative organ of inquiry, reason, furthers the state of disunity implied by the cognitive affliction of "immediately emotional" humans.[14] Theological

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[11] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 13.
[12] For an expansion of the way in which Feuerbach considers feeling and reason to be subjective affirmations of God's presence for consciousness, see his chapter entitled, "The Contradiction in the Revelation of God," Christianity, pp. 204-12.
[13] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xix.
[14] Hence Feuerbach's ultimate distinction between faith and love: the first of which is fashioned by reason, and produces an inward as well as an outward disunion in human being; the second of

consciousness takes as its object of inquiry something other than the human essence; and thus, though it claims to distinguish the imagination "as subjective from objective cognition," on Feuerbach's terms it fails to recognize that its necessary object (*Begriff*) is equally an unveiling of imaginative thought. The speculative philosopher, although a person of "active understanding," is similarly caught up in the overarching dominion of the imagination. In Feuerbach's view, the speculative "Absolute" implicitly reveals that "man, as an emotional and sensuous being, is governed and made happy only by images, by sensible representations. Mind presenting itself as at once type-creating, emotional, and sensuous, is the imagination."[15] That speculative thought effects the synthesis of forms of thought which are "at once type-creating, emotional, and sensuous," reinforces the way in which Feuerbach accuses the speculative philosopher of doing that which he principally seeks to avoid: namely, operating a level of "subjective cognition." This is the sense in which Feuerbach undercuts the very process by which speculative philosophy endeavours to reconcile the subjective content of feeling and religious representation with the objective and necessary content of the universal object of thought. For him, both poles belong essentially to the realm of subjective cognition; and, by consequence, the necessary concept (*Begriff*) of speculative philosophy is reclaimed as a representational truth, is subsumed under the workings of the reflective imagination.[16]

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which restores the unity of the human essence, becomes a manifest principle of activity between members of the species, and "heals the wounds which are made by faith in the heart of man." See Christianity, pp. 247-69.

[15] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 75.

[16] As I remark in a note above, I use "reflective" imagination in contradistinction to "pre-reflective" imagination. The latter, a slave to feeling, is the mode of self-knowing of religion, while the "reflective" imagination is indicative of that mode of self-knowing (or alienation) which

Marx Wartofsky marks the way in which Feuerbach restates the presumed relationship, in speculative thought, between subjective and objective modes of thought, as well as its related belief in the necessary identity of thought and Being. Summarizing Feuerbach, Wartofsky writes that Hegel "falls prey to a representation of the Imagination – this 'achieved' Identity – and takes it to be the object of philosophy itself, a truth about Being itself, whereas it is, on critical examination, only a formal truth." In support of his claim, Wartofsky draws from Feuerbach himself:

> This unity of subject and object is a principle which is as unfruitful as it is pernicious for philosophy, especially because it overrides the distinction between the subjective and the objective, and frustrates any attempt to deal with genetic-critical, conditional thought, or with the problem of truth. Hegel was led to take representations which expressed merely subjective needs, as objective truths, because he failed to go back to the origins, to the needs which give rise to these representations in the imagination, and took them, instead at face value.[17]

Here it becomes evident that the assertions which Feuerbach puts forward in The Essence of Christianity with respect to the "immediately emotional" person, can be credibly transposed onto the speculative theologian or philosopher, despite Feuerbach's independent claim that the speculative thinker abstracts the emotive and imaginative condition of human being. This abstraction or synthesis of the object of consciousness constitutes the shift from a pre-reflective to a reflective mode of the imagination. According to Feuerbach, speculative philosophy is blind to the *representational* nature of its vision precisely because it has lost sight

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misperceives itself as reason, so as to give birth to the ontological concept of theological and speculative consciousness. Although these terms are not found in The Essence of Christianity itself, I believe they help clarify much of what is at stake in Feuerbach's work.

[17] Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 192.

of the pre-reflective origin of religious consciousness. Likewise, the *Begriff*, the assumed necessary centre of all thought, is for him a creation of the imagination, and a further manifestation of the human representational impulse. It, too, finds its origin in the "subjective needs" of human beings, though these needs are misapprehended and abstracted by reflective thought: hence Feuerbach's insight in The Essence of Christianity that "man, as an emotional and sensuous being, is governed and made happy only by images, by sensible representations."[18] Ostensibly, the speculative philosopher explains the essence of human being solely in terms of the abstract intellect; in this sense, finite spirit cannot be construed as "immediately emotional" being. Yet, as stated above, Feuerbach's accompanying claim is that the abstract concept which orients the consciousness of the speculative thinker is similarly a manifestation of the imagination – the imagination which has abstracted itself from its emotive source. And, insofar as this is the case, "finite spirit" is not destined to realize its rational essence so as to mirror (*speculum*) or comprehend an absolute object of pure thought, but is principally ignorant of its original condition as an "emotional and sensuous being" guided by subjective yearnings. Speculative philosophers, in their search for "happiness," or what we can accurately substitute with "unity," misconstrue their subjective needs as objective truths, and are thereby seized by a state of disunity – by what is effectively an unhappy consciousness. The speculative thinker is propelled by the same "hunger and thirst"[19] put forward by Feuerbach as the originary impulse of religious consciousness. The speculative thinker is

[18] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 75.
[19] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 277.

driven by the same desire to fashion a representational fabric out of which to recover a unified image of the human essence.

Thus we are left with a twofold reflection on speculative thought. In one sense, Feuerbach charges speculative philosophy with abstracting humans from their essence by way of strictly rational concepts – and for neglecting the emotive and volitional (even imaginative) ground of the human essence.[20] Conversely, he implies that the speculative philosopher is guided *blindly* by the pull of the imagination, and that he follows the siren-call of feeling *unwittingly*. With respect to our analysis of Feuerbach, the latter observations are the more fruitful, insofar as they beckon us on to a closer reading of the role played by the imagination in Feuerbach's own formulation of species consciousness in The Essence of Christianity. For Feuerbach does not claim that the push and pull of feeling and imagination is destructive as such. Rather, he embraces feeling and the imagination as creative modes of human self-knowing insofar as human beings remain *conscious* of their dependence upon the emotive and imaginative impulse.[21] As long as one is not conscious or the pre-reflective origin of one's religious impulse, it is "the work of the self-conscious reason... to destroy an illusion – an illusion, however, which is by no means indifferent, but which, on the contrary, is profoundly injurious in its effect on mankind."[22] The illusion of religion and of speculative philosophy is injurious insofar as it assures the absorption of human being into a dreamed beyond, where he encounters the

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[20] Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 272.

[21] In the religious stage of self-knowing, this comprehension is, in some sense, not possible, i.e., insofar as the imagination operates on a pre-reflective level and has not yet effected the theoretical abstraction of humans from their species essence.

passive objects of the understanding as active objects of an *other*,[23] thereby denying him authentic existence in his proper sphere of reality, the world. Hence Feuerbach's implied distinction between "reason" of speculative philosophy and what he calls "self-conscious reason" – the *Begriff* of the first simply being a *Vorstellung* of the reflective imagination. Insofar as speculative thought constitutes a dream-like "reversal of waking consciousness," it constitutes, on Feuerbach's terms, a mode of subjective cognition. Its "essential organ" is not self-conscious reason, but a rational impulse governed by the reflective imagination itself.

In light of this discussion, one could question the extent to which Feuerbach's species concept itself constitutes a position that is fashioned out of the depths of imaginative representation. For it, too, like the imagination, "solves the contradiction in an existence which is at once sensational and not sensational."[24] The Hegelian conception of consciousness also entails that finite spirit mediates between the "sensational" (the finite) and the "not sensational" (the infinite); and like species consciousness, or "consciousness in the strict sense," it aims to solve the contradiction in an existence that takes place at the boundaryline of finite and infinite. But species consciousness differs in one important respect: insofar as it is grounded on an encounter with a concrete, bodily *other*[25] – viz., a member of the human species – it supposes an empirical being as the "absolute" object of consciousness, and the means toward a realized

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[22] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 274.
[23] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 140.
[24] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 203.

form of "absolute" self-knowledge.[26] On similar grounds, Feuerbach suggests that there is an objective and *infinite* human essence, an essence that we derive from our fellow species-members. He acknowledges that there is such a thing as a finite understanding, what he calls "subjective conception, *i.e.*, one which does not arise out of the general constitution of my species." [27] Speculative philosophy, which misapprehends the universal object of consciousness (the species) as a unified and independent *other*, rests on the subjective side of understanding, on the side of the reflective imaginative rather than of rational truth; it ignores the pre-reflective origin of the religious object, and conceives that its ontological concept possesses epistemological priority over feeling and the pre-reflective imagination.[28] Species consciousness, contrarily, entails an awareness of the universal object *before* it is reflectively enshrouded by the imagination and then is adopted as the necessary object of rational inquiry (as in theology and speculative philosophy). Species consciousness rests on the side of "objective cognition" insofar as it preexists the representational place of genesis of the speculative *Begriff*.[29] "If my conception is determined by the constitution of my species, the distinction between what an object is in itself, and what it is for me [*as, for example, in the imagination*] ceases; for this conception itself is an

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[25] Van A. Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 32.
[26] Not in the Hegelian sense of "Absolute Knowing" as a rational comprehension of the concept, but as a stage of self-knowledge that cuts short the rational journey of the Phenomenology and where the speculative object is understood as a created form of the imagination.
[27] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 16.
[28] "All therefore which, in the point of view of metaphysical, transcendental speculation and religion, has the significance only of the secondary, the subjective, the medium the organ – has in truth the significance of the primary, of the essence, of the object itself" (Christianity, p. 9).
[29] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 76.

absolute one."[30] Awareness of the species concept, therefore, assumes a mode of objective cognition which precludes the need to satiate human "hunger and thirst" through imaginative representation (or reflection), a genus of which is the speculative concept.

This is the sense in which Feuerbach attempts to get beyond the metaphysical relationship of finite and infinite implied by the rational dogmatism of theology and speculative philosophy, *without* doing away with the belief in an infinite as such. Unlike Kant, Feuerbach does not claim that the infinite lies permanently beyond the finite. He still conceives of the infinite dialectically, insofar as infinity is a mark of the human essence and is constitutive of the formal structure of human self-consciousness. He embraces the infinite as a mark of species consciousness in that species consciousness is a translated form of religion, which entails "consciousness of the infinite; thus it is and can be nothing else than the consciousness which man has of his own – not finite and limited, but infinite nature."[31] In that it assumes an infinite horizon of existence, Feuerbach's theory of species consciousness is – at least ostensibly – troublesome. How can he speak of an "infinite" without summoning, from the grave of theology, the ghostly forms of metaphysics? In one of his earliest writings, Hegel cautions against this very thing, stating that an examination of "the relation between man and the Christian religion" cannot proceed "without becoming in the end a metaphysical treatment of the relation between the finite and the infinite."[32]

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[30] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 16 (bracketed words, my own).
[31] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 2.
[32] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Early Theological Writings, trans. T.M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), p. 176. This passage predates the Phenomenology by

Interestingly, in order to avoid lapsing into a treatment of that nature, Hegel himself suggests a starting-point similar in tenor to that of The Essence of Christianity. He writes: "I am here assuming from the start that human nature itself of necessity needs to recognize a Being who transcends our consciousness of human agency, to make the intuition of that Being's perfection the animating spirit of human life."[33] The young Hegel's words put forward an exceptionally Feuerbachian perspective, particularly if one substitutes the term "species" for "Being." Moreover, in that his words suppose that human being manifests an existential *need* to "recognize a Being who transcends our consciousness," they echo the underlying assumption of Feuerbach's claim that human beings are "nothing without an object,"[34] and specifically, that human beings are driven by a "hunger or thirst"[35] for unity through this object.[36] That humans intuit the perfection of this object, and that this awareness constitutes the essence or "animating spirit" of existence, evidences a further likeness with Feuerbach, who contends that "the divine being is nothing else than the human being, or, rather, the human nature purified, freed from the limits of the individual man, made objective – i.e., contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being."[37]

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approximately ten years, and cannot be considered a form of the Hegelian system to which Feuerbach responds in The Essence of Christianity or elsewhere. Walter Kaufmann argues that Hegel's early writings would be better labelled "anti-theological," insofar as they argue against the positivity of Christian doctrine. See Kaufmann, Hegel: Reinterpretation, Texts, and Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965).

[33] Hegel, Early Theological Writings, p. 176.

[34] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 4.

[35] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 277.

[36] This "hunger and thirst," however, is manifested uninhibitedly by the pre-reflective imagination. The reflective imagination, by contrast, in some sense abstracts itself from the object of human yearning and gives rise to an alienated ontology.

[37] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 16.

Freedom from limitation, from finite individuality, constitutes "infinity" proper to Feuerbach only insofar as the individual does not attempt to reflect an *imagined* escape from the natural dictates of finite existence, but rather comes to contemplate his or her infinite essence as a member of the species: to retrieve the pre-reflective human essence. But Hegel's general question remains: that is, whether Feuerbach's analysis of the relationship between human being and Christianity becomes "in the end a metaphysical treatment of the relation between finite and infinite." The issue is a particularly problematical one, due principally to the fact that Feuerbach's idea of species consciousness, which distinguishes between subjective human being and objective human essence, assumes a relation between finite and infinite, particular and universal, that is inherent in most metaphysical positions. Granted, Feuerbach does not assume a traditional metaphysical stance, if one takes him on his own terms: that is, insofar as these binaries – finite/infinite, particular/universal – are articulated with reference to human beings alone, and not to some objective and infinite *other*. Yet the very proposition of a universal human essence entails that there is something "more real" than the judgment of individual human beings.[38] And thus, with respect to our current discussion, the question arises as to whether Feuerbach's species consciousness, what he calls "objective cognition," takes as its object something that is in fact a represented form of the imagination – whether it, too, is strictly a form of subjective cognition.

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[38] See Frederick M. Gordon, "The Contradictory Nature of Feuerbachian Humanism," Philosophical Forum VIII/2-4 (1977) 44.

As I have suggested, indeed, Feuerbach puts forth a broadened view of the human imaginative impulse, to the extent that speculative or metaphysical abstraction is subsumed under the workings of an active imagination, of subjective cognition.[39] Yet he maintains that "the species is *not* an abstraction; it exists in feeling, in the moral sentiment, in the energy of love."[40] Max Stirner, whose Ego and Its Own advanced one of the earliest and most thorough critiques of The Essence of Christianity, put forward the following charge: "The meaning of the law of love is perhaps this, that everyone must have something that stands over him (*das ihm über sich geht*). That object of holy love is the spook."[41] Insofar as this is the case, Feuerbach's "species" does in fact constitute an abstraction; it becomes an "ideal" or, in our terms, a *Vorstellung* of something that is conceived to be superior in essence to finite human, the subject proper of Feuerbach's work. Stirner's critique does not charge Feuerbach with giving in to imaginative thought as such; his accusation, rather, is that Feuerbach's "species" is an abstraction of the intellect. Stirner's general claim is that Feuerbach, while eliminating the infinite subject of theology, introduces an infinite and universal object that contradicts its sister-notion that the human being is a finite and sensuous being. "Feuerbach," he says, "allows the predicate to persist as an ideal – as a definition of the essence of the species, an essence which is 'imperfectly realized' in individual man as the 'complete essence of the perfect man.'"

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[39] See Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 76.
[40] Feuerbach, Christianity, pp. 268-69 (emphasis mine).
[41] Cited in Max Stirner, "Stirner's Critics," trans. Frederick M. Gordon, Philosophical Forum VIII/2-4 (1977) 75. This short work of 1845 is a rejoinder to an equally short writing of the same year by Feuerbach, written in response to Stirner's The Ego and Its Own (1844). The majority (approximately two thirds) of Marx's and Engel's work, The German Ideology, is devoted to a criticism of Stirner, to whom they refer ironically as "St. Max."

Speaking of himself in the customary third person, Stirner elaborates: "'The primary illusion,' says Feuerbach, 'is God as subject.' Stirner showed, though, that the primary illusion is rather the idea of the 'perfection of human nature' and that Feuerbach who champions this basic prejudice with all his might is therefore exactly like a true Christ."[42] Stirner's allegation is that Feuerbach has made an idol of the human species, and accordingly, that the objective essence of humanity is, to use Feuerbach's own phrase, "a ghostly chimera." Moreover, his condemnatory reference to Feuerbach as "a true Christ" supposes that Feuerbach's "species consciousness" is no more of a revealed truth than that which traditional theology supposes for the Incarnation. The species-concept, Feuerbach's "basic prejudice," does not mirror an already-existing truth, but rather is predicated upon an imagined one: the idea of a perfect and infinite human essence. According to Stirner, The Essence of Christianity articulates a particular *form* of reversal of tradition theological and speculative ontology; but, in so doing, Feuerbach's book presents traditional theological-speculative revelation in a new incarnational garb. This is the sense in which Stirner repudiates Feuerbach's claim that species consciousness entails the form proper of objective cognition, or the means of achieving knowledge of a "human essence." In the terms of our current discussion, Stirner implies that species consciousness, too, is a product of the reflective imagination.

Stirner, indeed, implies that Feuerbach's species-concept constitutes an abstraction that is no different from the religious *Vorstellung*, the speculative *Begriff* it usurps, insofar as it too supposes an incarnate, infinite essence for

[42] Stirner, "Stirner's Critics," p. 76.

humanity. For him, the attribution of this essence to the predicates of the species, rather than to the individual subject, entails a theoretical rather than an essential transformation of ontology. What, indeed, is the particular nature of Feuerbach's claim that species consciousness does not rest on the side of "subjective cognition," of the reflective imagination? How does his species-concept differ from the imagined forms of theological and speculative representation? If, as Feuerbach claims, the human being "is governed and made happy only by images," does it not stand to reason that his species-concept itself constitutes a manifest or imagined *Vorstellung*, one which also takes root in the "hunger and thirst" which guides "immediately emotional man," as well as the theologian and speculative philosopher? In light of these questions, Stirner's likening of Feuerbach to Christ can be viewed as more than sheer rhetorical flourish. It propels us, indeed, to question Feuerbach's own consideration of the Incarnation, for him, the *Vorstellung* which symbolizes the necessity of *the imagination* for human consciousness. Yet, how the representational value of the Incarnation, a manifest form of the human imagination itself, is related to species consciousness is something on which Feuerbach offers no elaboration.

Feuerbach suggests that Christ-incarnate has no metaphysical existence as a subject distinct from human consciousness; instead, the second person is none other than "the nature of the imagination made objective." "The Son is the satisfaction of the need for mental images, the nature of the imaginative activity in man made objective as an absolute, divine activity."[43] The Incarnation, in other words, reflects the human need to *represent* human predicates as those of an

imagined divine *other*. As Van A. Harvey observes, however, the symbolized Son, for Feuerbach, does not simply satiate the human need to think representationally. "It is not just that the religious mind needs to transform the abstract being of the reason into an object of sense and imagination; it is that this image must itself be regarded as divine."[44] In the same way that Feuerbach eliminates the distinction between God-as-subject and the predicates that have been applied to the divine being, he alters the theological distinction between the "Son as a metaphysical reality and the image of the Son."[45] This is the sense in which Feuerbach considers "indefensible" (Harvey) the notion of an incarnational metaphysic. It constitutes the mirror image of what he considers a dubious ontological subject. The Incarnation is neither a historical, mythological nor a representational image of an infinite object (including the species), but is a representational image of the human imaginative faculty itself.[46] According to Feuerbach, that "the definitions of the second Person are principally images or symbols," does not suggest that human beings must necessarily conceive of this *other* in representational form; for "these images do not proceed from man's

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[43] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 75.
[44] Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion, p. 81.
[45] Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion, p. 81.
[46] In his *Das Leben Jesu* of 1835, fellow "young" Hegelian David Friedrich Strauss suggested that Christ was in fact a symbol of the human species: that for the historical Christ, one must substitute the historical species; that "the two [human and God] are not essentially distinct." (See D.F. Strauss, The Life of Jesus Critically Examined, trans. George Eliot, ed. Peter C. Hodgson [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 777].) In this sense, for Strauss the Christ-event remains a *Vorstellung* of the species, in which finite and infinite conjoin. Feuerbach differs particularly in his suggestion that the Incarnation is nothing but the human imagination projecting itself in symbolic form. As a result, the Incarnation has no *representational* value in the general Hegelian sense, i.e., as a mode of picture-thinking which reflects an infinite object (be it the God-concept of theology *or* Feuerbach's "species"). Instead, it is through-and-through an image, which, at most, reflects the centrality of the imagination for species consciousness – though this, unfortunately, is a point upon which Feuerbach remains silent. As shall be suggested later, there is ground for

incapability of conceiving the object otherwise than symbolically, – which is an altogether false interpretation, – but the thing cannot be conceived otherwise than symbolically because the thing itself is a symbol or image."[47] For Feuerbach, therefore, the Incarnation does not point to an infinite reality beyond its representational fabric. It remains on the side of "subjective cognition," of the imagination – what he considers "an arbitrary activity"[48] – and appears as a symbol for the very reason that it is nothing more than a symbol. Thus, while speculative philosophy assumes a similar relativization of pictorial thinking, it maintains the necessity of the imagination for religious consciousness insofar as the representational husk of religious *Vorstellung* is shed so as to reveal a necessary thought-concept. For Feuerbach, Christ, the *Vorstellung* is the human imagination made objective; and insofar as this is true, theological and speculative inquiry, which assume the necessity of an incarnational object for thought, are entwined in the web of the imagination.[49]

The precise place of the imagination in Feuerbachian epistemology, however, is difficult to discern, particularly with respect to the Incarnation, his treatment of which gives greatest consideration to the imaginative activity of human being. On the one hand, Feuerbach asserts that the represented Christ satisfies the human need to think in images – a view which would seem to run parallel with his claim that humans are governed and made happy only by

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arguing that Feuerbach's treatment of the Incarnation is itself a mirror form of his discussion with respect to the species predicates.

[47] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 75.

[48] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 133.

[49] Feuerbach, Christianity, pp. 74-76.

images.[50] Under this assumption, the boundaries of imaginative thought – or the omnipotence of feeling – extend to the point where they encompass even the conceptual framework of theological and speculative inquiry: i.e., insofar as the theologian and speculative philosopher remain unaware that their objects of inquiry reflect an ontological principle which is encountered first through feeling, and only then is given representational form by way of the imagination.[51] It is in this sense that theological and speculative thought exhibit the selfsame "hunger and thirst" which reigns over the "immediately emotional" person. On the other hand, Feuerbach argues that the imagination is an arbitrary activity, and that it is, by those of "active understanding," understood as a subjective mode of cognition. He claims, moreover, that humans are not incapable of thinking otherwise than symbolically,[52] and by inference, that the incarnational ground of religious *and* speculative consciousness is based upon an imagined principle of ontological necessity: "how blinded by prejudice dogmatic speculation is, when, entirely overlooking the inward genesis of the Son of God as the Image of God, it demonstrates the Son as the metaphysical *ens*, as an object of thought, whereas the Son is a declension, a falling off from the metaphysical idea of the Godhead."[53] Thus, although the *Begriff* of speculative thought is itself subsumed

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[50] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 75.
[51] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 133. Feuerbach's discussion here, to reassert, pertains to the religious or "immediately emotional" human. Although theology and speculative thought assume reason as their proper instrument of inquiry, and deem emotive and imaginative content as subjective in nature, each is grounded upon a principle of ontological necessity which Feuerbach deems imaginary. Insofar as this is the case, and in keeping with this chapter's general interpretation of The Essence of Christianity, Feuerbach suggests that neither theology nor speculative philosophy can be said to be a form of "objective cognition," but rather that each should be understood as a manifest form of the reflective imagination. This conclusion can be read as another means of articulating Feuerbach's reversal of Hegelian ontology.
[52] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 75.
[53] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 76.

under the imaginative, and hence the emotive activity of the individual, by no means does it reflect a necessary mode of thought or a principle of ontological necessity as such. Rather, it fails to recognize its dependence upon pictorial thought, its essentially subjective place of genesis, and gives false assent to a rational framework, which, presumably, actualizes the "objective" or "necessary" content of the central object of consciousness. This lack of cognizance, a lack of what Feuerbach refers to as "self-conscious reason," is symptomatic of the essentially imaginative nature of both religious *and* speculative thought. Self-conscious reason, by contrast, retrieves the pre-reflective essence of human being.

With respect to our current discussion, this is the sense in which the imagination is for Feuerbach an arbitrary activity, despite his simultaneous conviction that the imaginative faculty is necessary for human beatitude. The Incarnation is not a necessary symbol, but is in essence, like all forms of pictorial thought, arbitrary.[54] Feuerbach's treatment of the Incarnation, in other words, has this as its significance: that it attempts the reduction of Christ to a symbol, and by extension, redefines as imaginative all thought which takes the Incarnation or any other symbol as its *necessary* centre. Simply put, the imagination in general is necessary for human happiness; a particular *Vorstellung* is not.[55] One can suggest

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[54] These thoughts are based particularly on p. 75 of The Essence of Christianity. For Feuerbach, the incarnational principle, or what Marx Wartofsky calls a "metaphor," is common to all religious thought, and is not simply a motif of Christian revelation: "... beyond this particular 'Christian' sense, Feuerbach takes incarnation as an essentially *religious* concept, in general, a characteristic element in *any* religious consciousness whatever" (Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 226). This, I believe, is one more way in which Feuerbach distances himself from Hegel and his ultimate position that Christianity, as the "Revealed" or "Manifest" religion, imparts to humans the ground of Being, in a way that the other religions do not.

[55] This is perhaps the clearest possible summation of Feuerbach's estimation of imaginative thought in The Essence of Christianity, though he does not state the matter so simply, but instead waffles between an affirmation and a condemnation of the imaginative faculty of human beings (see Christianity, pp. 74-78).

this despite Feuerbach's claim that Christ-incarnate "is in fact no devised, no arbitrary image; for it expresses the necessity of the imagination, the necessity of affirming the imagination as a divine power."[56] The Incarnation is not an arbitrary image insofar as it expresses the necessity of the imaginative faculty which engenders it, and *not* because it reflects the necessity of an infinite subject that has existence in and for itself.

Despite this seemingly apologetic interpretation of Feuerbach's statements regarding the imagination, Feuerbach's ultimate position with respect to the imaginative faculty of human being remains ambiguous. His clearest suggestion is that theological and speculative consciousness is necessarily conditioned by the imagination.[57] Yet, if the imagination is in fact a necessary form of human being, as Feuerbach claims, then it remains a fact to be accounted for in his general discussion of species consciousness, and not merely something to be understood as an illusion or a hindrance to the recognition of one's species nature, one's infinite essence.[58] Despite his frequent allusions to this "infinite essence," it could well be argued that Feuerbach, both in his discussion of species consciousness and in his erratic comments regarding the imagination, manages to

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[56] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 75.

[57] Wartofsky, too, stresses the fluid boundary which divides rational and imaginative thought. With respect to speculative philosophy, he writes: "The images as objects of feeling are given the status of *thoughts* as objects of reason. This self-deception is the characteristic error of that power of imagination that mistakes itself for reason proper" (Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 231).

[58] This, again, points toward the distinction Feuerbach makes between the "immediately emotional" person and the person of "active understanding," the one who takes the imagination at "face value" and the one who understands the "origins" of image formation. (See citation in Wartofsky, Feuerbach, p. 192). The issue can be restated in terms of whether the imagination is a "creative" or a "destructive" human attribute, a point upon which Feuerbach remains inconclusive. I borrow the "constructive/destructive" contrast from James A. Massey's discussion of belief in the "illusion" of personal immortality. See Massey, "Introduction," in Ludwig Feuerbach, Thoughts on Death and Immortality, ed. and trans. James A. Massey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. xli.

avoid the metaphysical trap of which Hegel warns in his early writings.[59] On one level Feuerbach accomplishes this insofar as he argues that his species-concept exists prior to the genesis of the imaginative, metaphysical vessels of theological and speculative thought (*Vorstellung* and *Begriff*).[60] His claim, in other words, is that the illusion of a metaphysical essence does not come into being until the illusory distinction between subject and predicate has been abstracted by the reflective imagination and, hence, by rational thought:

> Only when God is thought abstractly, when his predicates are the result of philosophic abstraction, arises the distinction or separation between subject and predicate, existence and nature – arises the fiction that the existence or the subject is something else than the predicate, something immediate, indubitable, in distinction from the predicate, which is held to be doubtful.[61]

Insofar as Feuerbach understands this metaphysical *ens* or subject as a "declension" of *what is first* an object of the imagination,[62] speculative philosophy, which assumes Being or the subject as a *first*-principle of thought, is entwined in the web of the reflective imagination.[63] It takes its abstract concepts as manifestations of an "immediate" and infinite reality, and fails to understand

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[59] Hegel, Early Theological Writings, p. 176.

[60] On Hegel's terms, of course, the ontological concept exists prior to the point where it is comprehended by thought. The God-concept *is*, "irrespective of our thinking." See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "The Ontological Proof According to The Lectures of 1831," Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion III: The Consummate Religion, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. Peter C. Hodgson *et al* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 352.

[61] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 20.

[62] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 76.

[63] Wartofsky remarks that, in Feuerbach's view, contradiction does not exist for the imagination as such (what I call the pre-reflective imagination), but is unique to rational thought. (See Wartofsky, Feuerbach, pp. 232-233). Rational thought is the realm proper of theology and speculative theology, is the place where contradiction first arises (an imagined contradiction, insofar as it is based on an imagined principle of ontological unity). Wartofsky's point offers an interesting counter-interpretation to my suggestion in the last chapter, that Feuerbach's introduction to The Essence of Christianity suggests an *emotive* place of disunity, or something similar to what Wartofsky calls "contradiction." These need not be viewed as mutually exclusive points; they hinge instead, I believe, on the distinction between rational contradiction and emotive disunity – though each signals a state of inner discord.

the nature or genesis of concept-formation (here with respect to the imagination).[64]

Feuerbach, indeed, supposes that imaginative representation does not become a vehicle for a metaphysical relation between finite and infinite until it has been abstracted by reason, which itself is personified or "imagined" by speculative thought as an ontologically distinct, infinite subject.[65] Religion simply accepts these imagined forms as "immediate" attributes of a divine *other*, and does not attempt to argue about the nature of an infinite essence. It is theology which first announces the distinction between subject and predicate, divine image and anthropomorphism, existent infinite *other* and imagined idol.[66] And thus it is theology which first announces the break of dawn of metaphysics, the metaphysical relation of finite and infinite, appropriated and abstracted by speculative thought in its discussion of *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*. Feuerbach attempts to cut short the process by which finite and infinite find metaphysically relation in the imagination, and dissolves the ontological distinction upon which speculative thought is predicated: "the antithesis of divine and human is altogether illusory," he says, "and is nothing else than the antithesis between the

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[64] D.Z. Phillips makes the important observation that Feuerbach's "emphasis on concept-formation is not an emphasis on origin instead of truth, but an emphasis on how certain philosophical concepts can be formed in a way which distorts the realities of human existence." D.Z. Phillips, "Feuerbach: religion's secret?" in Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 88. This is a theme which Feuerbach takes up two years after the first appearance of The Essence of Christianity, in Principles for a Philosophy of the Future.

[65] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 76.

[66] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 25. The religious person, in other words, encounters his "God" as a sensuous being, much as he encounters the objects of the sensuous world. This immediacy is lost in theological and speculative consciousness, which work under the assumption that there is a more immediate level of encounter, precisely what Feuerbach suggests is an *imagined* leap from the constraints of sensuous existence (Christianity, p. 214).

human nature in general and the human individual."[67] The distinction between the individual and the species, according to Feuerbach, supposes no *imagined* or metaphysical relation insofar as it exists prior to the genesis of concept formation which gives birth to metaphysics proper.

One should here recall that Feuerbach *does* suppose an infinite essence for human being, an essence that can be apprehended in the predicates of the species.[68] These infinite predicates arise as objects of consciousness only as a result of interaction between finite members of the species – a point which serves as the ground for Feuerbach's general denial of metaphysical (or essentially imaginative) thought, and his specific claim that he is "nothing but a *natural philosopher in the domain of the mind.*"[69] Yet, one must also juggle Stirner's counterclaim that "love," one of Feuerbach's species predicates, constitutes an abstraction[70]: in terms of our discussion, that it is itself a figment of the human imagination. How, indeed, does Feuerbach maintain a solid divide between his idea of species consciousness and the imagination, when he deems the latter a

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[67] Feuerbach, Christianity, pp. 13-14.

[68] This is the fuel for many critiques of Feuerbach, ranging from fiery reproaches of the more left-leaning "young Hegelians," Max Stirner and Karl Marx (with Engels), to the dampened criticism of more recent academic articles. For a firm example of the latter, see Frederick M. Gordon, "The Contradictory Nature of Feuerbachian Humanism," Philosophical Forum VIII/2-4 (1977) 31-47. For the general Marxist evaluation, see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The German Ideology, ed. C.J. Arthur, trans. Lawrence and Wishart (New York: International Publishers, 1974), pp. 39-96. (For Marx's canonical, "Theses on Feuerbach," see pp. 121-123 of the same volume.) Van A. Harvey's critique is perhaps the strongest recent monograph of this sort, insofar as it does not dismiss all of Feuerbach, but only what the author deems the "convoluted" strand of thought which runs through The Essence of Christianity. Harvey carries out his critique, moreover, not on the terms of Hegelian philosophy, but in light of the clear, "naturalist-existentialist" project that one finds in Feuerbach's later writings and lectures. See Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion.

[69] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xiv.

[70] Stirner, "Stirner's Critics," p. 76.

necessary attribute of human self-knowing?[71] How is the "species concept" itself not a *Vorstellung* of imaginative thought, a reaching out for something that rests beyond the limits of sensuous existence?

Herein, one might suggest, lies a fundamental place of ambiguity with respect to Feuerbach's conception of species consciousness. While Feuerbach affirms the existence of essential and infinite predicates of the human species – particularly his trinity: intelligence, love, and will – he argues that the imagination, too, is an essential and necessary attribute of human being. And although he does not make the selfsame claim, that the imagination is a "predicate" of the species that is reified as an attribute of a divine *other*, he puts forward what can be interpreted as a mirror argument in his treatment of the Incarnation: that Christ is the manifest form of the imaginative impulse reified as an *other*; and that it is, like the predicates of the species, an "activity in man made objective as an absolute, divine activity."[72] The difference, indeed, is that the pre-reflective imagination is a necessary mode of human self-knowing, but that its objects, which are apprehended by theology on a reflective level, are not. The imaginative impulse as such is necessary, its objects arbitrary, while species predicates find their confirmation in a person's encounter with concrete objects:

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[71] Feuerbach, Christianity, pp. 74-76.

[72] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 75. This is something that interpreters of Feuerbach neglect to mention. Harvey, however, makes the important point that "the image [of the Second Person] itself must be regarded as divine," though he draws no parallel between this necessity and the predicates of the species. (See Harvey, Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion, p. 81.) We are left, moreover, with the obscure triad: if (1) the imagination signifies a freeing from the limits of sense, or itself is the "limitless activity of the senses" (Christianity, p. 214), and (2) the Incarnation is "only the nature of the imagination made objective" (p. 75), then (3) the Incarnation, is *nothing but the limitless activity of the senses made objective*. The Incarnation, on these terms, becomes the birthplace of theological-speculative metaphysical forms (*Vorstellung* and *Begriff*) and consequently, the very ground for Feuerbach's critique of theological and speculative thought.

namely, fellow members of the species.[73] Love, along with other the "infinite" predicates of the species, is rooted in the senses, insofar as it manifests itself between concrete, sensuous members of the species. This is the sense in which Feuerbach can claim that species consciousness, or "self-conscious reason,"[74] does not contradict sense certainty, though it offers a particular form of reach beyond the limits of finitude: "Follow the senses! Where the sense take over, religion and philosophy come to an end. And you have as a consequence the plain, shining truth."[75]

In light of this treatment of the imagination in The Essence of Christianity, however, the "truth" (here: species consciousness) can be said to be neither "plain" nor "shining." The imagination serves as an interesting point of discussion insofar as it points the reader toward a consideration of Feuerbach's greater claim to have penetrated the truth with his blade, the species concept. Above, Feuerbach claims that the species concept is necessary insofar as it is predicated upon the apprehension of a concrete and empirical *other*. The content of imaginative thought, by contrast, is arbitrary and signifies the "limitless activity of the senses."[76] This is the only manner in which the imagination "solves the contradiction in an existence which is at once sensational and not sensational."[77] Yet, what is it that makes the species predicates as necessary to human consciousness as the objects of sensuous experience? Do they not signify

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[73] This is the main argument of Feuerbach's defense against Stirner's claim that love is an abstraction. See Ludwig Feuerbach, "The Essence of Christianity in Relation to The Ego and its Own," trans. Frederick M. Gordon, Philosophical Forum VIII/2-4 (1977) 81-91. A summary of this short tract can be found in Wartofsky, Feuerbach, pp. 423-24.
[74] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 274.
[75] Feuerbach, "The Essence of Christianity in Relation to The Ego and its Own," p. 85.
[76] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 214.

something "more" than their sensuous referent, viz., one's fellow member of the species? The "truth," in this sense, is not so "plain" or "shining."[78]

This point is furthered with respect to the necessary status which Feuerbach accords the imagination in the framework of human self-knowing, and moreover, to his treatment of the Incarnation as a mark of the necessity of the imaginative impulse of human being. To make use of the terms with which this chapter began: Is it simply that individuals of "active understanding" understand the arbitrary nature of imaginative content; that they can distinguish between the "necessary" species concept and the "arbitrary" representations of religious and speculative consciousness? Or is the imagination so necessary that even those of active understanding are dazed by its "entrancing splendour"[79]? For, as "emotional and sensuous" beings, we are, according to Feuerbach, "governed and made happy only by images, by sensible representations."[80] And this, indeed, can be understood as an indicator of the necessary place which imaginative thought holds in Feuerbach's understanding of human self-knowing, and by consequence, in his idea of the species concept itself. With respect to the necessity that Feuerbach accords the pre-reflective imaginative impulse of human being, one must question whether the species-concept, like the representational fabric of theological and speculative thought, is in fact a further unveiling of the incarnational metaphor, a further *Vorstellung* of the human imagination. Consideration of the imagination in The Essence of Christianity points to the

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[77] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 203.
[78] It is in light of this that many (e.g., Stirner and Marx) begin their respective reproaches of Feuerbachian philosophy.
[79] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xix.

ultimately problematical nature of Feuerbach's claim to have retrieved the essence of human being, to have penetrated the space which exists prior to the formation of the ontological concept.

[80] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 75.

Conclusion

Insofar as Feuerbach deems imaginative thought a necessary impulse of human self-knowing, one is left wondering whether his species-concept, in The Essence of Christianity, constitutes an object imagined: a form greater than or beyond "the senses" – what Feuerbach considers the realm of "the plain, shining truth,"[1] where both religion and philosophy meet their necessary end. This, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was the initial criticism launched against Feuerbach's Christianity by Max Stirner, who claimed that all ideals to which the individual bowed down in worship, including the secularized "perfections" of moral humanism, were godly abstractions.[2] Does Feuerbach, in his species-concept, unearth a ghostly chimera from the graveyard of theological and speculative thought? Marx and Engels, indeed, suppose this much, and suggest that "the species" is simply a secularized form of the religious or speculative Absolute it usurps from the throne of "self-consciousness," while for them the

[1] Feuerbach, "The Essence of Christianity in Relation to The Ego and its Own," Philosophical Forum VIII/2-4 (1977) 85.
[2] The author's own summary of The Ego and Its Own can be found in Max Stirner, "Stirner's Critics," trans. Frederick M. Gordon, Philosophical Forum VIII/2-4 (1977) 66-80.

entire empire of the human essence must fall.[3] Yet the duo's appreciation of Feuerbach's philosophical endeavour is evident: Marx and Engels claim that Feuerbach both accepts and resists "existing reality" and that he goes "as far as a theorist possibly can, without ceasing to be a theorist or a philosopher."[4] Feuerbach achieves *philosophical* rather than *real* liberation, a criticism that is sharpened in Marx's famous "Theses." There, Marx suggests that Feuerbachian materialism, what he calls "contemplative materialism," fails to "comprehend sensuousness as practical activity."[5] Feuerbachian materialism, indeed, differs from the Marxist version, insofar as it hinges on a conception of a human essence. Yet it would be uncritical simply to dismiss Feuerbach's position on Marx's terms, without recourse to an examination of Feuerbach's work itself.[6] The point at which Feuerbachian materialism (or the "sensuousness" which predicates his conception of species consciousness) intimates a principle of immateriality is heightened by consideration of the imagination as a critical device in The Essence of Christianity.

Ultimately, an analysis of the imagination announces the generally ambiguous nature of Feuerbachian species consciousness in The Essence of Christianity. As has been argued in the preceding pages, for Feuerbach, imaginative thought is the birthplace of what he considers to be alienated forms of consciousness: the theological and the speculative. The Hegelian articulation of

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[3] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The German Ideology, ed. C.J. Arthur, trans. Lawrence and Wishart (New York: International Publishers, 1974), p. 40.
[4] Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, p. 61.
[5] Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," supplementary text to The German Ideology, "Thesis IX," p. 123.

ontology was the subject proper of my first chapter, in which *Vorstellung* and *Begriff* functioned as the concepts through which the theological and speculative articulations of an ontologically necessary *other* could be brought to greater light. Representational and conceptual forms of truth, as was argued, reinforce Hegel's ultimate ontological principle, that both religion and philosophy "find their ultimate centre in the one thought of God"[7] – religious *Vorstellung* as the God-concept in figurative or imaginative garb, and *Begriff* as a vessel for rational truth, freed from the chains of imaginative representation. According to Hegel, I argued, Christian *Vorstellung* suggests the existence of an ontological concept, or *Begriff*, which exists necessarily *prior* to its comprehension in thought by finite spirit. The Hegelian philosophy of religion puts forward the twofold supposition that Christian dogma enshrouds the ontological concept, which exists as an ontologically distinct subject, but that the representational husk of Christian *Vorstellung* must undergo transmutation so as to mirror or comprehend the ontological concept in its pure speculative form.

In my second chapter, I attempted to sketch out the epistemological framework of The Essence of Christianity, a framework which inverts the theological and speculative expressions of traditional ontology. More specifically, I attempted to reveal the manner in which Feuerbach's inversion of Hegelian ontology hinges upon an interpretation of reason as an essentially subjective human instrument of knowledge. For Feuerbach, I suggested, reason

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[6] One should here recall Sass' argument that Feuerbach offers an alternative reading of Marxist materialism. Hans-Martin Sass, "The 'Transition' from Feuerbach to Marx: a Re-Interpretation," Studies in Soviet Thought 26 (1983) 123-142.

abstracts and effects the synthesis of an *imagined* object, and is not a mirror (*speculum*) or medium in which a necessary *other* can be known in its essential purity, once its representational husk has been shed. In order to communicate this reversal of Hegelian ontology, I sought to sketch out the way in which Feuerbach differs from Hegel in his estimation of feeling, the imagination, and reason as modes of self-knowing. Feuerbach, in essence, dissolves the distinction between contingency and necessity by which Hegel argues for the ontological necessity of the speculative concept. The very notion of a unified and infinite *other* is reclaimed as an object of an ontological dream, an object of the imagination, and is replaced, in Feuerbach's design, by the human species – the concept which effects a reversal of the subject-predicate relation proper to Hegelian ontology.

In my third and last chapter, I attempted to outline the ambiguous nature of Feuerbach's treatment of the imagination in The Essence of Christianity. On one level, I strove to reinforce the manner in which speculative thought itself can be viewed, on Feuerbach's terms, as a genus of imaginative representation. On another level, I hoped to show the way in which the imagination for Feuerbach, despite his claim regarding the essentially arbitrary nature of imaginative content,[8] is for him simultaneously an essential attribute of human self-knowing. This was complemented by Feuerbach's treatment of the Incarnation, in which one finds a mirror argument for the imagination as a predicate of the species, in a way which leaves Feuerbach's understanding of species consciousness open to

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[7] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion I: Introduction and The Concept of Religion, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. Peter C. Hodgson *et al* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 84.

serious criticism. I suggested this, despite Feuerbach's explicit position that species consciousness constitutes "objective cognition" proper,[9] a form of consciousness which embraces the human imaginative impulse, so long as we remain conscious of and mediate the arbitrary or "subjective" nature of imaginative objects themselves[10] (including and especially the ontological absolute, which, for Hegel, is the speculative *Begriff*).

In the pages which precede me here, I have attempted to show that the most significant shift in The Essence of Christianity is the ontological reversal which grounds both his reading of speculative philosophy and his "translation" of the "images" proper to Christianity.[11] On his terms, moreover, the species concept is the sublated or realized form of the ontological concept.[12] Yet, insofar as Feuerbach offers us a "translation" of religious and speculative ontology without rejecting belief in the human essence itself, his species concept remains at the problematical boundaryline between finite and infinite, at the horizon upon

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[8] Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), p. 75.

[9] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 133.

[10] This is in contradistinction to the view of Garrett Green, who claims that Feuerbach's view of the imagination is essentially hostile. See Garrett Green, "Who's Afraid of Ludwig Feuerbach? Suspicion and the Religious Imagination," in Christian Faith Seeking Historical Understanding: Essays in Honor of H. Jack Forstman, eds. Duke and Dunnavant (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), pp. 45-65. In the few sections of The Essence of Christianity where Feuerbach struggles specifically with the nature of imaginative knowledge, I have argued that there lurks an implicit affirmation of the imaginative impulse as a creative mode of human self-knowing.

[11] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xiii. That Feuerbach accepts "religious discourse" as factual, and its objects of devotion as literal, is the main point of (Wittgensteinian) criticism in Stephen P. Thornton, "Facing Up to Feuerbach," International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 39 (April 1996) 103-120.

[12] An objection, that this supposes a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the ontological concept, is suggested by Hegel throughout his Berlin Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Walter Jaeschke argues that, so long as one is faithful to the precise nature of dialectical development in Hegelian thought, Feuerbach's anthropological interpretation of religion *cannot* be understood as the realized form of the speculative *Begriff*. Walter Jaeschke, "Speculative and Anthropological Criticism of Religion: A Theological Orientation to Hegel and Feuerbach," trans. Dale M. Schlitt, Journal for the American Academy of Religion XLVIII/3 (Sept. 1980) 345-364.

which one finds religious *Vorstellung* according to Hegel.[13] Feuerbach, in this sense, is no iconoclast, a point which Stirner takes as his ground for his interpretation of the species perfections as abstractions.[14] This, moreover, is a further way in which a reading of the imagination as a central mode in the epistemology of The Essence of Christianity gives rise to the general level of ambiguity which characterizes the Feuerbachian "translation" of religious consciousness. The imagination, according to him, "solves the contradiction in an existence which is at once sensational and not sensational," and in this sense is the only "preservative from atheism."[15] On the terms of a religious iconoclast or a more extreme hermeneutist of suspicion, however, Feuerbach's species concept can be read in the selfsame manner.

This potential interpretation of the species concept in The Essence of Christianity arises *in spite* of the fact that the "infinite" according to Feuerbach differs from the conception of his master – in spite of the fact that it is what I shall call a *relative* rather than an *absolute* infinite, a distinction which hinges once more upon each thinker's stance with respect to the principle of ontological necessity, the theme which gives pulse to much of the discussion in this thesis.[16] The suspicious interpretation suggested above, moreover, arises *because* of the

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[13] This "boundaryline" frames much of my analysis in chapter one, and marks much of the discussion about religious consciousness in James Yerkes, The Christology of Hegel (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

[14] Stirner's "Ego," however, does not reflect the most extreme of iconoclastic categories, a view put forward by Marx and Engels in their German Ideology. Through and through iconoclasm, in fact, is perhaps not fully realized until Nietzsche, who leaves almost nothing untouched by his fire, and who rejects even the "I" of western philosophy as a prejudice which philosophers "baptize" as truth. See particularly Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Basic Prejudices of Philosophers," Book 1 of Beyond Good and Evil, in The Basic Writings of Nietzsche, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 2000).

[15] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 203.

fact that Feuerbach's species concept, though it does not imply an ontological reality that exists beyond the limits of finite existence, supposes an "infinite" horizon for the human essence, an infinite principle of historical materialism. On this front, Feuerbach writes:

> I firmly believe that many things – yes, many things – which with the short-sighted, pusillanimous practical men of to-day pass for flights of *imagination*, for ideas never to be realised, for mere chimeras, will to-morrow, *i.e.*, in the next century – centuries in the individual life are days in the life of humanity – exist in full reality. Briefly, the 'Idea' is to me only faith in the historical future, in the triumph of truth and virtue.[17]

In other words, Feuerbach's species concept, the grounding principle of his historical materialism, implies a belief in the potential resolution of the contradictions in historical existence. And thus, like the imagination, "which solves the contradictions in an existence which is at once sensational and not sensational," it functions as a further "preservative from atheism,"[18] insofar as it assumes belief in the infinite possibility of the human species, the infinite capacity to overcome contradictions, or things which pass in present times for "flights of the imagination."

Feuerbach's belief in the infinite potential of the species, reflects, I believe, his unwillingness to relinquish the metaphor of an infinite principle itself. He adopts, indeed, what can be viewed as a figurative or transfigured form of the infinite *other* which grounds Hegelian ontology, and in so doing, further reflects the necessary place of imaginative or representational thought on the inner road of

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[16] Despite Feuerbach's rejection of an *absolute*, infinite ontological concept, he affirms the infinity of the human species, r*elative* to the finite nature of the individual.

human self-knowing. One cannot help but mark Feuerbach's tendency to appropriate religious images as vehicles for a veiled form of infinite truth, as the *Ur-Text* of the "translation" that is The Essence of Christianity. The presence in that work of what Marx Wartofsky calls an "incarnational metaphor" has already been noted.[19] And, as I suggest in my last chapter, insofar as the incarnation serves as a mirror argument for the necessary place of the imagination in human self-knowing, the incarnational metaphor illustrates the way in which Feuerbach cannot entirely break away from representational thought, although he attempts to do just that. The very terms with which he distinguishes species consciousness from reflectively imaginative (theological and speculative) thought are yielded to him, in fact, by the ontological framework he attempts to dissolve. To cite again from a central passage in this regard:

> To the immediately emotional man the imagination is immediately, without his willing or knowing it, the highest, the dominant activity.... To him feeling is an immediate truth and reality; he cannot abstract himself from his feelings, he cannot get beyond them: and equally real is his imagination. The imagination is not to him what it is to us men of active understanding, who distinguish it as subjective from objective cognition; it is immediately identical with himself, with his feelings; and since it is identical with his being, it is his essential, objective, necessary view of things. For us, indeed, imagination is an arbitrary activity....[20]

The distinction between subjective and objective cognition, arbitrariness (contingency) and necessity, are embedded in the representational fabric of traditional ontology. In this sense, although Feuerbach attempts to divorce

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[17] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. xiv (emphasis mine). Referring to this passage, Feuerbach writes, "I attach myself, in direct opposition to the Hegelian philosophy, only to *realism*, to materialism in the sense above indicated."

[18] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 203.

himself from the ontological *other* of religion and philosophy, he cannot escape the metaphorical presence of an infinite *other* in his own discussion of species consciousness – an observation, some might argue, which reflects the principle of ontological necessity itself. From this perspective, Feuerbach's inconsistencies with respect to the imagination reveal that he is in the grip of an idea which he does not have categories adequate to convey, and that he must resort to speaking in a representational manner about the traditional dualities of speculative ontology (subjective/objective, finite/infinite, arbitrary/necessary). Although these terms are relativized in light of the fact that Feuerbach denies an absolute ontological concept, they illustrate the metaphorical or representational value that such a concept necessarily holds for human self-knowing, and reveal the essentially iconic purpose of the Feuerbachian species concept itself.

Feuerbach himself deems *imaginative* the fabric of the ontological "reality" that serves as the object of religious and speculative consciousness.[21] The thought-icons of religion and philosophy are, for him, without dimension or base. Yet, insofar as he argues that the imagination is a necessary impulse of self-knowing, and insofar as he gives voice to the terms of traditional ontology in a figurative form, his own representation of reality (species consciousness) becomes

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[19] Marx W. Wartofsky, Feuerbach (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 226-228.
[20] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 133.
[21] The *Begriff* itself becomes a metaphor, or a manifest form of what A.V. Miller, in his translation of Hegel's Phenomenology, calls "picture-thinking." I would like to point the reader to the first paragraph of that book's last chapter, "Absolute Knowing," where Spirit recognizes the nature of its representational condition thereto. While a poet often consciously *creates* figurative form, Spirit *sheds* its pictorial-rational husk and becomes fully self-conscious only when it recognizes itself as having been constituted of figurative-rational forms (*Vorstellungen*). Feuerbach extends the domain of imaginative thought, and subsumes the *Begriff* under the rubric of representation, thus implying the figurative nature of the Hegelian awakening to self-consciousness. This is of particular interest here, but begs for significant analysis elsewhere.

a vehicle for a veiled form of the infinite *other*. It is thus that an examination of the imagination in The Essence of Christianity points to the relatively problematical nature of Feuerbach's species concept. One finds that Feuerbach puts forward an ontological position which evidences a longing for an infinite horizon, the "hunger and thirst"[22] of religion and philosophy. There, one encounters the infinite horizon of traditional ontology presented in a veiled or metaphorical garb – without the necessary *Begriff*. What theological or speculative ontology lacks in terms of earthly "reality," it makes up for in terms of the principle of necessity that grounds it (much as the dimension that a sacred icon lacks, in terms of time and space, is made up for by the ontological horizon it is believed to represent). That Feuerbach speaks of an infinite horizon of existence, that he casts an image of an infinite in figurative terms, reveals that he may be in the grip of an idea which he does not have categories adequate to convey. Yet, as I suggest in chapter 3, Feuerbach affirms the necessity of a pre-reflective imagination – *before* the emergence of reflective imaginative activity, which misperceives itself as reason proper and marks the birthplace of the ontological concept. Feuerbach's conviction, that the emotive and imaginative impulses precede the formation of an ontological concept, is precisely what separates his reading of the Christian religion from Hegel's. Insofar as the species concept of The Essence of Christianity suggests the necessity of the imaginative impulse, or the power of images on the inner road of human self-knowing, it points to a pre-reflective horizon that is at once within and beyond religion and philosophy – and thus, perhaps, to the possibility of an ontological principle itself.

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[22] Feuerbach, Christianity, p. 277.

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