

[Feuerbach's Projection Theory](#)

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Date: Tue, 05 Mar 96 15:39:11 EST

From: Mike Monaco <MMONACO@KENTVM.KENT.EDU>

Feuerbach claimed that our conceptions of "god" are always just projections of our own values. God fulfills our need to objectify our virtues, and embodies our values. Thus the essence of religion is human nature, and our Gods tell us about ourselves..."theology as anthropology". I'm trying to trace this idea's history. Nietzsche runs with idea in his *Antichrist*, especially sections 16-17 and 25-26. Nietzsche claims that when we worship "god", we're really worship our own virtues--"god" represents our delight in ourselves, our feeling of power. I'd be very appreciative if anyone could point me in the right direction on this. I've heard that Baron Holbach's "physicalism" is somehow connected to this idea, but I can't find anything of his in translation. I've also heard that Lange (*History of Materialism*) has something similar. Lange was read by Nietzsche, so this could be a good lead. Thanks in advance for any assistance you can provide.

Date: Wed, 6 Mar 1996 14:18:23 +0200 (IST) From: Robert J. Griffin <griffin@post.tau.ac.il>

A consideration of theology-as-anthropology might want to investigate ideas from the pre-christian philosophers. excuse my vagueness as to source, but the book from which i studied greek included various sayings and proverbs in the margin, one of which was "if horses had hands, they would sculpt their gods in the shape of horses." then there is the later latin tag "it was fear that first made the gods." there was also the school of euhemerus, who believed that the myths had their basis in historical events and characters.

again, excuse my unscholarly vagueness, for it has been a while since i have dealt with this material. i write only because this may be enough to indicate that feuerbach is reviving classical notions. of course, nothing would prevent renaissance humanists from transmitting these ideas as long as they were assumed to apply to pagan gods.

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Date: Wed, 6 Mar 1996 15:07:06 -0800 (PST) From: Abraham Philip Socher <socher@uclink3.berkeley.edu>

> Robert J. Griffin <griffin@post.tau.ac.il> wrote

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- > ideas from the pre-christian philosophers. excuse my vagueness as to
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This is a quote (or paraphrase) of the pre-socratic Xenophanes. For secondary discussion which relates it to Feuerbach (& also, I believe, Nicholas of Cusa) see the work of my late teacher, Amos Funkenstein, esp. his *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (Princeton, 1986). He had returned to precisely these questions in the year before his death in a joint Seminar with the Berkeley Classicist Tony Long & in an uncompleted MS. which will eventually be published in some form.

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Date: Fri, 8 Mar 1996 07:36:53 -0500
From: Everdell@aol.com

Robert J. Griffin writes: "A consideration of theology-as-anthropology might want to investigate ideas from the pre-christian philosophers. [...] 'if horses had hands, they would sculpt their gods in the shape of horses.' then there is the later latin tag 'it was fear that first made the gods.' There was also the school of Euhemerus, who believed that the myths had their basis in historical events and characters. [...] this may be enough to indicate that Feuerbach is reviving classical notions..."

The best source on the euhemerist antecedents to Feuerbach is Frank Manuel's **The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods**, NY: Atheneum, 1967. Not only is this my old teacher's most original book, it's got an awful lot in it, including the attribution of "fear that first made gods" to the poem, **De Rerum Natura** of that exceptionally early atheist, Lucretius. Lucretius was probably echoing an even older saw of the Epicureans. Among those quoting or paraphrasing Lucretius: Petronius Arbiter (*Satyricon*), Statius (*Thebais* 3), Ben Jonson (*Sejanus* II:2), Nietzsche (*Genealogy of Morals*), George Santayana (*The Life of Reason*), and John Dewey - all sifted from that admirable leftish collection by George Seldes, **The Great Quotations**, NY: Lyle Stuart, 1960, Pocket Books, 1967.

But as for the gods in the shape of horses, I think they were made by a human being - Swift's Houyhnhnms.

-Bill Everdell, Brooklyn

Date: Tue, 05 Mar 96 16:44:00 PST

From: Cerling, Lee <lcerling@pepperdine.edu>

I should think you'd have to go back another couple of thousand years at least. Ovid wrote that "it is convenient that there be gods, and, as it is convenient, let us believe there are." And Greeks before him made similar observations, though I can't recall the sources at the moment. (I'm sure others on this list can cite them.) Even the Hebrew prophets criticized the prophets with whom they disagreed by saying, in effect, "God says that your ideas of God represent only your own wishes." [Cf., for example, Jeremiah 23.16 ff.] I should think that one of the first moves for any critic of religion in almost any culture would be to argue that those who speak for God or the gods are "merely" (another rhetorical move) "projecting their own values."

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