

## Feuerbach, Ludwig (1804-1872)

As a member of the "Young Hegelians", Feuerbach criticised what he called Hegel's reduction of Man's Essence to Self-consciousness, and went on to prove the connection of philosophical idealism with religion. In rejecting Hegel's philosophy and advocating materialism, criticising religion and idealism, Feuerbach emphasised the individual, purely "biological" nature of man. He saw thought as a purely reflective, contemplative process, and in his understanding of history remained an idealist. Nevertheless, his critique of Hegel's idealism laid the basis for Marx and Engels' work. Two years before his death he joined the German Social Democratic Party founded by Marx, but he was not politically active.

Both Marx and Engels were strongly influenced by Feuerbach, though they thoroughly critiqued him for inconsistent materialism: [Theses on Feuerbach](#); [M German Ideology](#), and [Ludwig Feuerbach and The End of Classical German Philosophy](#) (and others). Engels wrote in the latter work:

“... the main body of the most determined Young Hegelians was, by the practical necessities of its fight against positive religion, driven back to Anglo-French materialism. This brought them into conflict with the system of their school.

“While materialism conceived nature as the sole reality, nature in the Hegelian system represents merely the "alienation" of the absolute idea, so to say, a degradation of the idea. At all events, thinking and its thought-product, the idea, is here the primary, nature the derivative, which only exists at all by the condescension of the idea. And in this contradiction they floundered as well or as ill as they could.

“Then came Feuerbach's **Essence of Christianity**. With one blow it pulverised the contradiction, in that without circumlocutions it placed materialism on the throne again. Nature exists independently of all philosophy. It is the foundation upon which we human beings, ourselves products of nature, have grown up. Nothing exists outside nature and man, and the higher beings our religious fantasies have created are only the fantastic reflection of our own essence.

“The spell was broken; the "system" was exploded and cast aside, and the contradiction, shown to exist only in our imagination, was dissolved. One must oneself have experienced the liberating effect of this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was general; we all became at once Feuerbachians.”

In the [Principles of the Philosophy of the Future](#), Feuerbach puts his philosophical position concisely and comprehensively into one work. The [first section](#) includes Feuerbach's interpretation of the history of philosophy up to Hegel. The [second section](#) is probably the best, Feuerbach's critique of Hegel, and [final part](#) puts forward his own position, which is very weak really, and is subject to withering criticism in [Part III](#) of Engels' booklet.

Feuerbach, who Marx described as the “true conqueror of the old philosophy”, was a revolutionary, and at the end of his life joined the German Social Democratic Party, but he retained his differences with Marx to the end. Nevertheless, his contribution to the revolutionary movement should never be forgotten.

See: [Feuerbach Reference Archive](#) .

*Further Reading:* [Ilyenkov's](#) essay on Feuerbach.