Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872)

A. What he retains of Hegel’s idealism

1. World history develops dialectically

2. There is a mirroring of human thought in concrete cultural institutions

B. What he rejects

1. The single universal substance is Nature (spatio-temporal reality), not a supernatural, purely rational, living Spirit.

2. Human consciousness is not the projection of absolute Spirit trying to actualize itself, but the product of man alienated himself from his true source of reality, i.e. Nature:

   “Nature is thus the ground of man”
   --- cited in Copleston, p. 295

3. Religious thought and practice, including Christianity, is not one of the highest cultural expressions whereby Spirit manifests itself, but simply a higher form of human alienation that must be overcome.
C. Feuerbach’s dialectical analysis of religious belief

1. Man’s felt dependence on Nature first manifests itself in the deification of natural forces or the idea of God as the cause of natural forces.

2. Man starts to objectify nature and distinguish himself from it by contemplating his essence as a thinking, willing, loving species-being. However, he initially projects these essential attributes onto a transcendent being, God:

   “The clearest, most irrefragable proof that man in religion contemplates himself as the object of the Divine Being, as the end of the divine activity, that thus in religion he has relation only to his own nature, only to himself—the clearest, most irrefragable proof of this is the love of God to man, the basis and central point of religion” (Essence of Christianity, p. 57).

3. The alienation represented in Christianity, as well as its philosophical counterpart, Hegel’s idealism, can be overcome by substituting anthropology for theology:

   “Our most essential task is now fulfilled. We have reduced the supermundane, supernatural, and superhuman nature of God to the elements of human nature as its fundamental elements. Our process of analysis has brought us again to the position with which we set out. The beginning, middle and end of religion is MAN” (Ibid. p. 184).