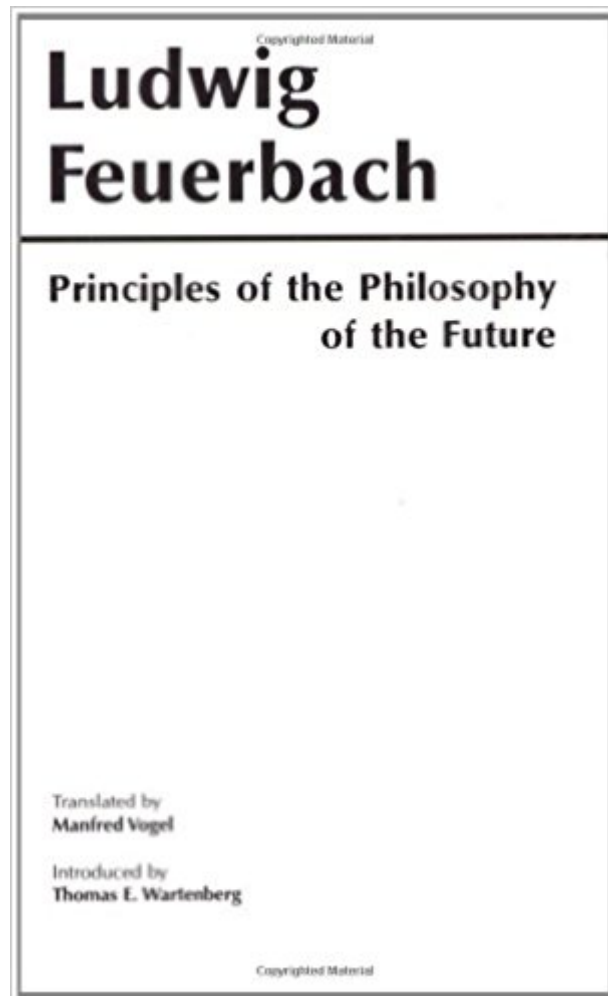


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Principles Of The Philosophy Of The Future (Hackett Classics)



Synopsis

Includes an Introduction and selected bibliography.

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Customer Reviews

Text: English, German (translation) --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Ludwig Feuerbach is a philosopher who is probably read more for the influence he had on other philosophers than simply for his own sake and there is probably some justification for that. Many of his ideas were ultimately developed with more depth and brilliance by philosophers like Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and the existential phenomenologists (especially Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty). But as someone who is fairly familiar with Marx, Nietzsche and the existential phenomenologists I still found many ideas expressed in this little book by Feuerbach that I thought were both brilliant and unique to Feuerbach, if not in substance at least in manner of expression. So Feuerbach is definitely worth studying in his own right even for those who are already familiar with the later thinkers who were influenced by him. The book is written in a somewhat aphoristic style, and it is very short; a person could probably read it in a single sitting if they were so inclined. But despite its short length it is a book that gives off sparks on virtually every page. It is not difficult to imagine when reading Feuerbach's *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* the effect such sparks could and did have when they reached the minds of a Marx or a Nietzsche. I would like to briefly

summarize what I thought were some of the most interesting and relevant ideas expressed in this little book (in no particular order). The central thesis around which Feuerbach's whole philosophy seems to revolve is his claim that the task confronting the "new philosophy" is the complete dissolution of theology into anthropology (pg. 5). Theology has ultimately inverted the true nature of man by turning predicates into subjects. According to Feuerbach a true sentence would run something like this, "Reason is divine". Theology, however, inverts this sentence by turning the predicate (divine) into a subject (God) and making the subject the predicate, so the sentence becomes, "God is (or has) reason". Through this inversion man is separated from his essence. Feuerbach believes the realization of human potential necessitates the dissolution of this inversion which separates man from his essence. This is a truly humanistic goal and it is the main goal of Feuerbach's "philosophy of the future". It will ultimately be up to Marx to work out the concrete and material conditions for the realization of human potential. While Marx is certainly critical of Feuerbach it is not, I don't think, because they have different goals or ideals. They are both interested in the humanistic ideal of realizing humanity's full potential. Marx, however, does not believe that the mere dissolution of theology into anthropology is capable of providing the conditions for that human realization without a fundamental transformation of society. Feuerbach also has some interesting things to say on Being and knowledge which serve to distinguish his own thought from that of Hegel. Feuerbach writes, "the consciousness of being is indeed always and necessarily bound to a definite content. If I abstract from that content of being and indeed from every content, then I am left, to be sure, with nothing more than the idea of nothingness...Being is not a general notion that can be separated from objects" (pg. 42). This is a fairly brilliant critique of Hegel's equation of being and nothingness at the beginning of his Science of Logic, and it has echoes in Heidegger's claim that Being is always the Being of beings. The point here is that once you abstract all content from the thought of Being you are no longer actually thinking of Being at all except in name. The "meaning of Being" in Heidegger's sense is based precisely on our ability to distinguish between sentences like "It is raining" and "It is not raining" (or between being and nothingness) and these sentences always refer to the being or nonbeing of actual beings. Feuerbach makes a similar claim about knowledge when he claims "The determinations that afford real knowledge are always only those that determine the object by the object itself, namely, by its own individual determinations; thus, they are not general determinations, as the logical-metaphysical determinations are, which determine no object because they extend to all objects without distinction" (pg. 66). To actually know an object means to know the determinations which are peculiar to that thing, and which are not shared by other objects. Knowing general determinations

that apply indiscriminately to any object does not, therefore, provide any real knowledge. Anyone who has read Hegel's Science of Logic will know that his categories are often exceedingly general, so much so as to be almost unrecognizable. Hegel's notion of "something" as "self-related being" for instance, is so general it is extremely difficult to even grasp. Feuerbach's point is that these categories and determinations do not provide any real knowledge due to their excessive generality. One other idea that I found interesting (and the last I will mention) was Feuerbach's attempt to provide a place for 'feelings' within philosophy. Ordinarily feelings are dismissed as purely subjective, as not having any objective relevance, and as incapable of providing any objective knowledge of the world. Human beings 'know' the world through perception and thinking (or reason), but not through feeling. The "new philosophy" according to Feuerbach, however, does not regard being merely as an object of thinking but as an object "of the senses, perception, feeling, and love" (pg. 52). He even writes that "Only in feeling and in love does 'this' - as in 'this person' or 'this object', that is the particular - have absolute value" (pg. 52). And later, "The new philosophy rests on the truth of love and feeling...it only affirms in reason and with reason what every man - the real man - professes in his heart" (pg. 53). Feuerbach critiques Hegel's notion that even the "this" refers to a universal since it is incapable of distinguishing in language (and hence in thought) between different "thises". When we say "this person" what we mean is a particular person but we are unable to actually say what we mean since the word "this" can apply indiscriminately to anything, and Hegel chooses to follow language here rather than common sense. But Feuerbach points out that there is an immense difference between the "this" as an object of abstract thought and the "this" of reality. "This wife, for example, is my wife, and this house is my house, although everyone speaks, as I do, of his house and his wife as "this house" and "this wife"" (pg. 43). While thought may be incapable of grasping the 'this' at least in language, feeling and love have no problem relating to the 'this'. This points to the fact that our relation to the world is not purely theoretical which is another theme that connects Feuerbach with the existential phenomenologists. The one concern I have about Feuerbach's philosophy as a whole is that it seems to me to tend towards the ultimate dissolution of philosophy conceived as a theoretical grasp of the nature of reality. Feuerbach's new philosophy seems to me to dissolve into empirical science on the one hand (to the degree that philosophy can still be considered "theoretical" at all) and into the humanist ideal of self-realization on the other (to the degree that man is supposed to give up a purely theoretical relation to the world and human life). The "dissolution" of philosophy in this sense probably would not worry Feuerbach who, I think, was quite happy to preach the "end of philosophy". And the humanist in me is fully supportive of the goal of promoting the realization of

human potential as well as the destruction of any forms of alienation that may stand in the way of that goal (including perhaps the "theoretical consciousness"). But as a philosopher who hopes someday to make a living at philosophy I am somewhat less excited about the prospect of philosophy's eventual dissolution. Luckily, however, I don't think philosophy is going anywhere. It has somehow always found a way to survive. Hopefully Feuerbach's philosophy will survive as well because there is a great deal of value in his thought. I would highly recommend purchasing this book to anyone who is at all interested in philosophy, and in 19th century philosophy in particular.

Feuerbach has too often been confined to the footnotes of the history of philosophy—a mere precursor to the more developed materialism of Marx and Engels. However, this little text is a tour de force of philosophical history and critique. Feuerbach attempts to undo the entire tradition of theology and speculative philosophy in less than 100 pages, and the force of his argument is uncomplicated and yet elegant. Feuerbach reveals the anthropocentric impulse inherent in theology and speculative philosophy, and suggests a radical philosophy of concrete reality as an alternative. Although Feuerbach's positive philosophy of sensation remains unclear and sketchy here, this remains an indispensable development in the history of materialism.

a little hard to read, but very educational

Nineteenth century German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach describes the philosophy of the future or the "new philosophy," as that which modern philosophy has endeavored to construct, in turning it's back on the traditionally bound theology and philosophy of prior and ancient ages. This "new philosophy" that Feuerbach speaks of is a materialist philosophy, void of the misconceptions that traditional theology and philosophy trace, that which explains God or religion as something being external from human consciousness and that the external world does not exist or is not important, that being can be abstracted or separated from the object itself, these are the myths that the "new philosophy" wishes to do away with. Feuerbach's classic "Principles of the Philosophy of the Future" precisely captures the full principles of materialism, as well as introducing other interesting notions along the way, such as his conception that religion and God is a completely human creation, a product of creativity and imagination, and therefore should be studied from the aspect of the social sciences, namely anthropology. "Religion is a dream of the human mind," Feuerbach states. Being a uniquely human conception, those fields which seek to study and understand man and his behaviors are better suited to provide a more adequate explanation of religion, such as sociology,

psychology, physiology and once again anthropology, or the study of man. For those who are skeptical of the biases of theology or the "old philosophy," this book provides a wonderful and thoughtful treatise on materialistic, secularized or humanized philosophy. It is easy to trace the influences from Feuerbach to such thinkers as Marx, Ponty, Sartre and Heidegger.

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