

Issues in Thinking about God

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Week 2

- The critique of theism and its theological background (Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, Nietzsche)
- D.L. Edwards, *Religion and Change* London 1969
- K. Barth, *Protestant Theology in the 19th Century – its Background and History*, London 1972
- J.C. Livingstone (ed.), *Modern Christian Thought*, vol.1, Minneapolis, MN 2006

1. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

- *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781, ₂1787
- *Critique of Practical Reason*, 1788
- *Critique of Judgment*, 1790
- A. Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*
- K. Barth, *Protestant Theology in the 19th Century*, chapter on Kant

Kant II

- Historical background:
- Rationalism (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz)
- Philosophy leads to rational theology, specifically the ontological argument.
- Construction of a 'Natural Theology' on the basis of those insights.

Kant III

- Influence of David Hume (1711-1776):
Cognition always based on sense-perception.
- In his first *Critique* (1781) Kant studies human cognition.
- Result: Cognition always involves rationality and sense-perception.
- The senses produce the 'material', mind provides the 'form'.

Kant IV

- Consequence: No cognition without the possibility of sense-perception.
- → God cannot be an object of cognition.
- Result: Metaphysical knowledge of God is excluded
- How then can God be known?
- Re-emphasis on importance of revelation.

2. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1830)

- *Faith and Knowledge* (1801)
- *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1832)
- *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, esp. contributions by H.S. Harris and L. Dickey
- M. Inwood, *Hegel* (excellent introduction to his philosophy)
- T. Pinkard, *Hegel. A Biography*
- P.C. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology* (full text available at Oxford Scholarship Online)

Hegel



Hegel I

- H.'s own thought though essentially philosophical is deeply informed by his theological background
- H. finds interesting those doctrines which Enlightenment thought had rejected (Trinity, Incarnation)
- Unlike Kant, H. recognised the task of thinking God

Hegel II

- God cannot be entirely detached from the world
- Influence of Spinoza, but Hegel develops 'panentheism'
- Concept of God must be dynamic, not static:
- A philosophical appreciation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

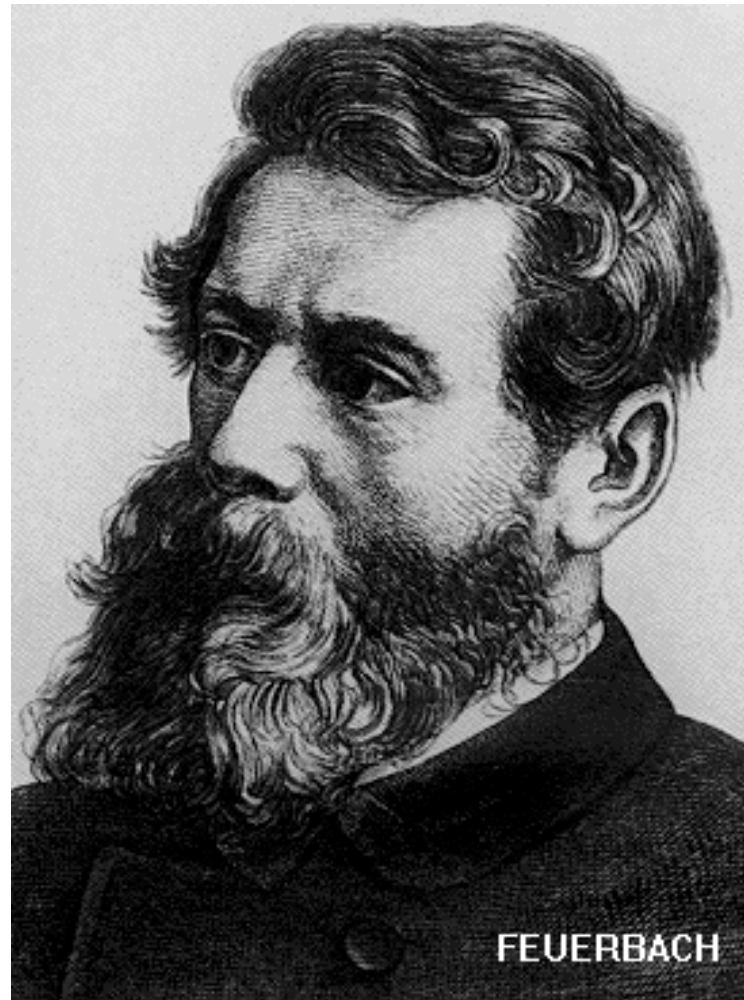
Hegel VI

- Is his philosophy thus a vindication of orthodoxy?
- For H. the truth of all these doctrines becomes ultimately apparent *in philosophy*

3. Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872)

- *Essence of Christianity* (1841) online at:
<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/essence/>
- K. Ameriks (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, final ch.
- W. Breckmann, *Marx, The Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, ch. on Feuerbach
- K. Barth, *Protestant Theology in the 19th Century*, ch. on Feuerbach (important for Barth's own theology!)

Ludwig Feuerbach



Feuerbach II

- Basic idea: religion is projection:
- God does not make man in his image, man makes God
- Not a projection though of the individual man, but of ideal, universal man
- All religions are inherently anthropomorphic
- Theological attempts to purge this notion of God are rejected as 'a subtle, devious kind of atheism'

Feuerbach III

- If all the attributes, then, are human, there is no reason there is a transcendent subject to them
- From *Essence of Christianity* (§ 2):
- ‘What is God to man, that is man’s own spirit, man’s own soul; what is man’s spirit, soul, and heart – that is his God. God is the manifestation of man’s inner nature, his expressed self; religion is the solemn unveiling of man’s hidden treasures, the avowal of his innermost thoughts, the open confession of the secrets of his love.’

4. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

- *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887) Online at:
<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/genealogytofc.htm>
- *The Antichrist* (1888)
- Excellent for biographical introduction (+ further reading) is the entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche/>
- M. Tanner, *N.: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford 2001
- W. Kaufmann, *N.: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1950)
- G. Deleuze, *N. and Philosophy* (1983)

Nietzsche II

- Starts from the idea of God as projection, but asks: what is projected?
- Jewish-Christian tradition is based on the resentment ('ressentiment') of underdogs.
- Their hatred of those who are better off translates into religious ideas:
- A) in pure form (eternal reward for those who are poor, suffer, etc.)
- B) transformed into the notion of 'love'.

Major Points

- How can we know of and speak about God given that our metaphysical attempts to establish his existence inevitably fail (Kant)?
- What does it mean for theological approaches to God that he emphatically needs to be *thought* about (Hegel)?
- How can we make sure the God who is discussed is not merely a projection (Feuerbach)?
- What is the cultural and social impact, specifically, of Christian attempts to think about God (Nietzsche)?