

interpretation

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Volume 13 number 3

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Individuation and Commonality in Feuerbach's "Philosophy of Man"

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The place of Ludwig Feuerbach in European intellectual history is usually understood, appropriately, in light of his concomitant aims of critically reformulating Hegelian philosophy on a materialistic basis, and exposing the "anthropological essence" of religious belief. Feuerbach himself intended the chief product of this dual project to be a "new philosophy" grounded in the affirmation of, and a more concrete understanding of "man" as such. At least after 1839, Feuerbach came to believe that such a new "philosophy of man" was needed to combat and overcome the alleged oppressiveness (for the "human spirit") of both Hegelian speculative philosophy and especially Christian religious doctrine.¹ Since he was really the first notable philosopher to extract himself from the then-dominant idealist "system" provided by Hegel, and subsequently engage in what appeared to be a radical critique of that system, and because of the novelty and thoroughness of his reduction of "religious truths" to "human truths," his work also was greeted with a great deal of enthusiasm at the time by other thinkers who were becoming disillusioned with Hegelianism. Frederick Engels, for example, acknowledged years later in looking back on the period of the early 1840s, when Feuerbach's influence in Germany was at its peak, that in response to his work ". . . we all became at once Feuerbachians."² Of course, it eventually became clear to at least Engels and Karl Marx that Feuerbach's "new philosophy" of "flesh and blood" human life remained, for the most part, abstract and idealist in its own right, ignoring as it did the actual, historically determined material relations between human beings that constituted the true sources of oppression and alienation in their lives.³

Even given the legitimacy of the charge that Feuerbach's "philosophy of man"

1. In 1839 Feuerbach's book *Philosophy and Christianity* was published. Prior to this time, as will be pointed out, he was actually a proponent of Hegelian philosophy in all his writings, and this text was the last one in which he would actively defend Hegelianism against its opponents. After 1839 Feuerbach became one of Hegel's most vocal critics. The text is found in *Ludwig Feuerbach: Sämtliche Werke* edited by Wilhelm Bolin and Friedrich Jodl (Stuttgart: Frommann 1903–11), Vol. III.

2. Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, found in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Works in Two Volumes* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), Vol. II, p. 368. The original German text was published as *Ludwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie* (Berlin, 1886).

3. Cf. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, translated by Clemens Dutt, W. Lough, and C. P. Magill, and reprinted in its entirety in *Karl Marx / Frederick Engels: Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, and New York: International Publishers, 1976), Vol. 5. The principal elements of their critique of Feuerbach are to be found in Part I of this text.

does not go nearly far enough towards an adequate materialist view of human existence, it can still be argued that, particularly in his analyses of the “human essence” and of human “species life,” he has provided us with some accurate and important insights into various dimensions of human experience. In what follows I will restrict myself to an analysis of what I believe to be this more positive contribution to the field of inquiry nowadays called “philosophical anthropology.” Specifically, I will attempt to evaluate and to make some sense of Feuerbach’s perspective on the dynamics and the outcomes of interpersonal relations, and of his position that “essential human nature” itself cannot be understood apart from the constitutive role that these relations play in conscious life.

As background for the present inquiry, it should be pointed out first that in the earlier part of Feuerbach’s intellectual career he saw himself as a faithful follower of Hegel rather than as a critic, one who was carrying on and further clarifying the Hegelian philosophical project. In most of his written works during this period Feuerbach took an explicitly Hegelian standpoint, often even defending Hegel against the latter’s many opponents. However, almost from the start Feuerbach in effect ‘anthropologized’ much of Hegel’s idealist metaphysics, while still viewing himself as *not* having departed from the basic philosophical categorizations and “system” of his (then) mentor. For example, in Feuerbach’s doctoral dissertation, which again was a self-consciously Hegelian work, he maintains that “man” as such *is* Spirit, and that the essence of “man” (of the *human species* taken as a whole) *is* Reason in the sense that Reason *is* universal and self-unified, just as the species is essentially a unitary, universal being.⁴ Apparently here, Feuerbach did not think that the Hegelian notions of Absolute Spirit (*Geist*) and Universal Reason referred to some supreme superhuman, or *non-human* Being which merely embodied itself in humanity as part of its progressive self-actualization. This ‘supreme being’ for Feuerbach *is* mankind itself, seen as a unity constituted by the community of living, conscious human beings. The species only exists, however, in so far as it actualizes *itself* in individual human beings, but at the same time the human essence is only to be found in the universality of *Geist*, Reason, and thus also thought, itself taken as a supra-individual reality. In this characterization of the essence of “man” then, Feuerbach does retain the organicist perspective of Hegel as well:

. one can say that the human being is not born, but is developed. For in nature, he is not a thinking being, but a reason-less being who is completely separate from others. Reason is not inborn, or implanted, as magnetic force is in a magnet. Nor does it grow

4. The dissertation (hereafter referred to just as the “*Dissertation*”) was titled “*De ratione, una, universali, infinita*”—*Dissertatio inauguralis philosophiae Auctore Ludovico Andrea Feuerbach, phil. Doct., Erlange MDCCCXXVIII*. Written in Latin, it was first published in German in *Ludwig Feuerbach: Sämtliche Werke* edited by Wilhelm Bolin and Friedrich Jodl, Vol. IV. The passage quoted here in English was translated by Marx Wartofsky, and found in his book *Feuerbach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 43. I should note in passing that I consider Wartofsky’s text to be the best study of Feuerbach available in English, and I must acknowledge the major influence that this text has had on my own investigations.

in man as fruit does on a tree. As a single individual man has no part of Reason at all. For Reason is community, universality; but man as a single individual is completely divided and separated from every other As reason is a communal thing, not an in-born property of single individuals, so man, unless he lives in a community, cannot attain to Reason. He comes to Reason not by himself, but through the actual presence of Reason in the form of a living community From the very beginnings of the race, we find man in living communities. Animals are animals as single individual beings; men are men only as one man, as the human race, as a whole, as a community. The origins of Reason, insofar as they are present in single human beings, can only be understood in terms of the totality of mankind . . . it follows that the individual, in the strict sense of the word, is only a fiction; and whoever wants to look for a human being *in himself*, i.e., one who is still untouched and untainted by society, must look for one who was neither born, nor raised, but must have been created from nothing.⁵

Two years after the completion of his dissertation, Feuerbach's first published work appeared (1830), in which he took a stand that was much more clearly antireligious and in opposition to Christian doctrine, and yet which was still explicitly Hegelian. In this text, entitled *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*, Feuerbach again argues both that the essence of the species, that is, of "humanity," is Spirit, where Spirit *is* consciousness, and that the essence of the individual human being *is* the species.⁶ Consciousness (which for all practical purposes here is the same as "Reason" and "Thought," as well as "Spirit") is characterized by its essential universality, but always in such a way that it is a reality that never transcends the human:

But consciousness itself is purely universal; knowing is an activity of essence, of Spirit itself. Consciousness as such is self-equal, self-identical, one in all humans. Only conscious beings are various; variety belongs only to the objects that are determinate persons who know themselves in consciousness. In their knowing, all humans are one, as if undivided, but in that which they know, they are various and separated, for that which they know in the knowing that is consciousness is just themselves, the various particular persons. Consciousness is the light; persons are the colors.⁷

Here also it seems as though Feuerbach did interpret Hegel's Absolute Spirit, and Absolute Idea, as being the actualized, self-developed 'human spirit,' that is, "man" as such; there was no transcendent reality, or God, and no Subject of history that was other than, or more than, the human species taken in its totality. Given this view, a case can be made for the claim that Feuerbach's interpretation of Hegel, at least in the earlier part of Feuerbach's career, is very similar to that of later commentators who also have seen Hegel's *Geist* more anthropologically.

5. *Dissertation*; see Wartofsky, *Feuerbach*, p. 44.

6. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Thoughts on Death and Immortality from the Papers of a Thinker, along with an Appendix of Theological-Satirical Epigrams, Edited by One of His Friends*, translated by James A. Massey, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 107–108. The original German text was edited and published by Johann Adam Stein in 1830, in Nuremberg (the author remaining anonymous).

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 108–109.

Alexander Kojève, as one such commentator, maintains that, according to Hegel:

. . . never, at any moment of Time, is there a Spirit existing outside of the human historical World. Therefore, there is no transcendence; History is the becoming of Spirit, and the Spirit is nothing but this historical becoming of Man . . . As for the goal of History—it is *Wissen*, Knowledge of self—that is Philosophy (which finally becomes Wisdom). Man creates an historical World only in order to *know* what this World is and thus to *understand* himself in it.⁸

And again:

Hegel means to underline that eternal or infinite Being—that is, the absolute Spirit (which, in Schiller, is God), arises solely from the totality of human or historical existence. Therefore, the temporal past of eternal Being is *human*, and *only* human. If one wants to talk about “God” in Hegel, therefore, one must not forget that this “God’s” past is Man: it is a Man who has become “God,” and not a *God* who has become Man (and who, moreover, again becomes God.)⁹

In Feuerbach’s later writings, this view of what Hegel was up to changed quite noticeably. It became more and more clear to Feuerbach that he needed to make a definitive break with the Hegelian speculative philosophy, if he were to do justice to the “philosophy of man” towards which he was working. Such a break was necessary because he came to believe that Hegel had not after all gotten beyond “theology” in the latter’s characterizations of Absolute Spirit, “the Idea,” History, etc.; that in Hegel’s system the Christian God, re-established in the various profiles of “the Absolute,” had merely been made immanent *as well as transcendent*, rather than being demystified; and that this speculative attempt to make theological doctrines more philosophically palatable ended up only making them more abstract and detached from actual human life. As already indicated, Feuerbach’s own perspective was fairly antireligious early on, but he had previously seen the Hegelian system as really only in need of some clarification and extension regarding essential human reality, not repudiation and *Aufhebung*. Eventually, however, he saw that the idealist philosophy of Hegel, as transformed theology, did have to be transcended, so that his philosophical project became, in part, an attempt “. . . to derive the necessity of a philosophy of man, that is, anthropology, from the Philosophy of the Absolute, that is theology . . .”¹⁰ Again, this construction of an adequate philosophical anthropology would need to be brought about by a prior critique of both speculative philosophy (that is, Hegelian philosophy) and religious doctrine. In a number of Feuerbach’s

8. Alexander Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, translated by James H. Nichols, Jr., edited by Allen Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1969), pp. 161–62.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

10. From the Preface to *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, by Ludwig Feuerbach, reprinted in *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach*, translated and edited by Zawar Hanfi (New York: Doubleday, 1972), p. 176. The original German text was published in 1843 as *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*.

works after 1839, he engages in just such a critique of both types of thought, with the aim of exposing their distortions on the one hand, and of bringing to light the concealed kernels of truth concerning "man" which they also contain, on the other hand. For example, he opens his 1842 "Preliminary Theses on the Reform of Philosophy" with the following claim:

The secret of *theology* is *anthropology*, but *theology* itself is the secret of *speculative philosophy*, which thus turns out to be *speculative* theology. As such, it distinguishes itself from *ordinary* theology by the fact that it places the divine being back into this world—ordinary theology projects it into the beyond out of fear and ignorance; in contrast to ordinary theology, it *actualizes*, *determines*, and *realizes* the Divine Being.¹¹

He then goes on to point out the consequences of the Hegelian speculative system:

The Absolute Spirit according to Hegel reveals or realizes itself in art, religion, and philosophy. This simply means that the *spirit of art, religion, and philosophy is the Absolute Spirit*. But one cannot separate art and religion from human feeling, imagination, and perception, nor can one separate philosophy from thought. In short, one cannot separate the Absolute Spirit from the Subjective Spirit, or from the essence of man, without being thrown back to the standpoint of theology, without being deluded into regarding the Absolute Spirit as being *another* spirit that is distinct from the being of man, i.e., without making us accept the illusion of a ghost of ourselves existing outside ourselves. The Absolute Spirit is the "deceased spirit" of theology that, as a specter, haunts the Hegelian philosophy.¹²

On the same grounds, Hegel's Logic and its 'supreme being,' "the Idea," also come under attack here:

The Hegelian Logic is *theology* that has been turned into *reason* and *presence*; it is *theology* turned into *logic*. Just as the *Divine Being of theology is the ideal or abstract embodiment of all realities, i.e., of all determinations, of all finitudes, so, too, it is the same with the Logic*.¹³

Even though Feuerbach's interpretation of Hegel underwent a fairly drastic change over the course of the former's career, so that he eventually came to view his own philosophical project as being a radical departure from Hegelian philosophy, he did retain his focus on the life and development of the human species that also had been so central for him in his earlier writings. In other words, Feuerbach's anthropologization of Absolute Spirit, of the Idea, Reason, etc., constituted a good part of the foundation of *all* his analyses. "Man" as such, that is, the species taken in its totality and in terms of its essential nature, became and re-

11. Ludwig Feuerbach, "Preliminary Theses on the Reform of Philosophy," reprinted in *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach*, p. 153. The original German text was written in 1842, and titled "Vorläufige Thesen zur Reform der Philosophie."

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 156–57.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

mained the Subject of history, or the Universal Subject, for Feuerbach. Instead of history amounting to the progression of the self-development and coming-to-self-knowledge of the Hegelian *Geist*, it was now seen as being constituted by the self-development, and progressive self-realization of the human species itself. Similarly, the Hegelian *Idee* and its movement was transformed by Feuerbach into the dynamic of the self-recognition, by human consciousness, of the essence of conscious human life itself. At the same time, it must be kept in mind that this unique appropriation and humanization of Hegel's various ontological and logical constructs only constituted the more abstract level of Feuerbach's anthropological investigations. At least in his post-1839 writings, he apparently was aware that explaining human reality from the standpoint of the species-as-Subject in *its* self-development did entail speaking in mere abstractions, since he continually asserted that only individual, physically existing human beings have "real existence."¹⁴ On the other hand, the results of this admittedly abstract level of analysis provided the backdrop for what Feuerbach himself considered to be his more concrete analyses of the development of the human individual in his/her own self-actualization and coming-to-self-consciousness. Although some, like Marx and Engels, justifiably claimed that even at this allegedly "concrete" level Feuerbach was still guilty of hypostatization and misleading abstraction, there clearly is a difference between these two investigative standpoints on "man" that he assumed (which is *not* to say that he took up these distinguishable standpoints in any methodologically consistent manner). Thus, it seems most productive to evaluate Feuerbach's more abstract explanations of the activities and goals of "the species" in terms of the larger conceptual framework to which they give rise, within which his conclusions about individual human existence then take shape.

If this evaluative perspective is accepted as a viable one here, it can be pointed

14. See, e.g., Ludwig Feuerbach, *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*, translated by Ralph Manheim (New York: Harper and Row, 1967). The lectures were originally given in Heidelberg from December 1, 1848, to March 2, 1849, and published in German in 1851 as *Vorlesungen über das Wesen der Religion*. An excerpt from the 14th lecture reads (from the English text, pp. 122–23): "The same is true of other human virtues and faculties, such as reason, will, or wisdom, whose value and reality for me are not lost or in any diminished if I regard them simply as human traits instead of deifying and hypostatizing them. What I have said of human virtues and faculties applies to all universals and class concepts; they do not exist outside of things and beings, they are not distinct from, or independent of, the individuals from which we have abstracted them. The subject, that is the existing being, is always the individual, the class is only a predicate or attribute. But it is precisely this predicate, this attribute of the individual, that nonsensuous thinking abstracts from the individual and makes into an independent object. This abstraction is then held to be the essence of the individuals in question, while the differences between them are disposed of as "merely individual," that is contingent, secondary, nonessential. Thus thought reduces all individuals to a single individual, or rather concept, and claims all substance for itself, leaving only the empty shell for the sense perception which shows us individuals as individuals in their multiplicity, diversity, individuality, and concrete existence. In other words, thought transforms what is in reality the subject, the essence, into a predicate, an attribute, a mere mode of the class concept, and conversely, turns what is in reality mere attribute or predicate into essence."

out further that one of the primary reasons Feuerbach continually places so much importance on the character of the human species itself, taken as a whole, is that such an emphasis enables him to better illuminate what he sees as the single most crucial factor in the developmental self-realization of the human individual: that individual human life always unfolds within and is given shape by some form of human community. Of course, the fact that human beings are "social creatures" is not by itself so significant for Feuerbach, since other species of creatures are also naturally "social" (bees, ants, wolves, etc.). What is unique about human community life is that human beings have the capacity to acquire an explicit *conception* of the community to which they belong, and *of themselves as members* of that community. Our cognitive faculties are such that our consciousness is not limited to an awareness (or a direct sensory apprehension) only of discrete particulars, whether particular humans, or other particular organisms. As human beings we can have as an object of consciousness *a group* of organisms (or of any objects), whether or not that group, conceived as a 'transindividual' totality, is immediately and physically present before us. Since we are all born into an already existing human community of some sort then, and even though our first conscious contacts are with other individual humans (parents or siblings in most cases), under 'normal' circumstances we as individuals develop an explicit awareness of this larger human reality which we see as transcending, or being 'more than,' the reality of any particular humans of which we are also conscious. As we develop a conception of the human *group* (which, of course, we then can refer to, or think about, even if we are physically alone at the time), we are able to enter into conscious relation with that group, partially by our coming to understand that we are, as individuals, parts of that whole. As a result of this cognitive process we come to recognize ourselves both *as individuals* differentiated from the group as a whole, and *as participants* in the reality of that group who in a very basic sense *belong to it*. This recognition of our interrelated individuality, participation, and 'belongingness' facilitates the emergence of a more developed sense of community, and as our conception of this community becomes more sophisticated we realize that we are not part of just any community, but that we belong to a specifically *human* community; we see that we are not any other type of being, but that we are *human* beings. Because of this consciousness of our own humanness, and of others as belonging to the community *because* of their humanness, we are able to derive a conception of "humanity" itself, and thus of the human species itself. And, it is this peculiar capacity to have one's own natural species as an object of consciousness, along with the necessarily associated consciousness of oneself as a *member* of one's species, that Feuerbach sees as setting human beings apart from, and above, all other species of sentient creatures.

One of the ways that Feuerbach tries to get across this idea of our unique status as humans in the natural world is by periodically referring to the human individual *as a "species being"* (*Gattungswesen*), in this context meaning that the human being is *naturally*, again, a type of being that normally has the human

species as an object of consciousness, and who is conscious of himself/herself as a member of, or as belonging to, the species.¹⁵ Apparently here, other sentient beings are *not* “species beings” because they don’t have this kind of consciousness, even though they can be classified as belonging to this or that species *by us* (such species aren’t able to classify *themselves* as members of their own species: as far as Feuerbach is concerned, only humans have this cognitive capacity for classification, categorization, and abstraction). In addition, this consciousness of ‘species-membership’ is what marks the individual’s attainment of self-consciousness itself as characteristically human. In other words, for the individual human being, to become self-conscious means becoming conscious of oneself as an individual *human being* who stands in a necessary relation to, but is not immediately identified with, the human species as a whole. Actually here, to be self-conscious of one’s species-membership involves not only being conscious of oneself as belonging to a human living community, which one unavoidably participates in, but also the consciousness of one’s own “essential human nature.” When Feuerbach refers to the human individual’s “consciousness of the species” he usually also is referring to the consciousness of “the human essence,” and this feature of consciousness further constitutes the distinctively human mode of self-consciousness:

But what is this essential difference between man and the brute? The most simple, general, and also the most popular answer to this question is—consciousness:—but consciousness in the strict sense; for the consciousness implied in the feeling of self as an individual, in discrimination by the senses, in the perception and even judgment of outward things according to definite sensible signs, cannot be denied to the brutes. Consciousness in the strictest sense is present only in a being to whom his species, his essential nature, is an object of thought. The brute is indeed conscious of himself as an individual—and he has accordingly the feeling of self as the common centre of successive sensations—but not as a species . . .¹⁶

Since this unique mode of self-consciousness *is* part of the human essence itself in Feuerbach’s estimation, and since he also often uses the term “species-being” in a second sense whereby it just refers generally to one’s “essential human nature,” one can say from this perspective that to *be* a species being *is* also to be conscious of one’s species being, which again means having the natural ‘species-capacity’ for the development of this uniquely human self-consciousness.¹⁷

In attempting to understand Feuerbach’s views here on the emergence of hu-

15. This peculiar technical term *Gattungswesen*, of rather obscure origin, was used by Feuerbach sporadically in his writings, and appears most often in his most famous work, *The Essence of Christianity*, translated by George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) (republished by Harper and Row, 1957); the original German text was published in 1841 as *Das Wesen des Christentums*. Also, as will be seen shortly, he uses the term in at least two distinguishable senses, and switches back and forth between these two different usages without any clear rhyme or reason.

16. *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 1.

17. *Gattungswesen* can also be translated as “species essence,” “generic essence,” or “essence of the species,” as well as “species being,” and much of the difficulty that scholars have had understand-

man self-consciousness, it becomes clear that his fundamental datum of analysis is not the human individual taken as an isolated entity, which can be merely explained as such in contrast to the human species taken as a whole. Feuerbach's primary focus at this investigative level is on the achievement of self-consciousness by human individuals, but only as those individuals are in meaningful and existentially constitutive *interaction* with other human individuals. That is, I only become self-conscious in this uniquely human way, and only thus become conscious of my species being and conscious of myself *as* a species being, through my relations with other at least potentially self-conscious individual human beings. Likewise, I only stand in conscious relation to the human species itself through my ongoing interaction with other persons, in such a way that there is in reality no direct or *immediate* relation (conceptual or otherwise) between myself, as a self-conscious individual person, and the species to which I nonetheless belong. The relationship between myself as individual and the species, and my relationship to myself, are both necessarily *mediated* by other persons. So, Feuerbach's fundamental datum in his analyses of the dynamics of conscious/self-conscious human life is human individuals in relation to each other, and this approach is most clearly expressed in his constant emphasis on the foundational relationship of "I and Thou" (*Ich und Du*).¹⁸

It is within the context of this I-Thou relation that the influence of the Hegelian analysis of the achievement and maintenance of individual self-consciousness becomes most visible. Hegel also asserted that human self-consciousness was attained only through the mediation of others, and was an outcome of a continual process of being recognized by another self-consciousness: that is, individual self-consciousness only exists insofar as it also exists *for*, and is acknowledged as such by, another self-consciousness.¹⁹ This constitutive process is, of course, dialectically reciprocal, as is evidenced by the following more formal description which appears in Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*:

Consciousness finds that it immediately is and is not another consciousness, as also that this other is for itself only when it cancels itself as existing for itself, and has self-

ing the significance of this term in the works of both Feuerbach and Marx (who borrowed the term from Feuerbach) can be traced to the multivalent character of both *Gattung* and *Wesen*. The most well-known and provocative examples of Marx's use of *Gattungswesen* are to be found in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, translated by Martin Milligan, edited by Dirk J. Struik (New York: International Publishers, 1964); see especially pp. 106–19.

18. Feuerbach seems to have been the first to use this *Ich-Du* dyad as the cornerstone of an analysis of interpersonal dynamics. Others such as Martin Buber, in his famous text simply titled *Ich und Du* (English translation by Walter Kaufman; New York: Scribner, 1970), clearly were influenced by the Feuerbachian use of the phrase. *Ich und Du* can just as easily be translated as "I and You," but I will bow to tradition here and translate it as many others always have, as "I and Thou" (the "Thou" has apparently been used to convey the sense of intimacy or closeness entailed in *Du* in contrast to the more formal *Sie*).

19. Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (original German publication: 1807), translated by J. B. Baillie as *The Phenomenology of Mind* (Harper Torchbook edition; New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 229.

existence only in the self-existence of the other. Each is the mediating term to the other, through which each mediates and unites itself with itself; and each is to itself and to the other an immediate self-existing reality, which, at the same time, exists thus for itself only through this mediation. They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another.²⁰

By means of each consciousness in this interaction being able to recognize that it is an object *for* the *other* consciousness, each is able to become an object *for itself*, which means, in effect, being able to be conscious of oneself from the 'stance' of another and in the same way as that other, who is conscious of oneself. Although Hegel doesn't spell it out in exactly this way, it seems in this analysis as though self-reflection, and thus the "I" posited by reflective consciousness (that is, the "I" of self-consciousness), are grounded in the reflexivity of consciousness, which itself is grounded in the *need* for, and capacity to take the 'point of view' of, the conscious other. (For Hegel, there does seem to be some sort of "ego," or "I," that emerges at an earlier moment in the dialectic of the development of consciousness, prior to the attainment of self-consciousness; however, this earlier moment is superseded, and the self-conscious "I," as a later achievement, is less incomplete and less abstract).²¹

Although the focus on the developmental need of conscious human beings for each other remained central throughout Feuerbach's writings, and although this focus was clearly oriented by his appropriation of the Hegelian descriptions of interpersonal interaction, it is still difficult to find a consistency and overall clarity in Feuerbach's views on this subject, both with respect to the actual extent of his appropriation of Hegel, and with respect to the role of the I-Thou relation itself. Part of this is due to the differences between his earlier views, when he basically accepted the Hegelian philosophical framework, and his later perspective, shaped as it was by the constant reaction against and attempt to go beyond Hegelianism. This lack of consistency and precision may also be partially due to the fact that Feuerbach never really carried out an extended and systematic analysis of these interpersonal dynamics, in the way that Hegel did, even though assertions about the I-Thou relation abound in many of the former's early and later works. In his dissertation, for example, Feuerbach argues that the human individual has an ". . . insatiable desire to unite with others from whom he is divided by nature . . .,"²² but this "natural" separation between individual humans is

20. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

21. This description of Hegel's analysis would correspond to the approach to interpersonal dynamics taken by George Herbert Mead and the whole school of symbolic interactionism. As part of the American Pragmatist tradition, Mead also was influenced by Hegel, and his central emphasis on the fact that the individual *only* comes to 'see' himself/herself (and thus can have a "self-concept" and individuated self-consciousness) by being able to "take the role of the other" can, I think, be viewed as just a different, and ultimately more concrete, formulation of the same basic process that Hegel was elucidating here. Cf. *George Herbert Mead: On Social Psychology* edited by Anselm Strauss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964, revised edition).

22. *Dissertation*: see Wartofsky, *Feuerbach*, p. 44.

only overcome *via* the universality of thought, that is, Reason posited as the "essence of man." Here, the fundamental need for the "Thou" is not due to the need for self-differentiation and individuation as a distinct human "I," since in fact this individuation is just what one aspires to transcend: the need for the "Thou" apparently amounts to the desire to be "one with the other," to enter into a unity which transcends the particularity of the I-Thou dichotomy itself:

All the interconnections of man to man such as love and friendship are limited, particular, finite, in nature . . . There must therefore be some way in the depths of man in which the yearning for the Thou can be fulfilled: where the *I* and the *Thou* are no longer counterposed, where this unity is not only a virtual one, not only a mere connection, but is absolute, unconditional, fully realized.²³

The essential bond then between persons qua human beings is thought, in such a way that this thought is both the precondition for "truly human" individual life in interaction with others, and an efficacious reality only by virtue of such interaction (whereby, as was stated earlier, Reason is only made real in the "form of a living community"). In this context there is no acknowledgment of the individuating role of thought (i.e., of reflective consciousness), and thus, again, of the cognitive necessity of the "Thou" for my very ability to become conscious of myself *as a human individual*.

On the other hand, in *The Essence of Christianity* Feuerbach does affirm that the process of self-individuation, as essentially entailed in the coming-to-self-consciousness of human beings, requires the "Thou." In this text, he in effect argues that I first became conscious of another who is like me, that is, I become conscious of my commonality with another human being, and then recognize that I am an object of consciousness for that other, just as he/she is an object of consciousness for me. This recognition leads (with the help of the reflexive capacity of thought) to my becoming an object of consciousness to myself: I become a self-conscious "I." In becoming conscious of myself in this way I at the same time differentiate myself from all that is other than myself, including the other conscious person, whose individuality I now also recognize as being like my own, in the sense that I become more fully conscious of "our" common *human* individuality. Feuerbach in fact claims that without the human "Thou," the human "I" would never arise as such, because the conscious individual would not be able to differentiate himself/herself from the rest of the 'world' over and against which he/she normally stands in self-conscious distinction. In other words, the "Thou" mediates my self-conscious relation with the world in general, so that without the "Thou" both my "I" and the world would in effect disappear *for* my consciousness, and I would be more or less merely absorbed into the 'flow of life' without any consciousness of being so:

Only through his fellow does man become clear to himself and self-conscious; but only when I am clear to myself does the world become clear to me. A man existing abso-

23. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

lutely alone would lose himself without any sense of his individuality in the ocean of Nature; he would neither comprehend himself as man nor Nature as Nature. The first object of man is man. The sense of Nature, which opens to us the consciousness of the world as a world, is a later product; for it first arises through the distinction of man from himself.²⁴

In *The Essence of Christianity* and Feuerbach's other later works, the focus is changed with respect to what constitutes the ultimate ground for the I-Thou relation. Even though thought remains a crucial bond between the "I" and the "Thou," and is still viewed as essential both for the developmental process of individuation, and for the uniquely human experience of unity with other persons that results from the recognition of commonality, it is no longer the most fundamental human bond. Thought becomes, for Feuerbach, secondary and derivative in relation to, and is viewed as being dependent for its efficacy upon, the even more basic bond of *Sinnlichkeit* ("sensuousness" or "sensibility"). Whereas in his earlier writings our natural "flesh and blood" character (our capacity for sensory experience, emotion, or pleasure and pain) was what kept us effectively trapped in our isolated individuality and apart from others, Feuerbach eventually came to view this same human "sensuous" nature as that which originally enabled individuals to enter into meaningful relation with each other, and without which the I-Thou would never emerge. Here, the "natural standpoint" of human beings is the standpoint of the distinction between "I" and "Thou," where both are recognized in their *human* sensuous existence, and this *distinction* is no longer something that needs to be transcended in order for the *unity* of the "I" and "Thou" to be realized: Feuerbach now sees that this natural distinction (which he even refers to as the "absolute standpoint") is what in fact constitutes this unity in the first place.²⁵ And, even though thought does have an essential role to play in self-conscious human life (recognized as necessarily *communal* life), given its capacity for abstraction it can overlook, or distort, the fundamental connective force of concrete, flesh and blood human existence, and abstract philosophical thought has often been the most guilty of this sort of oversight:

I am I—for myself—and at the same time You—for others. But I am You only insofar as I am a sensuous being. But the abstract intellect isolates being-for-self as substance, ego, or God; it can therefore, only arbitrarily connect being-for-others with being-for-self, for the necessity for this connection is sensuousness alone. But then it is precisely sensuousness from which the abstract intellect abstracts. What I think in isolation from sensuousness is what I think without and outside all connections.²⁶

The relation between "I" and "Thou," seen at this most basic level of human sensuous life ("sensuousness" referring to the totality of our natural capacities as physically real humans and to what Feuerbach sometimes calls the realm of "the

24. *The Essence of Christianity*, pp. 82–83.

25. See, e.g., *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, paragraph 56, p. 243; and paragraph 59, p. 244, in *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach*.

26. *Ibid.*, paragraph 32, p. 225. Hanfi consistently translates *Du* as "You" rather than as "Thou."

heart" as distinct from the concerns of "the head"), is thus grounded in the essential need of living human beings for each other and the concomitant mutual dependency that characterizes the underlying reality of all human social life. This primordial need of the "I" for the "Thou" seems to find its most fully realized, and in a sense its most concrete expression, according to Feuerbach, in the relationship between a man and a woman. This is not due solely to a more immediate physiological attraction, but also involves the fact that our consciousness of ourselves, as an outcome of the I-Thou interaction, entails the consciousness of our own corporeality, sexuality, and gender identity as "masculine" or "feminine." In addition, Feuerbach recognizes the special nature of the I-Thou relation between lovers, based as it is on "feeling" rather than mere intellect, and accompanied by an emotional dependency and fulfillment that at times seems almost paradigmatic in Feuerbach's overall account of the essential human need for the flesh and blood Other. As he claims at one point (with a bit of typical Feuerbachian hyperbole):

Hence personality is nothing without distinction of sex; personality is essentially distinguished into masculine and feminine. Where there is no *thou*, there is no *I*; but the distinction between *I* and *thou*, the fundamental condition of all personality, of all consciousness, is only real, living, ardent, when felt as the distinction between man and woman.²⁷

It is within the life-context provided by the need-motivated interaction of actually existent, sensuous, and mutually dependent human beings that 'real' human thought thus emerges. That is, it is this fundamental I-Thou relation between flesh and blood individuals that enables thought to develop and become a uniquely human force in the world. In Feuerbach's anti-Hegelian writings, thought is no longer treated as a separate, independent reality "in and for itself," but is always emphasized as being just the thinking activity of concrete human individuals. In fact, he claims that it is only through the need of human beings to communicate with each other, and through the natural capacity for speech itself, that thought (and thus reason) can arise. Human thought is an *internal dialogue*, which is a later product of an original attempt and ability to meaningfully communicate with other persons:

[O]nly where man communicates with man, only in speech, a social act, awakes reason. To ask a question and to answer are the first acts of thought. Thought originally demands two.²⁸

Our cognitive capacities are such that as a result of our communication (primarily verbal) with others, we learn to 'take the role of the other' (we play the role of both "I" and "Thou" for ourselves), and thus can learn to carry on internal conversations with ourselves whether or not others are present: this, according to

27. *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 92.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

Feuerbach, is human thinking at its most fundamental level, and its development is, again, constitutively intertwined with the consciousness both of ourselves as uniquely human individuals, and of the essence of the human species itself as that which we belong to as species beings:

Man thinks—that is, he converses with himself. The brute can exercise no function which has relation to its species without another individual external to itself; but man can perform the functions of thought and speech, which strictly imply such a relation, apart from another individual. Man is himself at once *I* and *thou*; he can put himself in the place of another, for this reason, that to him his species, his essential nature, and not merely his individuality, is an object of thought.²⁹

In Feuerbach's perspective then, other particular human beings always mediate my relationship as a conscious human individual to "my world," where that world includes (i) the human community, and ultimately the human species itself that I recognize myself as belonging to, (ii) the realm of "Nature" that I also relate to from a self-consciously *human* point of view, and finally (iii) myself as a unique being in that world who stands in essential relation to himself. It is through the dynamics of the I-Thou relation that my species being, and my existential status *as* a species being, are thus disclosed to me, especially insofar as this dynamic also amounts to an ongoing dialectic between human commonality and self-individuation. In other words, I only come to see myself in my distinctiveness and uniqueness as a particular human being, *through* my recognition of the common human character (and "essential nature") that I *share* with other persons, at the same time that I recognize that they too are unique, particular human beings who are *also human like myself*. This recognition of both my commonality with others, and our mutual distinctiveness as individuals, does *not* for the most part involve the reflective (and ultimately abstract) activity of merely tabulating what attributes I do and do not have in common with *x* number of other persons. According to Feuerbach, there seems to be a much more basic and primary mutual recognition of commonality and individuality in the I-Thou relation, which originates in the natural *need* of sensuous human individuals for each other, and in their "flesh and blood" interdependencies. That is, I recognize the other as human, and thus myself as being *also human like him/her*, *because* I need not just any other, but a *human* other. And, even though my more purely cognitive needs are not excluded here, they are now to be viewed as just one aspect, along with all other physiological and emotional needs, of a totality that constitutes the living, breathing "whole person," who unavoidably enters into the I-Thou relation grounded in this *human* need for the *human* other. It is this "whole person," who essentially requires other humans in order to be "truly human" himself/herself, that Feuerbach glorifies in most of his later works (and, with a different emphasis, in his earlier works also to some extent), and it is this type of flesh and blood human individual who *is* a species being.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

To be a species being then, given the foregoing analysis, more or less means *living* this ongoing and peculiarly human dialectic of individuation and commonality, as it manifests itself in the various spheres of meaningful human life. For example, in addition to the initial attainment of mere self-consciousness as such, the human individual strives to acquire and maintain a sense of *who* he/she is as a unique person, a 'self-image,' an estimation of self-worth, and a recognition of self-sameness over time (which includes but is not limited to a formal concept of one's personal identity), all of which emerge within the context provided by the interplay of individuation and commonality. The relation of oneself to one's own human body, as well as one's sense of past, present, and future, which goes beyond the narrower experience of temporal self-sameness towards a consciousness of oneself as an *historical being* who stands in relation to the historical species (as made up of the past, present, and future generations of human beings that I see myself as related to), are likewise essentially oriented by the interaction of these two constitutive phenomena. Again, all aspects of the conscious individual's relation to his/her "world" are mediated and given their "truly human" efficacy by other persons, which is to say that in all facets of our individual lives we are in some sense always already *with* others. At this level then, Feuerbach's notion of "species being" can also refer to the unique, or characteristic, 'way of being' of human beings, and this essential 'way of being' can probably best be summed up as a multifaceted, 'world-generating,' and anthropocentric "Being-with."³⁰

Given that the interplay of individuation and commonality provides the constitutive context within which the self-development of the individual takes place, it is in this investigative sphere that most of Feuerbach's claims about the individual's "essence," or "essential human nature," appear. Although on this subject of a human essence Feuerbach is again regularly ambiguous and unclear, he does seem to work with at least a general conception of an "essence" or nature" that is not only applicable to the human species taken as a whole, but which also can be used to describe the uniquely human features that the individual person in some sense "has." It must be kept in mind that, for Feuerbach, the common humanness of individuals and the reality of 'belonging to' the human species are not established merely on the basis of these separate individual subjects all having a certain set of predicates in common. However, he at the same time considers it quite legitimate to emphasize in his analyses the distinctively human features and capacities that any individual person (under 'normal' circumstances) can and does exhibit. In addition, then, to the uniquely human capacities for sociality and consciousness/self-consciousness which a person more or less una-

30. This notion of a foundational "Being-with" has gained more acceptance in this century through the works of philosophers like Martin Heidegger, and in my characterization of human "species being" as grounded in this "Being-with" (*Mit-sein*) I particularly have Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* in mind. Cf. Heidegger's *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962). The original German text was published as *Sein und Zeit* (Tubingen: Neomarius, 1927).

voidably actualizes in his/her 'being-in-the-world,' Feuerbach does identify other specific attributes, or "powers," that the individual possesses which also help to make up that individual's essential nature qua human being. At this point Feuerbach's inconsistency becomes obvious, because these attributes are often treated, after all, in a more traditional manner as essential predicates without which the individual subject is simply not a member of the class "man." The specific attributes Feuerbach focuses on here are Reason (or "Thought," "Understanding," "Intellect"), Will, and Affection (or "Feeling"), which together make up a triad of the soul (so to speak) which is fairly familiar in the history of philosophy.³¹ These qualities are not just 'there,' however, but together constitute that which the individual is conscious of when he/she has achieved consciousness of his/her "essential nature."

What, then, *is* the nature of man, of which he is conscious, or what constitutes the specific distinction, the proper humanity of man? Reason, Will, Affection. To a complete man belong the power of thought, the power of will, the power of affection. The power of thought is the light of the intellect, the power of will is energy of character, the power of affection is love. Reason, love, force of will, are perfections—the perfections of the human being—nay, more, they are absolute perfections of being. To will, to love, to think, are the highest powers, are the absolute nature of man as man, and the basis of his existence. Man exists to think, to love, to will.³²

It is primarily in *The Essence of Christianity* that these "powers" of reason, will, and feeling are emphasized as the three major essential human attributes, and it is also in this text that "feeling" and "love" are used as more or less interchangeable concepts, insofar as both are intended to refer to any type of 'feeling for' that which can satisfy any human needs (apparently, beyond what is immediately needed to keep the organism merely alive). Again, what is uniquely human about these faculties for Feuerbach is not just that all 'normal' human beings possess them, but that, in our manifestation of these "powers," *we as species beings* also have the *essential* capacity to have them as objects of consciousness, and thus become conscious of our own human essence ("species-essence") to that extent. It is this self-consciousness, as the individual's consciousness of his/her essential nature, then, that Feuerbach is trying to illuminate when he claims that the faculties of reason, will, and feeling ultimately have *themselves* as their own objects.³³ In addition, since in large part our uniqueness as human beings resides in what we are capable of being conscious *of*, Feuerbach maintains in a number of his post-1839 writings that the essence of a certain being can

31. Other commentators have also pointed out the very traditional character of Feuerbach's notion of human essence as a unity of Reason, Will, and Affection. See, e.g., Wartofsky, *Feuerbach*, pp. 261–64, where he reminds us that Feuerbach's model of human nature is the classical one of the "tripartite soul" that the Greeks affirmed. For another discussion of this point, see also Eugene Kamenka, *The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach* (New York: Praeger, 1970), pp. 47–48.

32. *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 3.

33. *Ibid.* See, e.g., Feuerbach's discussion of this on pp. 4–6; the same idea emerges in different formulations in many other places in the text.

be discerned in its "objects" (presumably any object of a creature's activity, needs, or awareness), and so the objects of human conscious life can be viewed as what distinguish human beings *essentially* from other types of beings.³⁴

Not only does the individual's human essence include the capacity to have the species, and thus that human essence itself, as objects of consciousness, but it also seems to include the uniquely human utilization of the same sensory faculties which, strictly speaking, we have in common with other species of animals. That is, the human individual possesses the sense of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch, but not in the same way that other sentient creatures do. According to Feuerbach, these human sensory capacities are unlimited and "universal" with respect to their possible objects, while the same senses in other animals are more narrowly focused and "particularized" regarding their objects. The nature of all sentient beings can be seen in the objects of their species-specific activities and needs, what stimuli their various particular senses are sensitized to, etc., but what essentially characterizes the human senses is that they lack any sort of species-specific limitation to what experiences they can provide us with, at least in terms of breadth: *all* possible objects of sentient experience can be objects of *human* sensory experience, because the human senses are not in principle limited to only certain types of such experience:

The senses of the animal are certainly keener than those of man, but they are so only in relation to certain things that are necessarily linked with the needs of the animal; and they are keener precisely because of the determination that they are limited by being exclusively directed towards some definite objects. Man does not possess the sense of smell of a hunting dog or a raven, but because his sense of smell encompasses all kinds of smell, it is free and also indifferent to particular smells. But where a sense is elevated above the limits of particularity and above being tied down to needs, it is elevated to an *independent*, to a *theoretical* significance and dignity—*universal* sense is *intellect*, and *universal* sensuousness is *intellectuality*. Even the lowest senses—smell and taste—are elevated in man to intellectual and scientific activities. The smell and taste of things are objects of natural science. Indeed, even the *stomach* of man, no matter how contemptuously we look down upon it, is something *human* and not animal because it is universal; that is, not limited to certain kinds of food. That is why man is free from that ferocious voracity with which the animal hurls itself on its prey. Leave a man his head, but give him the stomach of a lion or a horse, and he will certainly cease to be a man. A limited stomach is compatible only with a limited, that is, animal sense. Man's moral and rational relationship to his stomach consists therefore in his according it a human and not a beastly treatment.³⁵

As the above passage indicates, there is a very fundamental interconnection between our sensory capacities and experience, and our rational or "intellective" faculties. That is, not only are the human senses in themselves less restricted and narrowly focused than those same senses are in other animals, but even the limi-

34. See, e.g., *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, paragraph 7, pp. 180–83, in *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach*.

35. *Ibid.*, paragraph 53, p. 242.

tations that do exist for our senses (e.g., being less keen than those of other animals) are more than compensated for by our cognitive ability to think about, or reflect on, our sensory experience. As human individuals we naturally have as part of our 'rational' makeup the ability to classify, categorize, extrapolate, conceptualize, and thus to *abstract* from and theorize about immediate experience, so that all such experience (as well as our sensuous life in general) is in the end always mediated by these cognitive capacities, at the same time that we, of course, remain sensuous, "feeling" beings. In other words, as Feuerbach might say here, more generally, "thought" and "sensuousness" continually mediate each other. It is this uniquely human mode of abstractive, conceptual thought that gives rise to the natural human propensity for generalizing, or universalizing experiences (sensory or otherwise), and it is also as a result then of this capacity for universalization that the human individual is able to acquire a concept of the human species itself. Consequently, for Feuerbach, at one important level of human conscious experience the human species just *is* a product of abstraction, and is more or less related to as such by the individual person. Again, one must keep in mind that the species qua abstract concept is not merely a product of *philosophical* speculation. From Feuerbach's perspective this concept of "man" as such is a *natural* product of the human individual's cognitive apprehension and interpretation of his/her "world," because the exercise of human thought itself, or Reason, demands universals of this sort rather than mere particulars. This cognitive demand holds for the apprehension of all types, or species, of entities encountered in the world, but it is especially compelling with respect to the acquisition of the human species as an object of consciousness: "Reason cannot content itself in the individual; it has its adequate existence only when it has the species for its object . . ."36

Given the fact that in Feuerbach's analyses having the human species as an object of consciousness, by which one designates oneself as a human individual, often means having the human essence as an object of consciousness, the *need* to have the species as an abstraction *for* thought also indicates the *need* to identify and relate oneself to a concept of the human essence which transcends any specific particularizations, that is, all individuality. In this context I am not, as a self-conscious individual, merely conscious of "my" essential attributes or unique capacities as a human being; I also recognize that as an existing *individual* I am finite and limited in relation to the abstract universality of the "essence of man" as such. I am thus able to make a crucial distinction between myself as an individual *existent*, and the human *essence* as such, which amounts to the distinction between myself as an individual human and the human species. And, the recognition of this distinction entails the experience of the schism between my own particularity and the universality of "essential human nature." Given the concrete diversity of human beings, no particular individual is an adequate or complete expression of the human essence, and I also recognize this fact in my

36. *The Essence of Christianity*, Appendix 4, p. 287.

own case, such recognition leading further to a sense of lack, and of my own imperfection qua human individual.³⁷ Further, this consciousness of the dichotomy between what one is as a particular human being, and what the species (i.e., the human essence) is as an abstraction for thought, is enhanced in real life, from Feuerbach's perspective, insofar as he also identifies the concept of "species" with the notion of an "ideal nature of man," where this normatively grounded "ideal nature" is our essential human nature.³⁸ As can be seen, Feuerbach again shifts his investigative focus here, so that the emphasis is not now so much on the essential nature of the human individual, but more on the fact that the human essence is really only to be completely discovered "in" the species itself, with which the individual nonetheless enters into an essential and self-defining relation. In addition, in his claim that the human essence does not "reside in" the individual, but only in the human species, he is operating once more at two distinct levels of analysis (which, again, do not appear to stand in any consistent methodological relation to each other in his writings): sometimes he is referring to "the species" as simply an abstraction for thought, in the way discussed above; at other times he has in mind "the species" as an historical reality, that is, as the total human community made up of all past, present, and future generations of actual human beings, wherein the human essence is actually realized.

When Feuerbach is working at the investigative level where the species is viewed as an abstracted product of thought, the concepts of "species" and "essence," and the characteristics of "universality" and "ideality," are all associated together as standing over against "the individual," "existence," "particularity," and "reality." In acknowledging that, at this level anyway, the human essence is just an abstract object for human thought, Feuerbach wants to point out that this concept of human essence is still a necessary and indispensable one for the individual's adequate self-understanding, because it illuminates the fact that the nature of "humanity," or "man," is not summed up merely in terms of the attributes and capacities that are possessed by that particular individual. Put another way, as a species being the individual comes to recognize that his/her species being qua essential human nature is that which constitutes him/her both as a concretely existing individual in distinction from the species, and as a distinctively *human* individual. Actually, it was when Feuerbach treated the species as the essential object of thought that somehow stood in contrast to the concrete existence of the individual, that he came under some of the heaviest attacks by various other intellectuals, most notably Max Stirner and then Marx and Engels. While the latter two thinkers were critical of much more than just this aspect of Feuerbach's project, Stirner did focus primarily on this notion of an abstract "essence of man," and accused Feuerbach of dividing human beings into an essential and an ines-

37. *Ibid.* See, e.g., Appendix 1, p. 281: "No individual is an adequate expression of his species, but only the human individual is conscious of the distinction between the species and the individual . . ."

38. *Ibid.* See, e.g., pp. 206–207.

sential “ego,” or “I,” whereby the species (“man” as such) was our “true essence” in contrast to the “inessential” existing individual “ego.”³⁹ If the preceding analysis is accurate, Stirner wasn’t incorrect in pointing out this feature of the Feuerbachian “philosophy of man,” but he did seem to overlook to quite an extent just how and why Feuerbach utilized this concept of an “abstract human essence.” Given Feuerbach’s own imprecision and inconsistency in his views on “human nature,” however, this sort of misunderstanding on Stirner’s part may be forgivable. At the same time, in his response to Stirner’s criticisms (which were directed specifically at *The Essence of Christianity*) Feuerbach also seems to miss their point somewhat, insofar as he argues that the overall aim of the text in question was in fact to overcome the rift between the essential and inessential “being of man” in the first place. This aim was to be carried out through a philosophical analysis amounting to the affirmation and, apparently, the deification (*Vergötterung*) of the “whole man” (“. . . des ganzen Menschen vom Kopfe bis zur Ferse.”)⁴⁰ Glorifying the “whole man” in this sense does not seem to answer, at least directly, the question concerning the essential or nonessential status of the existing individual vis-à-vis the abstract species qua “essence of man” as such.

In this 1845 response to Stirner, however, Feuerbach also brings up the point that one of his purposes in placing so much emphasis on the human species itself, as that wherein the human essence more truly resided, was to address the very real feeling of limitation and finitude that the individual person often experiences as part of the consciousness of himself/herself as an individual human being. Feuerbach did want to affirm human individuality, but he also wanted, through his philosophical writings, to help people overcome the rather self-deprecating feeling of limitation associated with this individuality, by helping them recognize that they after all do participate in ‘unlimitedness’ by virtue of their being *members* of the human species.⁴¹ This aim of his discloses the other level of analysis at which he operates when he focuses on “essential human nature” as it is found “in” the species rather than “in” the individual person. At this level the human species is not a mere concept and a product of the individual’s abstractive thought, nor is it merely identical to the human essence as such. Here Feuerbach views the species at the actual human community in its historical existence and reality, made up of all past, present, and future human beings and the multiplicity of social relations into which they can and do enter. In this context, then, the “essence of man” refers both to the totality of human attributes and capacities

39. Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, translated by Steven T. Byington (republication; New York: Dover, 1973), pp. 34–67. The original German text was published in 1845 as *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*.

40. My rendering: “ . . . of the whole man from head to heel.” See Feuerbach’s essay *Über das Wesen des Christentums* in *Beziehung auf den “Einzigsten und sein Eigentum”* (“On *The Essence of Christianity* in relation to *The Ego and its Own*”), reprinted in *Ludwig Feuerbach: Kleine philosophische Schriften* (1842–45), edited by Max Gustav Lange (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1950), p. 182.

41. *Ibid.* See pp. 187–88.

viewed as a totality of all their different possible manifestations (given the *infinite* diversity of actual human individuals), and to the fundamental 'way of being' of human beings characterizable as an essential 'being-with-others' in a uniquely human mode of community life.

The idea that the human essence, and thus human species being, is only to be found in the "community of man," of course, goes back as far as Feuerbach's dissertation, but in Feuerbach's later thinking on this subject this "essence in community" was not just the universality of thought as he had earlier asserted. The later Feuerbach has in mind an historically grounded human community made up of concrete, flesh and blood individuals who exercise all their capacities (sensory, intellectual, emotional, etc.), who create their own "world," and who come to know themselves within the constitutive context provided by the direct and indirect interaction with others:

The single man in *isolation* possesses in himself the *essence* of man neither as a *moral* nor as a *thinking* being. The *essence* of man is contained only in the community, in the *unity of man with man*—a unity, however, that rests on the *reality* of the *distinction* between "I" and "You."⁴²

In this sense our "essential human nature," our "species being," just *is* this essential "species-life," and is also identifiable simply as "the essence of human life." But Feuerbach wants to go farther than this in his claim that the human essence is not just some set of attributes which, when merely present in any number of individual beings, designates those individuals as members of the abstract class "man." Even though we can identify essential features of the individual human being, according to Feuerbach no individual is, again, an adequate expression of the human essence because the *limitations* of any particular individual are *not* the *limitations* of the species itself taken in its living, historical reality as a transindividual, 'transgenerational' whole. At this investigative level the relationships between the species as universal and the person as particular, between essence and existence, whole and part, the one and the many, etc., becomes as concrete and nonabstract as they will get for Feuerbach, insofar as they ultimately find their most fundamental and "real" expression in the extremely significant yet more or less commonplace observation that what human beings can't accomplish individually, they can accomplish collectively. That is, whereas individuals always actualize their human potentialities, and exercise their human faculties, within the limitations imposed by their own specific, diversified particularity, and are always thus "imperfect," the human race taken as an historical whole is freed from this particularity, and is thus unlimited and in effect "perfect."

According to Feuerbach then, the human essence as it *truly* is entails the complete, perfect, and unlimited manifestation of all distinctively human "powers" and faculties, and this unlimitedness and perfection *is* in fact realized in the his-

42. *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, paragraph 59, p. 244, in *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach*.

torical species (in its past, present, and future actuality). This is so because the shortcomings of one individual in one facet of human life are always made up for by the relative lack of such deficiency on the part of other individuals; human beings supplement and complement each other in terms of the manifestation of all essential features of human existence, and thus *collectively* transcend *all* limitations and restrictions on essential human nature, in the course of world history. So, to view the species as a whole from this historical perspective, rather than focusing only on the presently existing human population, or only on the isolated individual, is the only adequate way to fully understand what the human essence really is, in Feuerbach's estimation. At this level the distinction between the species and the individual is thus preserved and even glorified, but always with the recognition of the fact that the individual is only fulfilled as a *human* individual, that he/she only fully appropriates and lives out his/her species being, and that he/she only participates in this unlimitedness of the species, through the world-constituting relationship to the human Other. In fact, Feuerbach's critique of Christian religious consciousness is in part directed at what he considers to be the false identification of the species and the individual. In other words, Christian thought sees the imperfections and limitations of the individual as the limitation of "man" as such, and thus only views the human community as an aggregate of isolated, individual sinners, who are sinners just by virtue of their individual finiteness and "imperfection":

The total absence of the idea of the species in Christianity is especially observable in its characteristic doctrine of the universal sinfulness of men. For there lies at the foundation of this doctrine the demand that the individual shall not be an individual, a demand which again is based on the presupposition that the individual by himself is a perfect being, is by himself the adequate presentation or existence of the species. Here is entirely wanting the objective perception, the consciousness, that the *thou* belongs to the perfection of the *I*, that *men* are required to constitute humanity, that only men taken together are what man should and can be. All men are sinners. Granted; but they are not all sinners in the same way; on the contrary, there exists a great and essential difference between them. One man is inclined to falsehood, another is not; he would rather give up his life than break his word or tell a lie; the third has a propensity to intoxication, the fourth to licentiousness; while the fifth, whether by favour of Nature, or from the energy of his character, exhibits none of these vices. Thus, in the moral as well as the physical and intellectual elements, men compensate for each other, so that, taken as a whole, they are as they should be, they present the perfect man.⁴³

As was indicated at the outset, Feuerbach believed that his "new philosophy" would provide a liberation, of sorts, for humankind, both because such a philosophy would help people to free themselves from their "old" misunderstandings (both religious and "speculative") of essential human reality, and because it would reestablish *all* subsequent human inquiry, including the natural sciences, on a new and more adequate materialist basis. Although there is good reason to

43. *The Essence of Christianity*, pp. 155–56.

think that his "new philosophy" was *not* all that liberating for the "human spirit" after all (even assuming for the sake of argument that "a philosophy" conceivably might be "liberating" for people generally), I have tried to show how Feuerbach at least has provided us with some accurate, insightful, and at the time novel analyses which seem to go to the very core of human experience. He was rarely consistent, or conceptually rigorous, in his philosophical investigations and in the presentation of his conclusions. However, in his constant emphasis on the dialectical interplay between human commonality and self-individuation, and in his relentless assertions that it is only within the context of the living, "flesh and blood" human community that "essential human nature" can be said to be "real," Feuerbach illuminated certain dimensions of meaningful human existence that previously had been only partially understood, and he forced a good deal of subsequent philosophical inquiry to attend more carefully to these foundational characteristics of what we often refer to nowadays as "the human condition."