

## GOING FURTHER: Feuerbach: God as projection of a human ideal

In understanding the roots of secularism, Freud's view that the idea of God is a human construction is very influential. Freud came to this view from his reading of Feuerbach. To understand Freud, it is useful to have some understanding of Feuerbach



**Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872)**

In his most important work, 'The essence of Christianity' (1841) Feuerbach argues that humans project themselves onto the idea of God. God is in effect a wishful illusion that we create. By creating this idea of God, we come to an understanding of ourselves.

***"The Divine Being is nothing other than the being of man himself, or rather, the being of man abstracted from the limits of the individual man or the real, corporeal man and objectified, i.e. contemplated and worshipped as another being, as a being distinguished from his own. All determinations of the Divine Being are, therefore, determinations of the being of man."***

The idea of God is a concept that we abstract from our concept of human beings. 'God is man written in large letters'. Feuerbach argues that the essence of religion is anthropology (study of humans)

We ascribe attributes such as love, wisdom and power to the being of God, yet these are really human attributes. In suggesting that God possesses these attributes completely, we deny our own worth as human beings. Feuerbach calls this alienation. We become separated and removed from something that we should be in harmony with, ourselves. By looking outward to a non-existent God, we fail to connect with ourselves and our fellow human beings. We ought to replace our religious faith in God with a faith in our own abilities as human beings.

### **The Attributes of God**

Feuerbach goes on to argue that many of the attributes of God such as omnipotence, omniscience and benevolence are incompatible. The concept of God is a nonsense that makes no sense. This is due to the fact that it is a combination of the projections of both our rational and emotional selves.

### **Influence**

Feuerbach's legacy is that he is the first major philosopher to explicitly state that he was an atheist and to seek to provide an explanation of the concept of God from an atheistic perspective. Various thinkers such as Freud, Marx, Durkheim and Nietzsche all owe Feuerbach a huge debt.