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Feuerbach and gender: the logic of complementarity

Ryan Plumley

History Department, Cornell University, 450 McGraw Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853-4601, USA

Abstract

Ludwig Feuerbach's work is often too easily dovetailed with the works of Hegel and Marx and therefore read teleologically as an intermediary step between the two "major" figures. By re-interpreting Feuerbach more as a system critic than as a system builder, this article attempts to elucidate his relationships to the other two. It will also point up the gendered articulation of his critiques of religion and philosophy. The article will show how Feuerbach's use of gender, though remaining fixed within a predictably hierarchical binary, is more than simply symptomatic of its context and offers significant resources for critical re-readings of nineteenth-century German philosophy.

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"While among the ancient philosophers Love was a bastard child, conceived with the concubine of Nature, in the new ones she is in contrast the lawful daughter of their philosophy. Woman is taken up into the community of Spirit; she is the living compendium of moral philosophy." Ludwig Feuerbach, *Fragmente zur Charakteristik meines philosophischen Curriculum vitae*.¹

It is tempting to view the works of Ludwig Feuerbach within a narrow teleology connecting G.W.F. Hegel to Karl Marx and categorized specifically as "Young Hegelian" or "Left Hegelian."² Although this perspective credits him with an

E-mail address: rgp6@cornell.edu (R. Plumley).

¹ Ludwig Feuerbach: *Werke in Sechs Bänden*, 4, Erich Thies, ed. (Frankfurt am Main, 1975), p. 208. Here and hereafter, if not otherwise indicated, the translations are mine.

² For typical examples see C.J. Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour: Marx and his Relation to Hegel* (Oxford, 1986); Warren Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1999); Eugene Kamenka, *The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach* (New York, 1970); David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (London, 1969); John Edward Toews, *Hegelianism: The*

essential transitional role, it often makes his thought appear more or less continuous with the methodologies, orientations, or tendencies of the major figures that surround him. His significant influence in the 1840s on the milieu of left-wing Hegelianism and especially on Friedrich Engels and Marx is attributed both to his efforts to critique Hegelian philosophy and reorient it towards a “materialist” worldview as well as to his trenchant condemnation of Christianity and theology. Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it,” is then understood as Marx’s basic break with Hegelianism and the end of Feuerbach’s influence.³

While this narrative is not egregiously wrong, it does obscure significant aspects of Feuerbach’s thought. It also renders him a “secondary” figure, a sub-plot in the story through which the “great” nineteenth-century systems are constructed. It is not my intention to save Feuerbach from this status—indeed I intend to distinguish his work from the system building to which he and others tend to compare it. Rather, I propose—as a perhaps helpful reformulation of the narrative—that Feuerbach’s “philosophy” was decisive precisely as a series of critiques. That is, the substance of Feuerbach’s philosophy is more a performance of related critiques than a set of systematic propositions. This is not to say that his work lacks for such propositions or that they are inadequate. To the contrary, much of his work seeks to illustrate and develop critique as a constituting activity within what I will term his logic of complementarity. Moreover, I hope to show that this logic is distinctively and foundationally gendered by the terms of its articulation.

While Feuerbach cannot be described as a systematic or even a sustained thinker on gender, he did mobilize gender and sexuality at key moments in his works. Moreover, the ubiquity of love as a critical concept in his philosophical work recommends a closer inspection of his less frequent specific statements on men and women. Feuerbach’s uses of the relations between the genders (sexual and otherwise) as metaphor, model, or example bring to the fore the complementary but usually hierarchical structure of binaries that operate in his thought. His use of binaries in this way unsettles a putative continuity from Hegel. Viewed as a logic of complementarity, Feuerbach’s appropriation of Hegelian dialectics amounted more to a propensity to think in terms of negations and binaries than to the demand to sublimate them into higher unities. He operated in a mode of critique that set material and collectivist correctives (often gendered female) to what he saw as the excesses of abstraction and individualism in contemporary thought and life (often gendered male). He deployed binaries as complements whose tension did not eventuate in further elaboration. Instead, he maintained strict polarities in order to use one pole as a remedy for the exaggerated tendencies of the other.

(footnote continued)

Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841 (Cambridge, 1980); James D. White, *Karl Marx and the Intellectual Origins of Dialectical Materialism* (Ipswich, 1996).

³ *The Marx–Engels Reader*, second edition, Robert C. Tucker, ed. (New York, 1978), p. 145. It is worth noting that recent efforts, especially by Breckman, have tried to show the highly political nature of Feuerbach and other Young Hegelian thought, but Hegel and Marx remain the primary orienting figures.

This critical mode also differentiates him from Marx, whose dialectical materialism does have a more obvious correspondence to Hegelian dialectics. Moreover, Feuerbach's critical efforts suggest a rather different kind of materialism than that of Marx. Feuerbach did not really advocate turning away from idealism as much as insistently, steadily, even unendingly facing it with materialist critiques. As constitutively gendered, these critiques were also more adamantly embodied than Marx's economic formulations of problems. His mode of critique appealed to (or excoriated) his predominantly male, *bürgerliche* audience as gendered rather than as classed. Thus, the social solidarity that Feuerbach commends by his expostulations on love might seem more relevant to the politics of the private sphere than the public one that occupied Marx. Yet, it is because the tense poles that define the contours of his thought never quite collapse, even ideally, that they present the problems of articulating and performing a general politics of their conflict—a challenge that Marx found compelling. In short, Marx (and more especially Engels) was motivated by the misreading that Feuerbach was a philosopher of the material world, whereas he was more often a philosopher of sustained critique for whom no philosophical system would ever quite finish the task of refuting or negating its adversaries—idealist or otherwise.

This essay will trace Feuerbach's thought through two major phases, interlacing an analysis of his use of gender, in order to highlight his logic of complementarity as it appears in two of its most important iterations. Feuerbach's recourse to gendered language and image is sporadic but consistent; thus, while not attempting a thorough recapitulation of each aspect of his thought or even each text, the essay will engage a variety of his writings to show the continuity of his work through time. This interpretation will make clear the significant differences between his work and that of Hegel and Marx, as I will note along the way. To begin, however, I shall set up my reading by summarizing some of the more important features of gender and gender relations in nineteenth-century Germany.

1. Gender in nineteenth-century Germany

Feuerbach worked with contemporarily operative stereotypes and models of men, women, and their relations. In mid-century Germany these ideal types were a product in the making—part of the turbulent social, economic, and political transition from a traditional, agrarian, monarchical society to a modern, industrializing, and *bürgerliche*-constitutional one. Nonetheless, the changes in family structure occasioned by the transition from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth has been widely studied both comparatively and within the specific context of Germany, and certain useful generalizations can be made about both the reality and ideology of mid-century family life within bourgeois circles.⁴ The changing nature of work meant that bourgeois men spent increasingly more time away from the home

⁴See Werner Conze, ed., *Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas* (Stuttgart, 1976); Heidi Rosenbaum, *Formen der Familie* (Frankfurt, 1982).

(in an office, store, lecture hall, etc.), leaving their wives, de facto (and eventually de jure), more authority within the household economy. Wives also came to bear the greater part of responsibility for the education and training of children, as well as responsibility for emotional support—i.e., loving child-raising.⁵ This separation of gendered domains of activity coordinated with the elaboration of gendered domains of obligation and expertise—an ideology of the “separation of spheres.” The specific roles assigned to the genders were structured around the putatively internal, passive, domestic, dependent, and emotive character of women and the putatively external, competitive, public, independent, and rational character of men.⁶ These binaries defined femininity and masculinity as ideal types rather than described them as empirical practices. Still, within the educated middle class at least, the dichotomy between men’s and women’s socialization, dispositions, capabilities, and experiences was probably quite severe.⁷ In any case, ideal and real were compatible enough that it is reasonable to expect that Feuerbach’s educated, middle class, male readers found his use of gender stereotypes resonant and compelling.⁸ His own fluency in these stereotypes followed from his *bildungsbürgerliche* upbringing and his educational preparation for an academic life.

The logic of these stereotypes did reinforce the polarity between “home” and “world,” radically separating the feminine and the masculine, but it also implied a complementarity between the two. Neither sphere in isolation was adequate to meet the needs of either party or the community. Rather, they were necessary to each other in order to achieve a complete humanity and to function socially. Thus the heterosexual union in marriage, premised on a “communion of souls,” became the standard of life applied to both sexes. According to Karin Hausen, the “idea of the complement seems to be the root definition in the polarization of the ‘character of the sexes’” by the mid-nineteenth century.⁹ The traditional primacy of status and financial concerns in the selection of spouses among the bourgeoisie was concomitantly moderated by the admission of romantic love as a significant requirement for a successful marriage.¹⁰ Complementary congruence between the

⁵Yvonne Schütze, “Mutterliebe-Vaterliebe. Elternrollen in der bürgerlichen Familie des 19. Jahrhunderts,” *Bürgerinnen und Bürger*, Ute Frevert, ed. (Göttingen, 1988).

⁶Karin Hausen, “Family and Role-Division: The Polarisation of Sexual Stereotypes in the Nineteenth Century—An Aspect of the Dissociation of Work and Family Life” in *The German Family: Essays on the Social History of the Family in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Germany*, Richard J. Evans and W.R. Lee, eds. (London, 1981). See Hausen’s simplifying, but instructive chart, pp. 55–56.

⁷On the viability of these roles within other social classes and other parts of the *Bürger*, see *ibid.*, pp. 66–72.

⁸Some idea of Feuerbach’s readership can be gleaned from the contributors to the *Hallische/Deutsche Jahrbücher für Kunst und Wissenschaft*, the journal of the Young Hegelians, to which he himself was a regular contributor. It seems reasonable to generalize that the journal’s audience was similar to its authorship insofar as the content of the journal was focused on issues relevant only to a left-leaning, philosophical subset of the already small educated class. According to Andre Spies’s analysis of these contributors, they “came overwhelmingly from what might be called the educated bourgeoisie.” See Andre Spies, “Towards a Prosopography of young Hegelians,” *German Studies Review* 1996 19(2), pp. 321–339.

⁹Hausen, 60, pp. 61–66.

¹⁰Hausen, “...ein Ulme für das schwanke Efeu.’ Ehepaare im deutschen Bildungsbürgertum,” *Bürgerinnen und Bürger*, pp. 85–117; Rosenbaum, pp. 285–288, 332–338.

genders did not, however, imply equality. While women's roles within the home were valued and celebrated, men's roles both inside and outside the home accrued authority as well as prestige. Feuerbach and his contemporaries had little trouble squaring mutuality with a rather strict hierarchy expressed theoretically and instituted legally and socially.¹¹ His use of gender to articulate complementarity is somewhat unsurprisingly guided by an assumption of hierarchy. However, his manipulation of that hierarchy, sometimes in the form of a reversal, is often surprising.

2. Thoughts on Death and Immortality

Feuerbach's *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* (hereafter, *Thoughts*) offers an early example of his method, and sets the tone for much of his later work.¹² Published anonymously in 1830, only 2 years after Feuerbach completed his dissertation, this work initiated his lifelong denunciation of Christianity and theology. At the time, he had secured a position as lecturer at the small University of Erlangen, the only academic post he ever held. The polemical tone of the work was no doubt inspired in part by the context of the university's resistance to his speculative philosophical standpoint. A training ground for the pastors of the Protestant minority in Bavaria, Erlangen was coming under the influence of the Pietistic revival that prioritized faith and feeling above rational investigation. Feuerbach, fresh from his studies under Hegel in Berlin (1825–1826), only uneasily integrated into his university, despite his own past of religious fervor. Indeed, Feuerbach had begun his university studies as a student of theology in pursuit of answers to his own religious questions, gradually become interested in philosophy while studying under Karl Daub in Heidelberg, and then had abruptly “converted” to philosophy upon his studies with Hegel.¹³ The hostility toward Christianity that he professes in the *Thoughts* was part of his rejection of his own childhood disposition to seek solace in faith in a benevolent God.

But the work should also be seen as part of the sustained Hegelian reassessment of religion during the 1830s. A “school” of academic Hegelianism had developed in Prussia in the late 1820s, but after Hegel's death in 1831, it both splintered and expanded to include intellectuals outside the academy and outside Prussia. One strain of the developing Hegelianism that has come to be known as the “Left

¹¹ On the mutually reinforcing natures of a complementary model of marriage and male monopolization of power in nineteenth-century Germany, see Dagmar Herzog, “Religious dissent and the roots of German feminism,” and Lynn Abrams, “Companionship and Conflict: the negotiation of marriage relations in the nineteenth century,” in *Gender relations in German history*, Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey, eds. (Durham, 1997). For a wider discussion of the legal parameters within which gender and sexuality were negotiated into the beginning of the nineteenth century, see Isabel V. Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700–1815* (Ithaca, 1996).

¹² Ludwig Feuerbach, *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*, James A. Massey, trans. (Berkeley, 1980).

¹³ For a more elaborate account of the conversion experience among the Hegelians, including Feuerbach, see Toews, pp. 89–94.

Hegelians” cultivated its philosophical possibilities in defiance of the reactionary turn in politics and intellectual life brought on by the July Revolution of 1830. The coalition of Church and conservative (i.e., traditional, personalist monarchical) agendas made the critique of religion a powerful, if slightly safer, mode of political dissent, as Warren Breckman has recently argued.¹⁴ James White paraphrases Karl Rosenkranz writing in 1840 that “whereas formerly Hegelianism had been regarded as the bulwark of both the Church and State in Prussia, it was now considered to be heretical in religion and revolutionary in politics.”¹⁵ David Friedrich Strauss’s *Life of Jesus*, published in 1835, was a center of Hegelian critique of the concepts and articles of Christian faith: revelation, miracles, and divine intervention generally. By 1838, Arnold Ruge and Theodore Echtermeyer had founded the *Hallische Jahrbücher*, the short-lived organ of the Young Hegelians, and much of its content centered around theological and religious questions that had been raised by Strauss, Bruno Bauer, and Feuerbach. Hence, Feuerbach’s *Thoughts* was an early example of a relatively sustained intellectual reassessment of religion in Germany that alienated him from the academic and political mainstream but also earned him allies among the small group of left-leaning Hegelians in Prussia.

Feuerbach’s disdain for Christianity, and Protestantism in particular, in the *Thoughts* was based on its focus on the individual’s salvation. This tendency culminated, in his view, in Pietism’s narcissistic and narrow belief in the divinity of the isolated individual’s religious experience: “...the person as person was the focal point of individual belief; thus each person in himself and in his own interior reality became a focal point to himself.”¹⁶ The Catholicism of the Middle Ages redeemed itself only by its constitution as a *community* of believers wherein the self’s definition in reference to the collective belief and practice held sway. Thus, Feuerbach viewed the historical progress of Christianity as a progressive degradation. He meant to correct this descent into excessive vanity by reminding his audience of the primacy of a material, social life over an abstracted, personal one.

For Feuerbach in the *Thoughts*, materiality and sociality were embodied and enacted in love. For him, love was just the overcoming of isolated individuality and finitude, the absorption of other into self such that self temporarily disappeared. In love, the human being, “a particular being, is inflamed by consuming wrath on his natural selfishness and singleness; in love, the human surrenders himself, surrenders everything that is particular and finite” (see footnote 16, p. 20). In love, “one is all and all is one,” and the possibility of the simultaneous and compatible experience of opposites is performed (see footnote 16, p. 28). Love even enacts the union of particular and universal, “personhood” and “essence,” insofar as it *is* a particular person that rejects himself in favor of the universal essence of humanity. Feuerbach defines God as love, as the ultimate unity of unity and distinction (see footnote 16, pp. 19–20). For him, God is the transcendence of self that he recommends as the cure for confining selfishness. The finitude of human beings, their mortality, offers the

¹⁴ Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1999).

¹⁵ White, p. 102.

¹⁶ Feuerbach, *Thoughts*, p. 11.

best proof of God's existence because the very capacity to measure distinct units of time, to define transitoriness, demonstrates the unending expanse of time in which they are imbedded: "Finite reality would have eternal existence if there were no eternal being" (see footnote 16, p. 20). Death is the best indicator of the existence of a reality more expansive than isolated individuality.

In a certain sense, then, for Feuerbach God simply is all of existence, and belief in God is simply belief in existing things. Eternal being, God, love, amount to an affirmation of materiality, the world, nature:

As the human who has experienced love has experienced everything, so the human who has known love has known everything. Know love and you have known God and everything. Thus only the genuine pantheist knows what love is; only he can love. Apart from pantheism everything is egoism, self-seeking, vanity, greed, mercenariness, idolatry.¹⁷

Belief in God and the experience of love thereby require an affirmation of the complete death of the individual, an affirmation of limitedness, in order to make sense of the possibility of transcending this limitedness through love (see footnote 16, p. 17). As John Toews has argued, Feuerbach's focus on death and love served as his embrace of nature as the new Absolute. Both death and love indicated and performed the limitations and the transcendence of individuality.¹⁸

Seen from this perspective, orthodox Christianity's belief in a radically transcendent God and in the immortality of the soul appeared as no more than abstract speculation, narcissistic egoism, and alienation. Feuerbach satirized "pietistic or modern mystical theology" as a ball game in which the believer throws himself away only in order to be thrown back by God. He humbles himself only to pride himself on his humility (see footnote 16, pp. 17–18). Christianity, Feuerbach believed, simply allows the individual to bask in vain self-reflection because the God to which his faith is directed exists only in his mind as an internal reality. Hence he has no access to the external reality of God in the world and the love upon which that access is premised.

All of this analysis was carried out in an ostensibly Hegelian vein, and Feuerbach still professed himself a Hegelian until more than a decade later. He even utilizes Hegel's self-developing *Geist* as the guide through the development from the ancient, pagan world, through Catholicism, to Protestantism (see footnote 16, pp. 15–17). It is therefore tempting to see Feuerbach's love as the *Aufhebung* of particular and universal aspects of reality or of immanent and transcendent possibilities for God and human beings. Warren Breckman takes this view, seeing a cyclical relationship between rationality (universality, transcendence) and irrationality (particularity, immanence) as constituting God for Feuerbach in the *Thoughts*.¹⁹ However,

¹⁷ Feuerbach, *Thoughts*, p. 30. Ursula Reitmeyer argues that "Love, so understood, is not a metaphysical but rather an *existential principle*" which leads Feuerbach to a new philosophical standpoint, "that of living Realism." *Philosophie der Leiblichkeit: Ludwig Feuerbachs Entwurf einer Philosophie der Zukunft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), p. 115.

¹⁸ Toews, pp. 193–196.

¹⁹ Breckman, p. 101.

Feuerbach does not seem to have had a clear Hegelian sublation in mind. Rather, the binaries operated as creative tensions which had to be maintained *as tensions* in order to function. The self-activity which Feuerbach ascribes to God, reminiscent though it is of Hegel's self-developing *Geist*, requires an unending polarity:

Where there is no opposition, no otherness, there is no distinction. (For in opposition there is distinction, and in distinction there is opposition; the things to be distinguished say to one another, 'I am *not* what you are, you are *not* what I am; as much as you are, so much I am not; where I am, there you are not; where you end, there I begin; my beginning is your end.') But where there is no opposition and distinction, there is neither joy nor pain, no drive, no stimulus, no spur, no impulse. Where these are not found in an essence, there exists in it no basis for activity; an essence that lacks self-activity is a dull and dead essence, an essence without drive or stimulus (see footnote 16, p. 25).

God's essence as self-activity exhibits an internal binary that enables its self-production. The generative aspect of God as love, then, turns on a complementary polarity that matches that of the gender stereotypes described earlier. Feuerbach uses love in its quite ordinary, commonplace meaning as the "communion of souls" between man and woman that eventuates in reproduction. It then stands in metonymically for a much wider ontology. But the complementary polarity between the sexes gives us the first and clearest idea of what Feuerbach understands his critical move to be. "Take the case of love of a person," Feuerbach suggests:

...when you both enter into the mutual bond of love, essence becomes object of essence, essence touches essence; and in this unity of essence, the separated individual and particular being of both of you disappears along with all distinctions and divisions in and between you... Without love, you are inseparable from your particular existence; in love, you and your particularity become nothing. But at the same time this perishing is a new and more excellent state of being (see footnote 16, p. 38).

This new and better existence through love recalls the mutual completion expected from marriage within the contemporary gender ideology. It also implies a creative or generative, a sexual, content to the binary. Loss of self in love enables procreation: "Love gives life and takes it away, destroys and engenders life" (see footnote 16, p. 38). It is clear that on this account, the Christian, transcendent God and the Christian whom God reflects become infertile and impotent as well as hopelessly self-contained and onanistic. Feuerbach saw Christianity's progress towards increasing inferiority as also a gradual sterilization.

His account of the degraded state of affairs in modern, Christian society is especially well highlighted by the epigrams that form the final third of the *Thoughts*. These caustic, sarcastic (but sometimes witty) condemnations of the folly of contemporary culture, institutions, and individuals are lightly interspersed with examples that mobilize gender and sexuality as their primary themes. His concluding 11 poems, however, *all* use gender to foreground the primary issues dealt with previously. The gender card, it seems, was his final play against his adversaries.

Feuerbach's audience, both intended and actual, was male, and he uses the standards of masculinity to degrade theology, Christianity, and Pietists. So, for example, he chides Pietists for their misguided or perhaps failed potency in "The *Sustentatores*, or *Erectores*, penis of the Little Pietistic Male Bees":

But nature is not their penis's erector—
No! Even this is sustained by belief alone.²⁰

Mortal life, on the other hand, is only "Spirit's engendering spasm": "Thus the event is brief, but the enjoyment sweet" (see footnote 16, p. 200). Feuerbach questions the virility of both Christians and Christianity, contrasting them with the life-giving capacity of *Geist*. For him, Christian belief is dead and un-procreative because it lacks the internal oppositions necessary to be self-active. Pietists are autoerotically aroused only by their internal belief. Instead of looking out to nature—women—for excitement, they are onanistic and self-absorbed. On Feuerbach's account, true divinity, that is, immanent materiality, will require the drive given by complementary binaries and exemplified by idealized male–female relations. Thus Feuerbach castigates Pietists with failing to live up to their role in the binary. Pietists, for instance, are the butt of jokes based on pointing up physical incapacities. Continuing to tropically associate Pietism with masculinity, Feuerbach suggests that believers are weak or dependent:

Natura se potissimum prodit in minimis:

Most men don't go out without walking canes,
But I have never yet seen a woman with one.

The pietists, for example:

Often men use for stability in life the knot even of a rotten tree,
If only it supports them differently.²¹

Feuerbach here plays on the standard of independence to which his male audience is bound.²² In order for this to work, women are situated as independent, contrary to expectation, a point to which I will return in a moment. Within these epigrams, Pietists are excoriated *as men*, men who do not exhibit the virtues of manhood: potency, strength, independence.

In an opposite move, Feuerbach also figures Pietists as strongmen or even rapists, men who embrace their masculinity to the exclusion of its complement. The male, whose "nature is robust," can "even endure pietism in a pinch." Yet this poem, "Something for Gynecologists," claims that pietistic women lose their "inmost essence," their "beautiful nature loses its reconciling Spirit" (see footnote 16, p. 249). Pietism here is pathologized such that it infects women (who operate as a synecdoche

²⁰ Feuerbach, *Thoughts*, p. 206. Translation altered: "Aber nicht ist bei ihnen Natur Erector des Penis;/ Nein! Auch er ist sogar nur auf den Glauben gestützt." *Werke*, 1, p. 303.

²¹ Feuerbach, *Thoughts*, p. 249. Second translation altered. "Männer nehmen drum oft zum Halt des Lebens den Knorz selbst/Eines verdorbenen Baums, wenn er nur anders sie tragen." *Werke*, 1, p. 348.

²² He also metaphorizes Christian belief as "a rotten tree," a sterile phallus.

for complementarity) and men endure it alone only to their detriment. A Pietist is also accused of robbing the maidenhood of Philology, “a vestal virgin,” blowing out the sacred fire of antiquity that she protected (see footnote 16, p. 182). In general, then, Feuerbach figures Christianity, particularly Pietism (which he sees as its logical extreme), as masculine and then works through the associative logic of gender stereotypes to make it appear decayed, uncreative, or obtuse.²³ “Out with you, you feeble philistines, you boring men!” he dismisses, “But to you, fair sex, I dedicate Spirit with love” (see footnote 16, p. 248).

As this example indicates, Feuerbach’s use of female images tends to operate in a much more positive register. While he does drag out tired tropes of prostitutes and promiscuous women in a few poems, he generally celebrates women, femininity, and Eve especially.²⁴ In an immediate sense, women complete the binary that Feuerbach wishes to maintain, and moreover they hold up their end of the complement more steadily than his wildly oscillating men. They offer to his male audience an example of humanity in tune with its role. In another sense, however, women’s comparative virtue turns on their literal embodiment of the kind of “living Realism” that unites oppositions in a fruitful tension.²⁵ Feuerbach instructs the selfish philistine who calls “the unity of Spirit and nature a mystery” to “behold the woman; the unity lies before your eyes” (see footnote 16, p. 249). He appeals to the sensual experience of vision to corroborate the feminine instantiation of the possibility of union of the material and the spiritual, the finite and the infinite. Women are more able or perhaps more prone to understand and enact the required binary because their lives keep them closer to the material existence that Feuerbach saw as the totality of immanence and transcendence. Feminine domesticity, responsibility for the feeding, clothing, and housing of the community, is here mobilized as a passive predisposition for immediacy contrasted with the actively created centrifugal and public disposition of men.:

The different offices of man and woman:

Men preserve the essence, women the existence of humanity;
Thus the man strives for the hereafter, but the woman attains nothing but reality.

The superiority of the woman:

The man must sweat to attain what he should be,
But the woman already is by nature what she should be (see footnote 16, p. 249).

²³ Feuerbach’s contradictory portrayal of Pietists resembles the similar portrayal of catholic priests by opponents of the Church. Particularly when religious dissent flamed up in the 1840’s, “Priests were portrayed by dissenters...as both undersexed *and* oversexed, as both emasculated *and* predatory,” a complex of ideas also resembling the discourse on homosexual men later in the century. Herzog, p. 91.

²⁴ “Youth! Feast on the bosoms of the pure, eternal virgins/ Philosophy and Art, but flee whores and sluts.” The immediately previous epigram begins a set that mocks Philipp Konrad Marheineke’s attempt to accommodate Hegelian philosophy to Christian dogma. Hence, the “slut” is philosophy defiled and impurified by religion. Feuerbach, *Thoughts*, p. 212.

²⁵ On “living Realism” see note 21.

The contrast Feuerbach assembles in these two poems suggests his disdain for the public, competitive, and ultimately abstract realm of civil society and the state dominated by and filled with men and structured by masculine stereotypes. Striving ends up achieving nothing, whereas a straightforward acceptance of materiality gives access to its reality and its virtue.

In a number of senses the male–female dynamic set up here is reminiscent of Hegel’s Master–Slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. For Hegel, the slave’s work on material reality ultimately serves him better than the master’s mediated enjoyment by giving him immediate knowledge of his relationship to reality and a gripping sense of his own mortality. This sense of his limitedness eventuates in stoicism before the unlimitedness of the world. Of course, the teleology then proceeds through skepticism and eventuates in religion, sublating the immediate concern over death. Feuerbach can be seen here arresting the dialectic somewhere before religion. For him, women seem to operate in a stoic acceptance that retains the necessary awareness of mortality. Men pursue the next steps, moving farther and farther from the basic truth articulated by the slave. By valorizing women, Feuerbach resisted the progress of sublations and maintained the dynamism inhering in binaries.²⁶

His approval of stoicism was therefore conveniently figured by the stereotype of women as passive, simple, and emotive. “The Secure, Happy Woman” has “no need of faith” because her nature “requires and strives after only that which duty impels [her] to do”: “What the man unites only by action is one in [her] by nature” (see footnote 16, p. 250). Among these epigrams, Feuerbach emphasizes the stereotype of woman as simpleminded and obedient, and her fulfillment of her role highlights the failure of pietist men described earlier. He also privileges her role in the binary by showing that her comfort in the world is the model for truth and the basis for a rejection of the ungenerative self-reflection enacted in faith and piety.

Feuerbach’s final move is to enlist women in an explicit confrontation with the excesses of religion. Taking Eve as his primary heroine, he recounts the successes of mythological women in dispelling folly and motivating men to come to their senses. Eve “pulled the night cap off the head of the pious fool,” and “she only did it out of love for us.” The “us” in this passage would seem to be addressed to his audience of men, reanimating the heterosexual-marital model of ideal gender relations that had seemed left behind in Feuerbach’s judgmental treatment of men in the previous poems. In any case, Mâyâ’s alleviation of Brahmâ’s depression such that he could create the world and Helen’s inspiration of the Greeks to “bravely smash heads” expand on the repertoire of cases of feminine virtue that brings Feuerbach to his call to arms:

²⁶ See G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A.V. Miller, trans. (Oxford, 1977), pp. 111–119. For a relevant discussion of the form of subjectivity created through the Master–Slave dialectic that relates it to, among other major themes, Nietzsche’s elaboration of the ascetic ideal and disgust with the sense and the body, see Judith Butler, “Stubborn Attachment, Bodily Subjection,” *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, 1997).

An appeal to the fair sex:

Dear maidens and women! Take the noble ancients as your example
And once again drive away theology (see footnote 16, p. 251).

Feuerbach ends the text by switching to a (phantom) audience of women and makes them seem like the most obvious or available source of immanent—as opposed to transcendent—redemption.²⁷ Feminine sensuality, seduction, and activity are transvalued into positive possibilities for women, and they offer the corrective to the rationalism, asexuality, and decrepitude of men.

We have seen then, that Feuerbach mobilized the panoply of gender stereotypes available to him, both positive and negative, in order to explicate and situate his critique of Christianity. It is interesting that, apart from only a couple of exceptions, women are consistently valued positively, whether they are fulfilling their own stereotyped roles or fulfilling those of men better than the men themselves. The functions of this consistent effort to valorize women were at least twofold. First, it baited and mocked his opponents by emasculating them, questioning their masculinity, or undermining their assumptions about the values associated with masculinity. But secondly, it energized heterosexual desire in the articulation of his argument. By setting up women as human ideals to be emulated, making them objects of admiration and desire, Feuerbach reactivated the very polarity that he wished to affirm. His model of creative tension through complementarity was reinforced by the strict division he premises between the masculine and the feminine. Of course, his figuration of a reversed hierarchy of authority should not be seen as an encouragement of role reversal or even a destabilization of gender roles.²⁸ Rather, it seems to be based exactly on the predictable set of stereotypes relevant to his *bildungsbürgerliche* audience.

Feuerbach's prominent use of gender specifies the mode of critique or the methodology of thought on which his work was premised. He did not follow Hegel's immanent critique by proposing progressive sublations of contradictions into syncretical unities. His advocacy of a return to materiality is not an *Aufhebung* of materiality and transcendence. It is rather a corrective intervention, an attempt to exaggerate one pole in order to bring the other back into balance. Feuerbach argued that it was exactly through limited, flawed reality that limitless, perfect divinity was intelligible—both poles are maintained through the excited critique of one. In a certain sense, materiality becomes for Feuerbach an inscrutable, unquestionable reality, a return of the repressed transcendent God. This way of thinking reproduces

²⁷ Of course, Feuerbach *did* have female readers, but they are not his target audience. For an interesting account of the mid-century activist and thinker Louise Dittmar and her reading of Feuerbach, see Herzog, *Intimacy and Exclusion: Religious Politics in Pre-Revolutionary Baden* (Princeton, 1996), pp. 143–166.

²⁸ Though early- to mid-nineteenth century efforts for women's emancipation did mobilize arguments similar to Feuerbach's. The putatively moral, emotive nature of women was cited as justification for their movement out of the home in order to balance the extremes of masculinized public life, destabilizing some aspects of the strictly defined ideal. See Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From the Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation*, Stuart McKinnon-Evans, trans. (Oxford, 1988), pp.63–82; Herzog, "Religious dissent," pp. 83–85.

the model of transcendent break from the present that Feuerbach demonized as characteristic of religious thought on immortality. His affirmation of the material itself becomes a kind of faith, driving the advocacy of a transcending, unmediated movement to a new way of life with a reanimated tension between the material and the ideal. Feuerbach showed little patience for the synthesis of traditional, religious modes of thought and modern, philosophical ones. Unlike Hegel, David Friedrich Strauss, or P.K. Marheineke, who all seemed willing to allow the bare bones of Christian belief to stand even after substantial critique, Feuerbach urged radical disjuncture with the dying past of religion.²⁹

Feuerbach's desire to refocus philosophical, theological, and social thought onto material reality prefigured the social pantheism that Warren Breckman has argued issued from the meeting of the German liberal tradition and the importation of Saint-Simonianism in the 1830s among German intellectuals on the left. Breckman contends that this new social pantheism "was essentially identical to 'socialism,' which in that transitional time before 'scientific socialism' meant an ethical commitment to the practical consequences of a proper understanding of humanity's collective being." Though it remained "a sentimental radicalism, naïve and romantic," Breckman believes that within the context of repressive *vormärz* Germany, it offered a significant alternative view on major social and political problems.³⁰ Breckman's argument emphasizes the extent to which Feuerbach's pantheistic critique of religion should be viewed simultaneously as a broad-ranging political polemic set against agendas as diverse as a personalist monarchy or the elaboration of an individualist civil society. But viewed through Feuerbach's insistent but unelaborated promotion of a radical break with contemporary belief and practice, both the political efficacy and the political content of his thought remain ambiguous.

Yet it is precisely this ambiguity, that of relentless critique, that of Feuerbach's logic of complementarity, that prompted Marx to undertake a more systematic and systematizing articulation of the materialist perspective. In one sense, Marx's adaptation of Hegelian dialectics to political economy was hardly indebted to Feuerbach at all, since it "skipped over" Feuerbach's materialist critique altogether: Marx replaced idealism with materialism, rather than proposing their sustained mutual articulation. The strain of Marxist thinking that emphasizes historical inevitability, deterministic necessity, and world-historical process is more related to Marx's study of Hegel and other Hegelians (Bruno Bauer, in particular) than his encounter with Feuerbach's materialism. On the other hand, the revolutionary, activist element of Marx's system, even that professed in the eleventh of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, is indebted exactly to the revolutionary utopianism expressed by Feuerbach's critical stance. His was no doubt an intellectualized activism, a politics

²⁹ Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, published in 1835, was taken as a radical dismissal of the truth of Christ's miraculous life, but Strauss himself viewed the empirical critique as a first step in the Hegelian *Aufhebung* that would re-establish the basic truth of Christian belief. David Friedrich Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet* (Tübingen, 1835). See Toews, pp. 255–287.

³⁰ Breckman, pp. 219–220.

of the pen. But Feuerbach's critique put pressure on his readers' bodies more or less directly by appealing to their sexuality and gender, inspiring the affect-laden politicization in which Marx participated. Hence, Feuerbach's uniformly critical logic of complementarity was efficacious because it avoided resolution and performed the (pro)creative tension that it affirmed.

3. Feuerbach's critique of Hegel

One of the generative aspects of a philosophy of critique is that it tends to produce further critique, and Feuerbach's next step was to apply his complementary critique to the Hegelian philosophy that had fueled his original turn against religion. His frustrations with Hegelianism, with academic philosophy, and with academia in general were partly the product of his disappointments as a professional. Feuerbach's materialist pantheism in the *Thoughts* catalyzed the professional alienation and isolation in which he lived for the rest of his life. Though the text was published anonymously, he was quickly discovered as its author and just as quickly lost his position as lecturer at the University of Erlangen. He did catch the attention of the Prussian Hegelians, Eduard Gans, Karl von Altenstein, and Arnold Ruge, among others, who courted him throughout the 1830s and, from a distance, incorporated him into the circle of major figures among the Young Hegelians who formed around the *Hallische Jahrbücher für Kunst und Wissenschaft*. But Feuerbach's attempts to obtain a salaried academic position through the 1830s foundered in the reactionary waters of his Bavarian homeland, and, due to their waning power base, his Prussian Hegelian allies were unable to promise anything more solid than their intellectual support (see footnote 18, pp. 328–331). By 1837, he gave up the attempt to incorporate himself into institutional intellectual life, married Bertha Löw, and moved to Bruckberg, the site of her family's porcelain factory (their immediate means of support) and his home for the remainder of his life. Feuerbach embraced his retreat into the obscure village because it gave him direct access to the nature around which his philosophical mentality was forming. "The philosopher, at least as I comprehend him," he wrote at the time, "must have Nature as his friend, must know her not only out of books but also face to face."³¹ From this point on, Feuerbach can be seen as developing an increasingly empiricist, naturalist philosophical perspective that was correspondingly increasingly at odds with Hegel's idealism. He also celebrated his release from the confines of the university wherein he had had to live a "manifest lie" by allowing his philosophy to socialize with theology. But, he asked himself, "is philosophy in our universities not ex officio a handmaiden of theology?"³² Feuerbach was probably referring to Bavarian

³¹ Feuerbach, *Fragmente*, p. 216. It is unclear exactly which elements of these "fragments" date from the time indicated and which may have been written in retrospect. Still, Feuerbach seems to have appreciated the parochial nature of his home as an immediate contrast to the cosmopolitan realm of his failed attempts to secure employment.

³² Feuerbach, *Fragmente*, p. 217.

universities, particularly Erlangen as a center of conservative theology, but the comment prophesied his later convictions. It was during this period that Feuerbach developed his explicitly critical attitude towards Hegelian philosophy, which came to fruition in the period from 1839 through the 1840s.

Even in 1827, immediately after leaving Berlin and his tutelage under Hegel, Feuerbach had expressed three major “doubts” (*Zweifel*) concerning the master’s philosophy, and when he sent his dissertation to Hegel in 1828 he expressed a modicum of rebellion from his teacher.³³ We have already seen how his methodology in the *Thoughts* departs from Hegel’s in significant ways. Yet it was not until a decade later that Feuerbach turned his own methods of critique onto Hegelian philosophy itself.³⁴ His *Towards a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy* (1839), *Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy* (1843), and *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1843), form a whole as Feuerbach’s sustained and public reassessment of Hegelianism.³⁵ Feuerbach’s attack on his philosophical roots iterated his philosophy of critique and redeployed the logic of complementarity that governed his thought.³⁶ Again, gender was constitutive and essential to this endeavor.

His initial public effort to directly question “the philosophy which dominates the present” was in an article entitled *Towards a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy* (hereafter, *Critique*). This piece, which appeared in 1839 in the *Hallische Jahrbücher*, was Feuerbach’s response to Ruge’s request that he review a book by Carl Theodor Bayrhoffer called *Die Idee und Geschichte der Philosophie*. Feuerbach found Bayrhoff pedantic and doctrinaire, typical of the simple-minded Hegelianism of which he had become considerably skeptical; and he used the review as an opportunity to air his initial, fragmentary critiques of Hegel himself. Feuerbach intended the article to appear anonymously and appended a footnote that emphasized its preliminary and incomplete state. Nonetheless, Ruge included Feuerbach’s name in the publication, possibly because he wanted to protect his journal from the censor and distance himself from the Hegelian heresy that Feuerbach presumed to inaugurate.³⁷

³³ Feuerbach, *Fragmente*, pp. 200–201. Letter to G.W.F. Hegel, 22. November 1828, *Werke*, 1, pp. 353–58.

³⁴ Of course, Feuerbach pursued other projects in that time as well, including his continued assault on Christianity and theology. His *Essence of Christianity* (1841) is often seen as his most lastingly influential work. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, George Eliot, trans. (New York, 1957).

³⁵ Feuerbach, *Towards a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy* and *Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy*, translated in *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, Lawrence S. Stepelevich, ed. (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 95–128, 156–171; *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, Manfred Vogel, trans. (New York, 1966).

³⁶ Manfred H. Vogel offers the following perspective in his introduction to *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*: “Even in that part of the *Principles* that is devoted to the positive formulation of his philosophy, Feuerbach continually returns to his critique of the metaphysical-idealist position. It would seem that he can formulate his position only in the process of attacking and criticizing the other.” Feuerbach, *Principles*, p. xlvii.

³⁷ Editor’s notes to *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Philosophie*, *Werke III*, p. 331.

One important aspect of this article is its explicit condemnation of the Hegelian dialectical process. Feuerbach notes that Hegel's system "knows only *subordination* and *succession*; co-ordination and coexistence are unknown to it."³⁸ He opposes the tendency to attribute reason to, and therefore to *rationalize*, historical moments as passages towards the Absolute. So understood, reason seems to inhibit rather than advance an understanding of any particular historical moment, including the present, with its complex of tensions, "co-ordination and coexistence." By starting at a posited beginning of *Geist's* development, Hegelian philosophy fails to engage *Geist's* present state on its own terms. Feuerbach proposes that instead of starting from abstract Being, he will look to "Being itself, i.e., real Being" (see footnote 38, p. 100). Reiterating the argument of the *Thoughts*, he explains that "the god of limitation stands guard at the entrance to the world," that only through "self-limitation" is access to the real world possible (see footnote 38, p. 98). Thus Feuerbach reaches a similar conclusion about what is needed: a radical break with Hegel, a (re)turn to materiality as a corrective to the excesses of reason's speculative excursions. Here reason, a synecdoche for Hegelian philosophy, replaced Christianity as the object of Feuerbach's scorn, but the basic critique remained the same.³⁹ Feuerbach claims that Hegel and his followers narcissistically define and proclaim his philosophy "as *absolute* philosophy; i.e., as nothing less than *philosophy itself*" (see footnote 38, p. 97). But he queries the self-projective project of claiming this transcendent status for one individual or one individual philosophy. Understanding requires love's transcendence of self:

Only love, admiration, veneration, in short, only passion [*Affekt*] makes the individual into the species. For example, in moments when, enraptured by the beautiful and lovable nature of a person, we exclaim: she is beauty, love, and goodness incarnate.⁴⁰

In love, we are able to simply declare that another person *is* love. That is, love is once again identical with the movement of both parties beyond their narrow and particular individuality. In this passage, (hetero)sexual desire, *Affekt*, emotive excitement, succinctly frame Feuerbach's doubts about reason's capacity to effect a transition from the individual to the collective.

This was a distinct shift from his earlier thought, particularly his more or less Hegelian dissertation.⁴¹ At this later point, Feuerbach was suspicious of reason and its elaboration in Hegelianism, and proposed his standard remedy. Hegelianism, the logical extreme of reason, has taken the place of Pietism, the logical extreme of Christianity, as Feuerbach's concern, but he similarly seeks to re-establish the creative tension between reason and materiality by overstating his commitment to

³⁸ Feuerbach, *Critique*, p. 96.

³⁹ A point Feuerbach himself makes in the *Theses*, as we shall see.

⁴⁰ Feuerbach, *Critique*, p. 97. Translation altered from "he is love..." The German uses *sie* to agree with *die Person*. The maintenance of the feminine in this discussion of love seems more appropriate.

⁴¹ *De Ratione, Una, Universali, Infinita* [*On Reason, One, Universal, Infinite*], *Werke*, 1, pp. 17–76. In this work Feuerbach shows that it is precisely through reason that individual unites himself to a more general, collective life.

the latter pole. “Truth,” he claims in the *Critique*, “exists not in unity with, but in refutation of its opposite.” Thus “Dialectics is not a monologue...but a dialogue between speculation and empirical reality.” Moreover, “Sensuous being denies logical being” (see footnote 38, p. 110). Feuerbach viewed reason as inherently abstracting, inherently tending to stray from the world, constantly in need of a material corrective to keep it from excessive speculation. His usage of negation did not culminate in a Hegelian negation of the negation, but rather firmed up mutually defining binaries as the structure of life and thought.

The next phase of Feuerbach’s critique of Hegel was not published until 1843 in a volume collected by Ruge and printed in Zürich in order to avoid censorship. Entitling this work *Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy* (hereafter, *Theses*), Feuerbach was again cautious about its comprehensiveness as a critique. He was also cautious about its political implications in the context of the newly intensified Prussian censor. However, the considerable fame garnered by Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity* (1841) had made him the apparent successor to Strauss as the foremost critic of Christianity in Germany, and therefore Ruge eventually convinced him to keep the piece unchanged as part of his collection.⁴²

The *Theses* explicitly build on Feuerbach’s work on religion by elaborating a conflation of Hegelian philosophy and Christianity, thereby making the condemnation of the latter directly applicable to the former: “The new philosophy is the *realized idea*, the *truth* of Christianity.”⁴³ Feuerbach argues that Hegelianism, like the religion of which it is only an outgrowth, tends to stray from materiality and therefore break the tension that makes it productive. Hence, he concludes that “the philosopher must consider what in the human does *not* philosophize, but rather is *at odds with* philosophy and *opposed* to abstract thinking,” and that this “unphilosophical, absolutely antischolastic essence in us, distinguished from thinking, is the principle of sensualism” (see footnote 43, pp. 163–164). The figure of the philosopher turned against himself, turned toward the “sensual,” pushes Feuerbach’s logic of complementarity toward contradiction and perhaps paradox. But the force of this lived ambiguity is the further advocacy of generative polarity. Indeed, Feuerbach plays on the embodied tension through a series of related polarities—head/heart, thinking/intuition, school/life, determining/determined, being/non-being, mediate/immediate, activity/passivity—that all culminate in a return to the basic polarity, this time formulated nationally: German metaphysics/French sensualism. The implicitly gendered associations of the binaries must seem clear, but Feuerbach goes on to formulate them explicitly:

The true philosopher, the philosopher *identical with life and human being* must be of *Franco-German* descent...The *heart*—the feminine principle, the *sense* for the finite, the seat of materialism—is a *French disposition*, whereas the *head*—the masculine principle, the seat of idealism—is German (see footnote 43, pp. 164–165).

⁴² Editor’s notes to *Vorläufige Thesen zur Reformation der Philosophie, Werke III*, pp. 357–367.

⁴³ Feuerbach, *Theses*, p. 171.

Here Feuerbach explicitly figures the complementary polarity as procreative. He simultaneously re-imagines the “true philosopher” as a strictly and primarily corporeal entity, maintaining the primacy of the pole that he views as endangered. Nonetheless this metaphor makes clear that Feuerbach was not as hostile to either reason or philosophy as his hyperbolic calls for a focus on materiality make it seem. His overall project was an ongoing corrective critique.

In fact, despite his prominence as a critic of religion in the 1840s, Feuerbach increasingly understood his critique of Hegel to be the more important endeavor. The pressure to systematize this project into a more thoroughgoing philosophy that could serve as a basis for change, philosophical and social, occupied him from 1842 onward. Even before his *Theses* had been published, Feuerbach was working on the publication of a follow-up piece that he thought might begin a new philosophy. In these *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (hereafter, *Principles*) he strove to articulate his own philosophical position as a materialist study of the human that admits of a complementary tension with philosophical reflection itself. This book was also published in Zürich in 1843. It deepened his developing alienation from Ruge and more especially from Marx and Engels, in spite of its impact on their developing materialist agenda. Feuerbach essentially became a political quietist or disengagé in this period, discouraging others’ attempts at overt political involvement and retreating into his own philosophical seclusion.⁴⁴

His earnest pursuit of a “philosophy of the future” nonetheless remained primarily a philosophy of critique that did not resolve itself into a formalized system. He continued to situate his thought in reference to its complement, Hegelian idealism. Recalling his contention that unlimitedness is only comprehensible through limitation, Feuerbach argues in the *Principles* that the “new philosophy” will be grounded in the empirical.⁴⁵ In Feuerbach’s view, Hegel’s “speculative identity of mind and matter” is a contradiction that is obscured in the ostensible sublation of contradictory elements: “God is determined as a process, and atheism is determined as a moment in this process.”⁴⁶ In contrast, he proposes to eliminate the contradiction precisely by maintaining it:

The new philosophy itself is basically nothing other than the essence of feeling elevated to consciousness; it only affirms in reason and with reason what every man—the real man—professes in his heart. It is the heart made into mind. The heart does not want abstract, metaphysical, or theological objects; it wants real and sensuous objects and beings (see footnote 46, pp. 53–54).

Sensuous objects, then, can become abstractions, but only if mediated through the heart into the mind. By preserving the distinction between heart and mind, between

⁴⁴ Editor’s notes to *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft, Werke III*, pp. 372–378.

⁴⁵ “The differences between materialism, empiricism, realism, and humanism are in this work irrelevant,” he claims. Rather he proposes a general schema for philosophy’s future. Feuerbach, *Principles*, 23, fn. 1.

⁴⁶ Feuerbach, *Principles*, p. 34.

materiality and speculation, he re-orientes philosophical work toward its basis in “real,” “sensuous” being.

In addition, Feuerbach continued to uphold love as the basic model for transcending self and achieving philosophical truth in the *Principles*. “Two human beings are needed for the generation of man,” he claims, “of the spiritual as well as of the physical man” (see footnote 46, p. 59). Idealized, procreative, marital, gender relations remain the distinctive expression of love’s complementary polarity. The move to philosophical universals can only be achieved in the communion between empirical individuals. In contrast, Feuerbach disparagingly compares the *Aufhebung* of the general and the particular, thought and being, in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* to a breakdown of “natural law.” If “my wife” and “my house” become “this wife” and “this house,” Feuerbach claims, “we would directly arrive at a community of goods and wives where there is no difference between this and that and where everyone possesses every woman.”⁴⁷ He ridicules Hegelian sublation by metaphorizing it with a scandalous destabilization of marriage.⁴⁸ But in addition to deriding Hegel, Feuerbach’s appeal to anxiety about the loss of sexual control within the heterosexual hierarchy enlivened the embodied and lived ambivalence that the future philosophy had to maintain in order to remain critical and generative.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Feuerbach, *Principles*, p. 43. It is interesting to compare this passage with that in Marx’s “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844” where he chides “crude communism” with reducing the community of women to a communal possession. *Marx–Engels Reader*, pp. 82–83.

⁴⁸ It is also interesting to note at this point that Engels critiqued Feuerbach precisely for valorizing the love of the *bürgerliche* marriage and therefore saw love as degrading into class warfare. Manuel Cabada Castro suggests that Engels *wrongly* interprets “love” in its empirical forms in institutions, since Feuerbach is specifically critiquing certain institutions and proposing a fuller and more inclusive conception of love (that may cross class boundaries). I tend to favor Castro’s reading insofar as the stereotyped marriage seems to operate as a model, analogy, or metaphor for love, not a substitution. Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, C.P. Dutt, trans. (New York, 1941). Manuel Cabada Castro, *Feuerbach y Kant: Dos Actitudes Antropologicas* (Madrid, 1980), pp. 177–182.

⁴⁹ Of course, keeping faith with such an ambivalence meant that Feuerbach was never able to settle upon a definitive or comprehensive philosophical system, much as he tried. By 1846, his further attempts to develop the *Principles* produced an unpublished, short collection of polemically explanatory notes now entitled *Against the Dualism of Body and Soul, Flesh and Spirit* (1846) [*Wider den Dualismus von Leib und Seele, Fleisch und Geist, Werke*, 4, pp. 165–195]. Despite the promise of the title, he predictably seeks to reconcile body and soul through the primacy of the body, the corporeal, sensual, material, emotive, and hence the feminine. “I love in order to live, says the man; I live in order to love, says the woman”:

... but the crucial point of love lies in the belly. The woman represents flesh, the man spirit, that is, the man is the head, the woman the belly of humanity. In man the belly recedes, in the woman it come forward—the female belly is anatomically more developed, more perfect than the male—in men the belly has a subordinate, merely teleological, meaning, in women it also has an independent, aesthetic meaning; in the man the belly is merely a restored building, but in the woman it elevates itself to the temple of love. (187)

With the uterus as both a reproductive site and a center of love, the passage metaphorically implies that the birth of a new philosophy demands an eroticized communion of souls. The poetic erotics of this passage also incite his masculine audience to the desirous embrace of materiality.

4. Conclusion

Feuerbach scholars are fond of noting that he is not a systematic thinker. Yet we might well understand much of his work as a system of critique that resisted the temptations of *Aufhebung*. Feuerbach worked from a perspective that maintained binaries often on the model of idealized gender relations, situating them as complementary, but usually hierarchically arranged. This way of thinking seems to differentiate him both from Hegel and from Marx, the two usual signposts in understanding Feuerbach's thought and its trajectory. It suggests that Feuerbach appropriated little from Hegel's method apart from the propensity to think in terms of negations and binaries. "What does my method consist in?" explained Feuerbach, "In reducing everything supernatural to natural by means of humanity, and everything superhuman to human by means of nature, but constantly only on the grounds of evident, historical, empirical facts and examples" (see footnote 32, p. 226). In doing so, he operated in a consistently critical mode, problematizing even his own systematic prescriptions or propositions.

Feuerbach's critical ambiguity paradoxically gave his writings a revolutionary tone. By constantly excoriating his opponents and promising redemption upon their disappearance, his works encouraged his readers to imagine that the transition to a new world was as simple as an immediate reversal, radical break, conversion experience, or "revolution." His embrace of immanence, in fact, often functioned as an embrace of transcendence:

The old philosophy necessarily reverted to theology... The new philosophy, on the other hand, can never relapse; that which is dead in both body and soul can never return, not even as a ghost" (see footnote 46, p. 68).

Notwithstanding his repeated claims that his critiques were preliminary, introductory, partial, incomplete, Feuerbach did claim that his work had the force of establishing some kind of completely new, more complex negotiation within the binaries that he put forward. The seductive misreading that Feuerbach's work proposed revolutionary transition from one worldview to another, a misreading which he himself eventually tended to profess, motivated Marx to claim that Feuerbach was "the true conqueror of the old philosophy."⁵⁰ But, to the extent that his critiques operated within a logic of complementarity, they always relied upon the strength and validity of their complement—Christianity, religion, Hegelianism, philosophy.

Thus, pinpointing the influence of Feuerbach on Marx requires that we look less at the explicit content of Feuerbach's philosophical claims—materialism, empiricism, or humanism—and more at the impact of his critical mode. Marx's readings of the *Theses* and the *Principles* led him to the conclusions by 1844 that Feuerbach had demonstrated that philosophy, like religion, was to be condemned, that he had established "*true materialism*" and "*real science*," and that he had opposed the "the negation of the negation" with "the self-supporting positive, positively grounded on

⁵⁰ Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," *Marx–Engels Reader*, p. 107.

itself” (see footnote 50, p. 108) (see footnote 50, p. 108). Yet these claims are more projections of Marx’s own insights than recapitulations of Feuerbach’s texts. Marx’s turn to political economy in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) and *The German Ideology* (1845–1846), indebted though he claimed it was to Feuerbach, in a sense simply displaced Hegel’s dialectic from ideas to economic development. He thereby passed over the core of Feuerbach’s thought as a system of sustained critique that problematized the kind of authoritative statements that Marx attributed to it.

Moreover, Marx ignored the ways in which Feuerbach’s work engaged the gendered body. In part by utilizing gender as an affective rhetoric, Feuerbach made the empirical body, especially the body of his reader, an essential element of his work. He explicitly implicated the gendered body in his philosophical critique, giving it the (performative) potential to enliven his readers’ bodies even as he called upon them to enliven themselves. This effect helped give Feuerbach’s texts the revolutionary tone that excited Marx. Hence, despite his distinctly un- or anti-revolutionary stance, Feuerbach’s gendered logic of complementarity contributed to the revolutionary sentiment that inspired much of Marx’s work.

We might say, then, that within a genealogy of Hegelianism Feuerbach is an uncle—important, but supplementary to the blood lineage between Hegel and Marx. On the other hand, we might say that Feuerbach exemplifies a significant counter-current or alternative to the string of philosophical systems in the nineteenth century—from Kantianism to neo-Kantianism. Given the contemporary scholarly interest in revisiting and re-reading the “great” thinkers of the German tradition, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, etc., this tradition’s “secondary” figures might offer important resources for overcoming the canonical readings of canonized texts that still have considerable resonance in a variety of fields.⁵¹ A careful reading of Feuerbach’s work suggests a model of substantive and sustainable critique of considerable interest in itself and also as an instance of the intellectual alternatives to the sweep of nineteenth-century bourgeois thought.

⁵¹ In areas as varied as German studies, post/colonial studies, and high theory, scholars have recently been coming to terms in interesting ways with the philosophical roots that feed contemporary thought. See Susan Buck-Morss, “Hegel and Haiti,” *Critical Inquiry*, 2000 26(4), pp. 821–865; Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford, 1997), *Antigone’s Claim* (New York, 2000); Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, 1999).