

The Matrix of Religion

By
David Wasdell

An (as yet unfinished) response to ‘The Essence of Christianity’ by Ludwig Feuerbach whose brilliant analysis prefigured the work of Sigmund Freud and laid the foundation of Karl Marx’s understanding of alienation. The paper pins major faults in the author’s analysis which have had devastating effects in subsequent application.

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THE MATRIX OF RELIGION

[A response to: 'The Essence of Christianity' by Ludwig Feuerbach]

Introduction

A paper in response to a book penned 140 years ago needs some justification, particularly in view of the curt dismissal of Feuerbach's significance exemplified by the comment: "He exercised a far wider influence than the intrinsic merits of his writings deserved" (Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church). As Lloyd Geering points out: "Like Strauss, Feuerbach tended to be dismissed too cheaply by the defenders of Christian orthodoxy and became overlooked in the later 19th century" (Faith's New Age, p. 132). This century has seen his rediscovery.

Geering describes him as "One of the principal interpreters of the new age of religion" (op cit. p. 132). Karl Barth concluded that "No philosopher of his time penetrated the contemporary theological situation as effectively as he and few spoke with such pertinence" (An Introductory Essay to the Essence of Christianity by Ludwig Feuerbach, Harper & Row, New York 1957, p.x). Indeed, Barth, insisting that Feuerbach represents the most consistent and significant development of the radical subjectivism in 19th century theology consciously developed his own theological views as a direct reply to the Feuerbachian view.

As a critical interpreter of Hegel's philosophy, Feuerbach came to influence key but disparate thinkers like Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, Buber and Heidegger.

"Now once more Feuerbach has come to the forefront of philosophical, theological and political consciousness. He is seen as a seminal figure in nineteenth-century thought: his empirical version of Hegel's genetic-critical method lies at the base of Marxism, Freudianism and the old Rationalist critique of religion; his doctrine of the I-Thou has had important impact on theology and existentialism; and his conception of religion and morality as enshrining wishes is a startling forerunner of a leading idea in Freudian psychology." (The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach by Eugene Kamenka, Published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1970, Publisher's introduction)

In his own introduction, Kamenka notes that since the early 1950s there has been an ever-increasing volume of publication and republication both of Feuerbach's own works and of critical studies devoted to him, especially in Germany and France. This European revival of interest in Feuerbach is only recently beginning to make itself felt in the English-speaking world. His significance lies in the inter-related fields of politics and religion.

The publication of Marx's early philosophical writings in the late 1920s and early 1930s, culminating in the new 'philosophical' and 'humanist' interpretations of Marx, has shown that a detailed understanding of Feuerbach is crucial to an appreciation of the intellectual origin and content of Marxian thought. It has thus brought Feuerbach

back into the centre of any serious consideration of Marx's philosophy." [Kamenka, op cit. p.viii]

Feuerbach provided the bridge between the dialectic philosophy of Hegel and the historic-economic analysis of Marx. In the following pages I shall be arguing that one of the fundamental flaws in Feuerbachian analysis is taken up in the Marxist position and bears the brunt of responsibility for the current polarisation (to the point of ultimate armament) between Communist and Capitalist ideologies.

With respect to the significance of Feuerbach's analysis of religion, Manfred H. Vogel writes: "Feuerbach's critique of religion commands a new attention in our day and its impact is pervasive" [Translator's introduction to Principles of the Philosophy of the Future, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1966, pp. xxvii ff.], while the editors of the abridged version of Feuerbach's "The Essence of Christianity" published in the series Milestones of Thought (Frederick Ungar, New York, 1957) insist that:

"Feuerbach's analysis of religion ... has become the most influential attack on religion in the modern world. His formulation, therefore, is truly a living issue in the problem of the interpretation of religion." [EC p. iii]

In response to Feuerbach's critique of religion, this paper argues that his work only takes account of one side of the religious field and is inadequate as an analysis of the cause of the condition of alienation with which religion seeks to deal. This inaccurate diagnosis of the religious condition severely flaws Feuerbach's prescriptive writing. The Marxist superstructure rests on this faulted foundation of philosophical/religious analysis, while displacing the cause of alienation onto the oppressive structures of the State.

Feuerbach deals with issues which are fundamental to our times. His inadequate analysis of the problem of alienation and the subsequent development of faulted religious and social structures generate dysfunctionally inhumane systems of being in today's world. Radical reconsideration of Feuerbach's seminal material is essential in any attempt to break through the ideological impasse of East/West confrontation, the potentially catastrophic economic inter-relationships of the North/South divide or the inherently destructive interfaces of the major world religions.

PART I - EXPOSITION

Chapter I: The Centrality of Religion

Whether for individual or society, religion enshrines norms, values and long-term goals. It validates the social structures and institutions. It serves as a stabiliser and preserver of the social system particularly at points of crisis or external threat. From this foundation of world view and self and social perception, flow the more transient political, economic and social systems. Religion exercises a profound influence on culture, art form, music, literature,

philosophy, yes, and even the sciences. Critical analysis of the dynamics of religion has fundamental consequences for every facet of being at every level of society.

"Feuerbach saw the critique of religion as the sine qua non of human emancipation, for in religion, he believed, he had found the 'secret' or paradigm of the process of alienation. Alienation, for Feuerbach, was a form of intellectual error, a fantasy which could be cured by showing how it arose and what its real content was. Religion, indeed, was not only the intellectual model of all other alienation-fantasies, it was also their necessary material support." [Kamenka op. cit. p. 114]

The modern social psychologist would probably prefer the phrase 'defence construct' to that of 'alienation fantasy'. Nevertheless Feuerbach's position is clear. He sees the religious system as seminal or archetypal, the crystal structure or model upon which all other social constructs depend. His was not an anarchic or nihilistic attack upon religion. His concern was creatively and sympathetically critical. His analysis was an attempt to understand, not to destroy.

"Religion became for Feuerbach the fundamental phenomenon in the history of human culture; to understand it was to understand man. It was for this reason that Feuerbach was anxious to deny that he was an atheist: he had not come to destroy religion, but to explain it* ... Feuerbach's technique, then, is that of the man who is seeking the empirical sources of human beliefs, that in terms of which they are to be appraised and understood." [Kamenka, op. cit. p.35]

To understand and analyse the heart of religion is to understand and analyse the heart of man, for religion is the mirror image of the most primitive level of human consciousness.

"Religion is the first form of the self-consciousness of man. Holy, therefore, are all religions, for they have saved for posterity this first form of consciousness." [EC p.65]

Feuerbach perceived religion as codifying the dynamic core of social structures. He therefore sought to penetrate to the dynamic core of religion itself in order to cast clearer light on the human condition and its historical presentation. Clearly any such analysis cannot be limited to Christianity alone but applies to the phenomena of religion in general, so moving significantly beyond the limited and historical treatment of his predecessors.

"Feuerbach advances beyond Strauss. By analyzing the origin of religion psychologically rather than historically, Feuerbach seeks in principle to account for all religion, not just Christianity. And by showing that religion arises from genuine human need, and therefore makes a positive contribution to life, he avoids Strauss' oneness." [EC p.vi]

*Footnote 1: Does Kamenka see Feuerbach as anti-Christ? For Christ came not to destroy but to fulfil the law.

Footnote 2: In passing it is worth noting the parallel expression in the writing of Karl Marx "religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man ..." [Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Collected Works, Vol. 3 - Marx & Engels 1843-1844, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1975, p. 175]

This raises one of the unsubstantiated assumptions of Feuerbach's work, namely that the essence of Christianity is the essence of all religion. It may be, but such a hypothesis needs to be supported by parallel analysis of the essence of other world religions and not simply assumed.

Chapter 2: The Position Summarised

The editors of the abridged version of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* have attempted to condense or distil the heart of his position into a single paragraph:

"Feuerbach's main thesis may be stated simply. Religion arises from the needs, wishes, and lacks of human life. Religious ideas embody emotional attitudes and real insights into what Man ought to be which are expressed in fitting imagery, projected into the extramental world, and objectified. Statements about God are then regarded as truths about extramundane existence; in truth, they are about man himself." [EC p.vi]

The similarity with later Freudian statements is marked. For Freud, religion was a construct of wish-fulfilment, a projection and reification into the external world of internal unconscious process. In the absence of any significant corpus of psychoanalytic case-study material Feuerbach's formulation is profoundly prophetic.

Kamenka summarises Feuerbach's position at greater length, including some of the implications and side issues around the central theme:

"Religion is a dream, a fantasy-picture which expresses man's situation and at the same time provides a fantasy-gratification of man's wish to overcome that situation. Religion is therefore primarily practical rather than theoretical: it is an 'art of life'. In religion man recognizes his helplessness, his dependence, and he seeks to overcome it by calling in the aid of the imagination. Sacrifice and prayer thus stand at the very centre of religion and reveal to us its essential character and aim. The ground of sacrifice is dependence, the result of the (successful) sacrifice is confidence, self-feeling, independence. The same is true of prayer - 'not, certainly, the prayer before and after meals, the ritual of animal egotism, but the prayer pregnant with sorrow, the prayer of disconsolate love, the prayer which expresses the power of the heart that crushes man to the ground, the prayer which begins in despair and ends in rapture' [ECE p.122]. Men rush to religion in their need, because it is in their need that they feel their wants most strongly and yet discover that they are helpless save in fantasy.... Because religion expresses a wish, it is not merely a mechanical projection of that which man finds on this earth; it incorporates a moral judgment as well. What man praises and approves and therefore wishes for is God to him; what he blames, condemns, is - for him - not divine. The religious fantasy, in expressing a moral judgment, also becomes a form of compensation... Feuerbach emphasizes that men seek in heaven what they cannot find on earth. They compensate for their frustrations. 'The more empty life is, the fuller, the more concrete is God. The

impoverishing of the real world and the enriching of God is one act. Only the poor man has a rich God' [ECE p.73] - just as it is the chaste monk who worships the most sensual Heavenly Virgin."[Kamenka op. cit. p.39]

There was a massive dislocation between Feuerbach's position and the orthodox received, or traditional view, of the essence of Christianity. Western theologians have consistently seen religion as response. God is seen as active in history, self-revelatory in scripture or in Christ. He is the gracious other who comes to meet man in his need, whether that other is externalised and objectified as in the classical theologians, or in the neo-orthodoxy of a Karl Barth (voicing his No against the subjectivism of Feuerbach) or whether it be internalised in the Ground of Being or the Process of Nature (so Tillich, and more recently Cupitt). Feuerbach outrageously presses behind such a position, describing the ground of religion not as a deity with distinctive essence in response to whose activity man exercises his religious functions, but as fundamentally a projection out of the inner consciousness, needs and wishes of man, an alienation of man's inner self, reified and objectified. In relation to this phantasy object, man engages in religious behaviour in an attempt to handle within the phantasy field the conflicts, needs, dependency and alienation which he experiences in the depth of his being. So Kamenka describes the process:

"Religion, then, is a form of wishing - the expression of a lack or need and an attempt (in the imagination) to overcome that lack or need.... It is an attempt to work over reality into something satisfactory to man. But it does so in fantasy, because man is not yet ready, not yet powerful enough or knowledgeable enough, to do it in reality. When man does become knowledgeable and powerful enough, religion withers away and dies; its place is taken by politics and technology as the expression of firmly reality-centred human wishes and as the ground for a real as opposed to an imaginary transformation."[Kamenka op. cit. p.14]

It is a mark of psychosis that a symbol is mistaken for the reality of the symbolised. Feuerbach perceives religion in this light. Religion and its consequent theology is a symbol construct, a reflection of man's inner being. The alienation at the heart of religion lies in attributing to this symbol construct an objective reality in itself and acting as if the phantasy field had some objective existence over and above or distinct from man. Religion is thus seen to be a psychologically immature phenomenon from which, if he is to move towards a more healthy psychic maturity, man must recover.

"Religion is for Feuerbach a stage in man's coming to an understanding of himself, his nature, and his tasks. But for Feuerbach (as for Comte, with whose ideas his thinking unconsciously had so much in common), religion is a stage which must be left behind. It is an illusion which binds aspiration. Man can only know himself - and become himself - by rejecting all limits to his self-assertion. He can only become great by rebelling against God."[EC p.viii]

Man becomes whole by taking back to himself the projection which generated the phantasy field, by de-reifying the symbol construct, by dealing in some other way with those archetypal and primitive needs in fulfilment of which man creates the Gods. Inadequate analysis of the underlying needs blocked further development by Feuerbach himself and tragically formed the foundation for Marx's displacement of the problem into the ideological/political arena.

Chapter 3: Political Excursus

Feuerbach's "The Essence of Christianity" was published in 1841. Within two years the young Marx had grasped its critique of Hegel, adapted it and made it his own. The Feuerbachian position became the foundation of the Marxist analysis. It is the underlying stratum upon which the future structures of his building depend. Marx hailed Feuerbach as: "A second Luther in the history of Man's emancipation from illusion".

"Certainly Marx's acceptance of Feuerbach's main contention constitutes the book's principal historical influence. This acceptance is not unqualified. He terms Feuerbach's mode of thought too abstract and speculative; he objects that Feuerbach deals inadequately with the social determination of the "projected" religious ideas. But the main Feuerbachian position remains intact." [EC p. vii]

Marx penned a series of "Theses on Feuerbach" which were published in Frederick Engels' "Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy". In these he comments that:

"[Feuerbach's] work consists in the dissolution of the religious world into its secular basis... Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human." [op. cit. New York, International Publisher, 1941, p.53]

Feuerbach is the bridge between the idealist dialectic of Hegel and the materialist philosophy of history of Karl Marx. The latter's dependence on Feuerbach at this point is summarised by Kamenka:

"The criticism of Hegel that he consistently reverses the true relation of subject and predicate, of cause (or ground) and effect and thus deifies or personifies the attributes, functions or relationships that cannot be understood in and through themselves alone, was enthusiastically taken over from Feuerbach by the young Marx... This Feuerbachian criticism of the relationship of subject and predicate in idealist philosophy lies at the root of Marx's critique of Hegel's political philosophy and of Marx's rejection and critique of alienation in intellectual work. The economists, Marx argued in his writings of 1843 and 1844, reify economic categories, treat them as abstractions from man and thus make economics irrational, i.e. both contradictory and inhumane. Restoring the correct relation of subject and predicate in Hegel ("standing Hegel on his head" or rather on his feet) seeing the State as a predicate of society and not vice versa, led Marx to his materialist conception of history. The Marxist conception of history indeed is an application to society of the Feuerbachian genetic critical method of explaining religion." [Kamenka op. cit. p. 37, footnote 2]

Marx and his later expositors moved significantly beyond Feuerbach, both in the analysis of the origin of projection, which generates religion, and also of the source or cause of that dependency and alienation which gives rise to the need for projection.

"For Feuerbach, man projects his nature, then worships that nature objectified as a lawgiver, as God. For Marx it is not Feuerbach's "man" which does the projecting, but society and State; their "projections", i.e., their legal and moral systems can be traced to economic modes of production." [EC p.vii]

Feuerbach's position was fundamentally psychological. He understood religion as emanating from the inner needs, wishes and consciousness in the depth of the being of man. Marx displaces this origin, projecting its causal matrix onto society or the State, whose dynamics have evolved through the historical process dominated by the economic relationships arising out of the world of work and its means of production. The conditions of dependence and alienation with which religion seeks to deal are perceived by Marx as emanating from the economic dynamics of the State.

"Marxists, themselves far more rigid than Feuerbach, have added another assertion which they consider by far the most important - the assertion that human dependence is primarily social dependence evoked by class oppression and more generally by the impersonal laws that bind all classes in a class society." [Kamenka op. cit. p.65]

This defensive flight from dealing with the devastating core of alienation at the heart of the being of man represents a fundamental flaw in the whole Marxist position. The system which he constructed upon this foundation bears all the marks of a para-religion. The deep needs of man emanating from his fundamental dependency and inner alienation are projected out onto society and ultimately onto the State and there reified and objectified. The Marxist system then seeks to deal with these "objective" realities in the economic system as a way of solving the underlying problems of alienation. Inevitably the system in its mature form reveals itself as a manipulation of symptoms without engagement with their causal dynamics. The result is a modified set of economic and social relationships with a preserved, and if anything exacerbated, level of dependency, alienation and oppression. The symptoms of distress of the human condition emerge in socio-economic and political systems, as in religious behaviour, as corporate collusional projections out of the inner core of the being of man.

Far from moving beyond Feuerbach, therefore, Marx withdrew from the dangerous area to which his mentor pointed into the comparative psychic security of social displacement. The criticism which Feuerbach raised of religion must, on his own terms, now be raised against the Marxist system. It is a flight, a displacement, a defence, an illusion, an opium of the people. It is a sign of the underlying malaise of society and yet, in displacement, a defence from dealing with the distress of its causal core.

Marx splits his world in defence against engagement with the schizoid dread of his own inner being. The social cost of sustaining this collusional defence has already been massive. How many more must die before man finally abandons this flight from reality?

Chapter 4: Of Theology and Dreams

For Freud, the analysis of dreams was an open door to the study of the unconscious for the stuff of which dreams are made emerges from the depth of human being. The symbols,

pictures, movements and events of the dream world re-present the anxieties, conflicts, repressions, hopes and fears of the unconscious realm often coded in the form of events and people, objects and ideas of immediate experience. Now suppose that instead of attributing dream content to the unconscious level of the human psyche, it is postulated that dreams are a direct communication to man from an objective real other world. Dreams would then be recorded, analysed and systematised in an attempt to search for the content of messages received. Wishes expressed in dream symbolism would be perceived as commands received from the beyond. The unconscious source of dream content would be reified and deified into the Wholly Other, over against man, utterly distinct from man and yet deeply in communication with man. The fundamentally defended split between the conscious and unconscious worlds would have led to the projection of the unconscious into an objective other, dissociated from the being of man. The effective distance would preserve the defensive repression that prevented further integration of conscious and unconscious material. It is some such process which Feuerbach postulates as underlying the realm of theology.

"Religion is to be treated on the analogy of dreams, fantasies, works of fiction or imaginative art. They too are natural - they do not portray a totally other world, they merely select and rearrange materials drawn from this world. We look at them and we ask, 'Where did their creator get the idea?' and 'What is it that he wants to express?' The same, Feuerbach says, should be done with religions. The answer our examination will give us, in religion as in dreams, will contain no supernatural residue. Man gets the ideas contained, rearranged and elaborated in religion precisely where he gets all other ideas - from human experience." [Kamenka, p.59]

"The analogy of dream-analysis also enables us to explain and justify Feuerbach's hostility to theology. Dreams stand to reality at one remove; theology stands to it at second remove. Where dreams can illuminate reality, once they are properly interpreted, theology obscures reality by resisting such interpretation, by treating the fantasies that constitute religion as direct representations of (another) reality. Theology, as theology... is necessarily obscurantist: it seeks to take as the very foundation of its subject that which makes no sense, and to strip away everything that does make sense. It treats error as truth, fantasy as reality; it seeks to separate the form of the dream from its substance, or rather to treat the form as though it were the substance. It thus loses the clue to the real meaning of the dream; it impedes study instead of promoting it." [Kamenka, p.60]

Once religion is understood as a dynamic expression of the fundamental drama being played out deep in the unconscious process of human being, then its study becomes an open door, a high road of insight into humanity. Theology stands like an armed barricade across this road, reversing the process of insight. It mirrors the quest for understanding away from the realities of the human condition back into a psychotic world of fantasy, treated as objective reality, to be ordered, systematised, studied and then internalised as some kind of external prescriber for the behaviour of man. It is this process of splitting, projection, reification and re-introjection which ensures that, contrary to the myth of man's rationality, it is the psychotic depth of his own unconscious, codified into religious systems, which dominates the socio-political and economic realities. To pray "Thy Kingdom Come" is to seek the omnipotent fulfilment of unconscious desire. It is individual and corporate megalomania, the

most inhuman form of manipulative domination, white-washed by displacement and authenticated by common collusion.

PART II: CRITIQUE

Chapter 5: Primal Chaos

Feuerbach sifted through the multi-faceted, complex phenomena of religion in search of its essence. He was seeking that distillate, that irreducible minimum, that fundamental core dynamic which could make sense of the host of apparent contradictions and complexities in religious behaviour itself. So in his Lectures on the Essence of Religion he wrote:

'In the field of religion, we find ourselves at first in a chaos of the greatest and most confusing contradictions. Despite this, deeper examination shows such contradictions to be reducible to the motives of fear and love and these, though in accordance with the differences in mankind they attach themselves to different objects, can be reduced to the feeling of dependence.' [Sämtliche Werke, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1960-64, Vol. 7, p. 54. Quoted in Kamenka, op. cit. p.56]

This identification of the twin emotions of fear and love as lying at the heart of religion has much in common with other analyses. The concept of dread, the fear of the desired, as central to the religious sense of awe or worship emerges again and again. From a different perspective, one strand in the work of Sigmund Freud traces all psychological presentation back to the underlying polarity of the life and death instincts. Feuerbach, however, takes us one stage back behind this dipolar tension and grounds it in the experience of dependency.

There are many levels to man's dependency, just as there are many myths about his independence. Life on earth is a fundamentally dependent phenomenon. It emanates from the interaction of solar energy with terrestrial raw materials. The power of father sun unites with the resources of mother earth to generate the dependent children of the world, in all their multiplex life forms. All dependency links are traceable back into this base. In cosmic terms, the solar system itself is dependent upon other levels of galactic, inter-galactic, and universal energy exchange over time.

For the human being, dependency is initially mediate. From conception to birth the developing embryo is contained as a sub-system, a parasitic or symbiotic organism, within the bounds of the mother's womb. And here is the archetype, or primal experience, of dependency - the matrix or mould which forms the ground of subsequent learning.

If that on which man depends is benign, accepting, supportive and resourceful, then the dependent being feels secure, cared for and at peace. Man reciprocates to his benign dependency base with attachment, care or love. On the other hand, should that on which man depends be malign, unsupportive, deprivatory, persecutory or even exploitative and counter-dependent, then the dependent being is in fear of death. By definition to be dependent is to be vulnerable, for that on which dependency is fixed holds power. The dependent is

powerless. To be powerless and vulnerable to a malign dependency base is to be impotently at risk. The emotional response is one of anxiety, rising into fear and terror, associated with retaliatory rage, inhibited by the dependency itself and the awareness that to destroy that on which one depends is to destroy the self in the process.

If the ground of dependency is at times benign and supportive and at other times malign and persecutory, the dependent is thrown into ambivalence, suffering conflicted emotions of love and fear, heightened into chronic dread when the reversals are unpredictable and unstable. Powerless vulnerability and potential oppression emerge in society when one group depends upon another for its sustenance and well-being. So in the industrial trading economy, Marx pinned the ownership of the "means of production" as the social manifestation of dependency and oppression, deducing that alienation in the condition of man emerged from the economic relationships of the State. These in turn gave rise to religion as a way of attempting to deal with emotions generated by dependency, while perpetuating the dependency itself (hence his opium descriptor for the function of religion).

In this Marx missed the point that the way adult man reacts to that on which he finds himself dependent is grounded on his previous experience of dependency. The person whose fundamental experience has been one of a benign dependent base has a deep inner sense of well-being and will not intuitively relate to his fellow men as if they are potential enemies, nor see his environment as out to attack him. Such paranoid characteristics emerge in the personality of the one whose earlier experience of dependency has included the malign, persecutory, exploitative and unpredictable elements. The patterning out of dependent relationships within the rational adult world re-presents these deeper levels of unconscious experience, projected into the transactions of every day life. Tragically, Marx sought to deal with the underlying problem of dependency by rearranging the epiphenomena, the surface symptoms of the underlying social psychology. His treatment is essentially more superficial than that of Feuerbach, who pressed back behind the sociological phenomena to their psychological ground.

“Religion, for Feuerbach then, is in the first place grounded in dependence; it arises in consequence of man's recognition of his helplessness and could not arise if he were not helpless.... What explains why men have religion and animals have not, is that man is conscious of his dependence. Further, man has memory, he can fix past events in his mind. His experiences of the past can therefore provide the material from which he constructs his hopes for the future. Thus the belief in an after-life expresses the wish that the dead were still alive, that the past would continue into the present and the future. Fear of death is a primary fear at the base of religion: 'The grave of man' Feuerbach writes, 'is the birthplace of the gods.'”[Kamenka, op. cit. p.41]

There are certain logical dislocations in the end of that last paragraph which provide important pointers to the underlying flaws or faults in the Feuerbachian position (or at least in terms of Kamenka's representation of it!). Firstly, our understanding of memory is now much wider than it was 150 years ago. Memory may be pre-verbal, precognitive, unconscious, reaching back into the dim twilight of the primal field, with its intrauterine dependency and perinatal disturbance. Secondly, past experience provides the material from which man not only constructs his hopes for the future but also his fears for the future. This construction of hopes and fears is not, indeed, limited to the future but applies also to the here-and-now of his present experience.

To postulate that belief in an after-life expresses "the wish that the dead were still alive" is precisely not to speak of the fear of death, but of the denial of loss. Wish for the perseveration of the beloved beyond the grave represents difficulty in handling the mourning or grieving process. Now the death of a beloved represents the loss, or attenuation, of part of that environment on which man depends. Loss of the dependency-base experienced in part in adult life, triggers and resonates that fundamental loss of the dependency base experienced in birth. At birth, supremely and archetypally, man in his most absolutely dependent position experiences the reversal of the dependency-base and the loss of his known world. Thus belief in an 'after-birth' expresses the wish that the surrounding womb was still in place. Or in other words, that man were still intrauterine, that the conditions of the womb-world would continue through the present into the future without the traumatic disruption of birth (the myth of eternal life).

In the light of this, I would submit that Feuerbach inverts birth and death. He perceived the grave of man as the birthplace of the gods. It is more accurate to see the birth of man as the matrix of religion. The primal fear at the base of religion is generated at the point of parturition. Here the foetal being experiences the irrational reversal from benign to malign in that on which he depends for survival. The holder becomes the evictor, the support becomes the crusher, that which provided the food and oxygen and carried away waste products provides such services no longer. The neonate must breathe or die, suck or die, excrete or die. The level of trauma encountered in birth is reflected in the adrenal release, high pulse rates and foetal distress during the process of parturition. The physical impingement also marks the point of fundamental loss. To the neonate, the womb-world died. Birth is the archetypal bereavement, the figure of death, the symbol of cosmic catastrophe.

It is as a defence against the irruption of the psychotic anxiety associated with birth that religious behaviour emerges ultimately codified into a theology which reifies, objectifies and preserves the intrauterine world of phantasy-objects and processes utilised as the defence against primal reverberation.

In so far as man encounters in his later life that which resonates with his primal experience, just so far will it evoke religious behaviour in response. Quite insignificant changes may lead to irrationally high levels of anxiety. Puberty, marriage, the birth of the next generation, major life crises, bereavement and preparation for one's own death are the high points of the religious life. Similarly events in the economic and agricultural cycle, which are most significant in terms of focussing dependency needs, also lead to heightened religious presentation. Seed-time and harvest represent the dependency festivals of the agricultural era. Solar dependency is reflected in those rites associated with sunset and dawn, with the longest and shortest days and particularly with the death of the old year and the birth of the new.

If religious intensity is distributed around the high points of anxiety in the life-trace and patterned out across the annual cycle of events, it is also focussed around those geographical points most resonant with primal symbolism. The domed hill, free-standing in a flood plain, hanging space-ward like a pendant breast from Mother Earth, is crowned with an ashera, an ancient temple of the fertility cultus, or a cathedral to the Madonna. In so far as the defences against primal anxiety begin to fail, just so far does the fear of death, laid down in birth, rise into consciousness, chaoticising thought process, disrupting social relationships, and

triggering irrational interaction with the contemporary environment. The higher the levels of stress to which a person is exposed, the easier it is for the primal, or psychotic angst, to irrupt through the defences and chaoticise the conscious process. In such a condition man turns evermore deeply to religion, to the symbols of his world security in a desperate bid to avoid the rising sea. Thus Langer:

"Man can adapt himself somehow to anything his imagination can cope with; but he cannot deal with Chaos. Because his characteristic function and highest asset is conception, his greatest fright is to meet what he cannot construe... It need not be a new object; we do meet new things, and 'understand' them promptly, if tentatively, by the nearest analogy, when our minds are functioning freely; but under mental stress even perfectly familiar things may become suddenly disorganized and give us the horrors. Therefore our most important assets are always the symbols of our general orientation in nature, on the earth, in society, and in what we are doing; the symbols of our Weltanschauung and Lebensanschauung..." [From S. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, page 286, cited by Geertz, *Religion as a Culture System*, in Michael Banton (ed) *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, p. 14, Kamenka, op. cit. p.67]

In constructing his world and his society, man co-operates collusively and corporately to institutionalise defences against the resurgence of primal chaos. He is, however, only limitedly successful and is always vulnerably exposed to the overwhelming encounter with the depths of his own inner alienation.

There are, Geertz argues, three points where chaos as a tumult of events - events which do not only lack interpretation but seem to lack interpretability in principle - breaks in. This is when a man is at the limit of his analytical capabilities, when he is at the limit of his powers of endurance, and when he is at the limit of his moral insight. In these situations a challenge is thrown down which religion takes up. Or as Feuerbach would have said, and as Malinowski did say, the function of religion here is to relieve intolerable stress, to overcome the feeling of helplessness." [Kamenka, op. cit. p.67]

To speak of a "challenge thrown down which religion takes up" is somewhat misleading. Encounter with the boundaries of ability unmask the myth of man's independence, breaks down his defences and reverberates deeply the archetypal experience of dependency and boundedness. It is in this condition of regression that the irrational and chaoticising levels of fear, anxiety, terror, rage and the sense of imminent destruction or breakdown irrupt. These anxieties arise, not because the boundary encountered in the here and now is in and of itself fundamentally threatening, but because encounter with the boundary triggers regression to a situation in which the dependent being was fundamentally threatened. The emotional response appropriate in the primal trauma is projected and transferred into the new context which then becomes an occasion for calling into action those same defences which were utilised to handle the threat of primal impingement and loss. In this, religion is seen to be precisely not a projection of what man is, but a defence against what man fears. Feuerbach's analysis of the essence of religion failed to make this distinction.

Any attempt to unmask and destroy religion itself, without dealing with those underlying dynamics which generate and require it, only leaves man defenceless, face to face with primal chaos. In flight from his heart of fear, man then constructs other defences, para-religions, alternative modes of managing his anxiety. Marxism represents one such construct.

Only in so far as the fundamental fears, repressed traumata and unrelieved loss can be re-engaged, and the sustained and repressed distress levels released, does the energy which drives religion subside. Feuerbach perceived the grave of man as the birthplace of the gods. It would now appear to be more accurate to say that the matrix of man is the grave of the gods.

Chapter 6: Projection

As lights dim, the moving picture on the cinema screen attracts and absorbs attention. The image is, however, merely a mass of moving multi-coloured shadows, a representation of the master copy held on film. The image is a projection of the reality.

Feuerbach lived before the age of film projectors.

Religion is human nature reflected and mirrored in itself.... God is the mirrored image of man.[EC p. 30]

If man is the master copy, Feuerbach argues, then god is the image of man projected onto the canvass of the cosmic boundaries. The study of god is therefore, by displacement, the study of man.

"Proposition: the object of a subject is nothing else than this subject's own nature objectified. Such as are a man's thoughts and moral character, such is his God; so much worth as man has, so much and no more has his God. Man's being conscious of God is man's being conscious of himself, knowledge of God is man's knowledge of himself. By their God you know men, and by knowing men you know their God; the two are identical. God is the manifested inward nature, the expressed self of man; religion is the solemn unveiling of man's hidden treasures the revelation of his most intimate thoughts, the open confession of what he secretly loves.[EC p.10]

Not, of course, that the religious person is aware that what he perceives as the ground of religion is a dim reflection of the depths of his own inner being, for if a person were that conscious then he would be precisely not religious. Those who exercise a leading role within the religious activity, the priests and theologians, are of all people the most unconscious of the projection mechanisms. For them the image is the reality, the symbol is the ground, the defence is absolute and absolutely defended.

"But when religion - man's consciousness of God - is designated as man's consciousness of himself, this is not to be understood as affirming that the religious person is directly aware of the fact that, when he is aware of God, he is aware of

himself in his nature as man. On the contrary, ignorance of this fact is fundamental to the peculiar nature of religion."[EC p.10)

Feuerbach's fundamental fallacy lies in his identification of that which is projected in religion as the essence of man. God is precisely not the reified projection of what man is in and of himself. God is, rather, a projection of the defence against what man fears. Religion is a shield erected out of the paranoia of man's inner being. The omnipotence, care, protection and love of the deity are the reified phantasies created by omnipotent wish-fulfilment in response to the needs for protection against the perceived malign dependency base and for perseveration of the idealised womb-world whose loss raised intolerable grief. Feuerbach's mistaking of defence for being has had massive repercussions in all those political, philosophical, psychological, sociological and theological systems which are indebted to him.

A secondary flaw in Feuerbach's position lies in his consistent identification of religion with "man's consciousness of God". Religion consistently deals with the demonic as well as the divine, with darkness as well as light, with hell as well as heaven. The cosmic drama is played out between the forces of good and evil, both of which take their place in the realm of the supernatural and are fundamental to the process of religion. Feuerbach splits off and ignores the negativities of the religious field, leaving God alone on the screen. The process of splitting and denial here noted in passing, is dealt with at greater length in the next chapter.

Once religion is perceived as a phantasy world, reified and projected in some way out of the inner being of man then the process of recovery from religion becomes an important step in the maturation of man. Progress in the reality-orientation of human consciousness leads to the withdrawal of the projected energy which generates the religious field and enables the gods to be seen through as defensive images of man.

"Man projects his nature into the world outside of himself before he finds it in himself..... Hence the historical progress of religion consists in this: that that which during an earlier stage of religion was regarded as something objective is now recognized as something subjective, so that that which was formerly viewed and worshipped as God is now recognized as something human. The later stage of religion recognizes the earlier stage as a stage of idolatry, a stage at which man prayed to his own nature, and at which man objectified himself without recognizing the religious object for what it was: his own nature. At a later stage, religion does reach this insight. All progress in religion tends therefore to a better understanding of what we are."[EC p.11)

In religious behaviour the process of projection is denied. That which is projected is split off, reified and invested with some sense of objective reality. Man, aware of the lack of that which he has invested in the gods, perceives himself in need of possessing that which the gods hold. He therefore seeks to internalise the divine, to receive grace, to consume sacramental elements, to be baptised or endowed with the Spirit, to receive gifts from God. In short, he re-introjects that which was projected whilst stoutly denying the original projection.

"Man - this is the mystery of religion - projects his nature into objectivity, and then makes himself an object of concern for this new "subject", [*] for this projection of his nature. For God wants man to be good. God asks that man attain perfection and

beatitude, for there is no beatitude without perfection. Thus man, while he apparently humiliated himself to the lowest degree, is in truth exalted to the highest; for in and through God, man aims at himself." (EC, p.17)

[*Thus in affirming: "God loves me", man unmask his essential narcissism.]

In this process, religion perpetuates the projection while compensating for its consequent and felt effects. In traditional terms, progress in religion involves the intensifying and purifying of the projection, together with a more complete and efficacious process of re-introjection. The result is the deepening alienation of man from his inner self, the reinforcement of the splits and denials required to sustain the myths of objectivity associated with the ground of religion, a further distancing of man from reality and a strengthening of those psychotic defences which lie at the heart of religion.

Feuerbach, in contrast, argues that real progress in religion requires the unmasking of the projection mechanism and its withdrawal, accompanied by a demythologising of the ground of religion and an increasing clarity of perception that the reified objects of worship are products of phantasy. This reduces the need for rituals of re-introjection and enables an unpicking of the defences which perpetuate man's inner and social alienation. The maturation of man proceeds in an antithetical direction to his religious endeavour.

Chapter 7: Idealisation and Denial

It is all too easy to be selective in terms of the information we receive or the memories we retain. A young couple head-over-heels in love become blind to each other's faults, perceiving the potential partner as an ideal mate. Reality dawns when the honeymoon is over. A family whose young son died tragically in a home accident remember him as an idealised off-spring, almost an angel in disguise. The negativities which could have sustained the balanced realism of the memory are repressed and denied, together with the anger and guilt within the family and between its members concerning responsibility for the accident. The same process, operating in the opposite direction, may occur as a marriage breaks down, the partners separate, proceed into litigation and divorce. Frequently, the good things about the other partner, the positive recollections of the marriage, disappear from view. Each may perceive the other as some kind of persecuting, almost demonic negativity and the marriage as hell realised. In each case the process of splitting the information field, or 'idealisation' followed by the repression or denial of one side of the split serves to protect the people concerned from coping with the anxieties, the ambivalence, the negativity, the anger, guilt, depression and grief, which would otherwise be involved in handling the wholeness of reality.

Idealisation and denial are fundamental defences which are brought into operation under conditions of stress and high levels of angst. The higher the level of stress, the more vulnerable and hurt the subject becomes, the more profound and complete is the process of idealisation. In other words, the more deeply dependent a person is on that which, holding power over life and death, then turns bad, the more intensely these primitive defences against the experienced anxiety are brought into play.

When a position of idealisation is encountered, it is a sign of repressed and unresolved distress or conflict, an indicator that the levels of terror, rage, loss or ambivalence associated with the person or event, were too deep to handle. Perseveration of splitting is a pointer to unresolved trauma. Feuerbach is acutely aware that the character of God represents an idealised split off part of man, but since he lived and wrote a hundred years before such processes were more adequately understood his psychological naivety vitiates his causal diagnosis.

"For the "Divine Being" is nothing else than the nature of Man, i.e. human nature purified, freed from the imperfections of the human individual, projected into the outside, and therefore viewed and revered as a different and distinct being with a nature of its own." [EC p. 12]

The process of idealisation always splits the field into two antithetical parts, light and darkness, heaven and hell, good and evil. Where the triggering trauma, the impingement which generated the split, is very intense, one side of that field (commonly the negative) is subsequently repressed and denied, leaving only the idealised good field in view. Since the initiating event is so intolerable in its stressing, the data field is displaced from its origin and projected onto some other object or field. All conscious connections between the original and the displaced positions are broken, so securing the defensive structure from penetration. If, for any reason, the defences weaken or are seen through, the originating trauma irrupts into conscious experience. At the first sign of any such emergent distress the immediate and compulsive reaction is to strengthen the defences, to intensify the idealisation process, to deepen the split, to reinforce the repression and denial, to generate greater distance of displacement and to destroy the nascent connections between originating cause and current conscious symptom or presentation.

Feuerbach perceives the 'Divine Being' as the displaced, projected, idealised, good part of human nature. That which man perceives as utterly and absolutely good and true is reified, personified and deified.

"God is the essence of man viewed as absolute truth , i.e., as the fulfilment of what is truly human. This God, however, varies with those properties which define for men their nature and because of which they view this nature as the highest form of being. The properties, therefore, which men attribute to their God constitute for them the truth and consequently the highest possible existence." [EC p. 15]

Embedded in Feuerbach's text at this point is an implicit psychological critique of the ontological argument for the existence of God, following Anselm and Descartes. The various attributes of divinity are seen as idealised perfections of human character. Since the divine is a mirror of the human and non-existent humanity is a contradiction, so the idealised divinity must exist. For Feuerbach the insistence on the existence of God is none other than the reflection of the awareness of the existence of man.

"You believe in love as a divine attribute because you yourself love; you believe that God is a wise, benevolent being because you know nothing better in yourself than benevolence and wisdom; and you believe that God exists and that he is therefore a subject... because you yourself exist and are yourself a subject. You know no higher human perfection than to love, to be good, and to be wise; and likewise you know

no higher bliss than to exist, to be a subject; for the consciousness of bliss is for you dependent on the awareness of being a subject, of existing. God is for you an existent, a subject, for the same reason that he is for you wise, blessed, and a person."[EC p. 14]

The religious, or supernatural, field is restricted in Feuerbach's perspective to the being of God himself. The negativities inherent in traditional forms of religion are blotted out from view. The cosmic powers of darkness and evil, Satan as the fallen angel, hell as the antithesis of heaven, the principalities and powers which make up the forces of darkness ranged against those of light - have no place in the Feuerbachian concept. The black side of religion is denied. For him the fundamental split is reflected in the dislocation and distance between man and God. For God to be and be perceived as good, man must be and be perceived as bad.

"It is also essential to observe, and this phenomenon is an extremely remarkable one, characterizing the very core of religion, that in proportion as God becomes more ideally human, the greater becomes the apparent difference between God and man. To enrich God, man must become poor; that God may be all, man must become nothing.[EC p.16]

The idealised bad field from which all goodness has been selected out and denied is focussed into the being of man. That which is human but good is annihilated, in tandem with that which is supernatural but bad. So Feuerbach generates by selective denial the fundamental antithesis between good God and bad man. As a true Hegelian at heart, it is the synthesis of these two opposites which generates the new man, in Feuerbachian thought. Except that even here the negativities of the synthesis are also denied. Feuerbach's ideal man is god incarnate and in no sense a synthesis of good and evil, human and divine.

"Religion denies the goodness of human nature: man is wicked, corrupt, incapable of good. On the other hand, God is completely good, is the Good Being. And religion demands that this goodness personified as God be a human objective. But is not thereby goodness declared to be an essential characteristic and the destination of man?"[EC p.16]

The absoluteness of the antithesis between man and god is evidence of the intensity of the idealisation process. The elements on each side of the split are utterly dissociated and a great gulf is fixed between the two.

"Religion is the alienation of man from himself; for man sets up God as an antithesis to himself. God is not what man is, and man is not what God is. God is the infinite, man the finite being; God is perfect, man is imperfect; God is eternal, man temporal; God is holy, man sinful; God is omnipotent, man impotent. God and man constitute an antithesis: God is absolutely positive, the realization of every perfection; man is absolutely negative, comprehending in himself every imperfection.[EC p. 18]

Now when the absolutely positive thesis combines with the absolutely negative antithesis the synthesis is absolutely nothing, except perhaps for a high energy discharge, as in the encounter of matter with antimatter. For Feuerbach the process of integration indicates that the thesis wins hands down and annihilates the antithesis. So the process of denial is taken

one stage further. The human is split into good and bad, good is denied; the religious or supernatural is split into good and bad, bad is denied; the field of being is split into the human and divine, the human is denied, leaving Feuerbach's new man as the internalised incarnation of one pole of the defensive split.

It is significant that at one point Feuerbach shows awareness of the dipole or split fields within the being of man himself.

"But in religion, man objectifies his own latent nature. Hence it must be proved that this antithesis, this contrast between God and man with which religion begins, is in reality a conflict between the individual and his own nature." [EC p.18]

In this important sentence Feuerbach indicates that the split between man and god mirrors a fundamental split within the self of man. Unfortunately he appears unable to carry the analysis further. He is dealing with the four sectors of a two-way split with two of those sectors repressed, or denied. The split between the natural self and the supernatural holding environment is cross-faulted by the split into good and evil. Denial of the bad supernatural and the good natural fields allows Feuerbach to simplify the position into the antithesis between man and god. The identification of a split, or idealised field, as of the essence of being, instead of being an essence of defence of being, blocks his further progress. He searches the nature of man for that which could generate such a split and reveals his essentially Manichean position. It is man's mind, his reason, his intelligence, in its pure form, which is split off from the evil body within it which it exists, God is the alienated mind of man. Kamenka summarises the Feuerbachian analysis:

"God, in the first place, is put over and above man as an alien being. What is the human characteristic that can be set over and above man, that leads to a split in man's conception of himself, that enables man to recognize his dependence and unworthiness? It is Intelligence, i.e., Reason or Understanding. God, then, is in the first place the human understanding conscious of its own perfection. It is free of the lusts and sufferings of the heart, it enables man to rise above them and even to come into conflict with them. The infinite spirit, then, is nothing but the human understanding freed from individuality and suffering." [Kamenka op. cit. p.47]

The defensive mechanisms of idealisation, projection and denial are symptoms, signals, pointers to an underlying causal trauma of great intensity. The splitting between mind and body, the psyche/soma split as it commonly termed today, is also an indication of intense physical distress or impingement. The mind, overwhelmed by the distressful information and pain being received from the body, retreats into a world of its own, an intellectual cave, an idealised haven, burying within the mind/body split the repressed energy of the causal trauma. Feuerbach fails to perceive the intensity of energy vested in the defence system, a lacuna preserved by his own defences of denial. He fails, therefore, to penetrate to the next level of analysis, leaving the question "what generates this fundamental split?" unanswered. As a result he attempts to dismantle religion without dealing with those underlying needs which religion exists to satisfy. Little wonder that other forms of religion, para-constructs of defence, aggregate around his work.

Chapter 8: The Ground of Defence

Several major unresolved questions lie at the heart of Feuerbach's work. They focus around the issue of the origin of the phenomenon of alienation. What is it in the condition of humanity which generates such a deep, yet universal, self-estrangement in the ground of being? An estrangement, moreover, invested with such high levels of psychic energy as are needed to account for the intensity of religious behaviour. The history of later nineteenth century social philosophy coheres around this common core. A variety of answers to the basic question are provided, each leading to fundamental shifts in social construct, some patterning out into massive political and economic realignments.

The "state of the art" of social and individual psychoanalysis was inadequate at that time to carry investigation of the issue to the necessary depth. Some pointers to an appropriate line of advance began to emerge in the early twentieth century, notably in the work of Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank, Carl Jung, Melanie Klein and D.W. Winnicott.

Freud saw the origin of anxiety (and hence the consequent defences of the human psyche) as arising out of the earliest fears of castration. The application of his insights to the field of religion were worked out in *Moses and Monotheism*, *Totem and Taboo* and *The Future of an Illusion*. Another strand in Freud's work reaches tentatively behind the castration complex into the position of conflict between "the life instinct and the death instinct". He posits these two antithetical drives as "innate", characteristics of the inborn essence of what it is to be human.

Otto Rank's brilliantly perceptive study of "Birth Trauma" traced the originating core of angst into the life-threatening distress experienced by the emergent foetus at the point of birth. Although his ideas initially gained cautious approval from Freud, they led to violent reactions from other analysts (notably Abrahams and Jones). Rank was evicted from the European circle, emigrated to the States and his ideas lay largely dormant this side of the Atlantic until quite recently.

Working with the comparatively sustained phantasies of psychotic patients, whose defences are much less amenable to analysis and developmental resolution, Carl Jung came to the conclusion that the fundamental splits in being and in world perception were not only individually innate but commonly shared racial archetypes of the human unconscious. The different parts, or personae, could be assembled and integrated into some kind of symbolic symmetry, a mandala, a religious world view. Such a position enabled the maintenance of splitting, dissociation, projection and denial and provided some kind of validation of sustained psychosis. His work failed, however, to penetrate significantly into the causal dynamics of the condition.

Around the period of the Second World War and its following decade, Melanie Klein clarified the basic mechanisms of defence operation, but again (following Freud) saw them as "innate". For her, psychic life began at birth and any development prior to the babe in arms position was ignored. D.W. Winnicott drew attention to the significance and importance of "the holding environment" provided by the very early nursing relationship between mother and child - a continuation of the intrauterine holding environment of the womb-world. He denied to "normal" birth the quality of trauma since it did not yield significant deviation from

normal behaviour. This tautological denial of the significance of birth stems from the therapeutic and analytic sanction of the task which perceives "normal" as "normative" and is precisely not concerned with examination of the normal defences and their underlying traumata.

The application of psychoanalytic insight to group and social dynamics in the work of, for example, W.R. Bion and Elliott Jaques rested on the same set of assumptions as those of the classical psychoanalysts. They too saw the primitive defences of idealisation, splitting, denial, projection and introjection, as innate characteristics of human behaviour. They were to all intents and purposes uncaused effects with whose presenting phenomena one had to cope in some way.

It is an indication of the intensity of the underlying impingement and hence of the energy vested in the defences that each attempt to penetrate to the causal core of norm defensive behaviour has been subject to irrational opposition. Reaction has emerged in oppression of information, dislocation and chaoticisation of the theoretical field, breakdown of relationships between key field workers and analysts and tautological preservation of the norm status quo. Only in the last decade and a half has sufficient concerted breakthrough of these defences been achieved as early, rather crude, attempts at enabling deep primal regression with the use of hypnosis or controlled dosage of LSD gave way to the more sophisticated techniques of deep regressive analysis and primal therapy. It would appear that the frontiers of understanding of the core of alienation, and its associated primitive defences, have now been sufficiently pushed back to enable major developments in answer to the questions with which Feuerbach so valiantly wrestled. The significance of such developments must be emphasised, since they have major implications, not only in terms of philosophical and religious perception, but also for the outworking of such shifts in world view in the major socio-political and economic structures of the world and also in terms of the release of major constraints on the levels of maturational development and potential fulfilment of humanity.

If Feuerbach mistook one pole of defence as the ground of being then it is vital to delineate the ground of defence itself. What is that condition of dependency, common to man, in which the ground of dependency reverses from being benign and supportive to malign and persecutory? At what point in the human drama does such reversal occur so commonly, with such intensity, raising such anxiety, that the intrapersonal defences are laid so deep and with such common patterns that extremely large social systems resonate together and generate common symbolic constructs to handle the material? All indications now point to the experience of birth itself as providing just this common matrix or causal origin of alienation.

In its primitive, pre-verbal, level of consciousness the full-term foetus is aware of its womb-world. There is an all-embracing intimacy of touch, a shock absorbing, protective, supportive, environment in which it lives and moves and has its being. The womb is continually in motion, a living boundary other than the foetal self and yet in the most intimate communion with it, having patterns of mutual response. The steady, pulsing, background, double-rhythm of the maternal heartbeat is punctuated at intervals by digestive rumblings, sounds of voices and other external noises. The provision of food and oxygen and the removal of waste products are functions automatically provided by the environment. The foetus has no responsibility, no work - it is simply supported in being. Not that the womb-world is either good or bad, it simply is and is what it is. Within this world the foetus is

indeed formed in the image of its mater. Here is the condition of ultimate dependency and also of vulnerability. If the mother is contented, the babe is contented. If the mother is shocked, or anxious, the adrenaline pumps into the foetal blood-stream and the foetal pulse rate rises in mirror shock and angst. If the mother drinks, the babe is intoxicated. If she grieves, the same hormone balance is reflected across the placental boundary. The dependency here is not ideal, but it is good enough and not normally over-stressed.

As the time for birth approaches, however, things begin to change. By this time the babe is head down, the womb distended and spatial freedom inhibited. With bile and urea being excreted by the foetus, the amniotic fluid takes on a characteristically bitter taste, (Recalled in extreme conditions of adult suffering, described as 'bitter' and analogous to the taste of wormwood and gall). During the first stage of labour the matrix around the head begins to dilate, the surrounding fluid drains away, restricting movement still further. Gradually the head is pushed down into the birth channel and the second stage of labour is under way. The levels of stress experienced during the process vary enormously from birth to birth, even for the same mother, but that the level of stress is normally high and frequently traumatic is undeniable.

As third stage labour onsets the head may be moulded or crushed against the bony pelvic structures and progress occasionally blocked. Meanwhile, increasing and rhythmic pressure is brought to bear on the feet, legs and buttocks of the babe, which is gradually rammed through an orifice apparently too small for it. The benign supportive environment has turned wild. Even in a so-called 'normal' or uncomplicated birth, levels of pain for both mother and child are high and in many cases reach intolerable levels of stress for both parties. At least the mother knows what is going on, the babe has no such experiential data bank by which to understand the terrifying sequence of events. As the rhythmic crushing and pushing continues the babe is evicted from Eden and a world is lost, never to be re-entered. The umbilical life-support system no longer provides adequate oxygen and, fighting for survival, the neonate takes its first breath and cries. The information-overload continues with handling, lights, washing and high noise levels, but at least the pain is over. Soon exhaustion sets in, crying subsides and the neonate sleeps. Lack of umbilically transferred food gives rise to new needs. The babe is hungry and in new distress cries out, slowly learning to suck for its life. The nursing relationship is established. The trauma is over. But lessons have been learnt so deeply in these crucial hours that subsequent disruption of any dependent base may reverberate with levels of terror and loss so deep, so profound, and yet so common. In the process of parturition lies the common ground of defence.

Anxiety is the emotional response to the experience of threat of the well-being of the human organism.

D. Wasdell
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