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Ludwig Feuerbach – Philosophical Pioneer of Contemporaneity

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> But its secret, [...] is the secret of common and social life – the secret of the necessity of the you for the I – the truth that no being [...] is in itself a true, perfect and absolute being, whilst only the connection, the unity of beings of identical essence constitutes truth and perfection. The supreme and ultimate principle of philosophy is the unity of man with man. All the fundamental relationships – the principles of the different sciences – are only different species and modes of this unity (Feuerbach, 1843).

I. Introduction

Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach (1804-1872) was a philosopher of greater stature than the recognition he received during his lifetime, which has only recently been measured by new publications of his main works in Italy, Colombia, Portugal, Spain, Brazil and Germany, as well as by the spread of international academic societies dedicated to his philosophical thought (Serrão, 1999b).

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In his philosophy, we find a comprehensive system encompassing the philosophies of nature, religion, history, science, aesthetics, morality, and politics. His thought was influenced by philosophical pantheism (namely Italian and particularly that of Giordano Bruno), but also by scientific naturalism, from which specific disciplines in areas of nature (inhuman and human) were already unfolding, and by democratic republicanism, whose cumulative questioning of European dynasties would result in the Revolutions of 1848 which, although defeated, at least brought universal suffrage (sometimes also including women) onto the political agenda (Tomasoni, 2022, p. 12-13; Serrão, 1999a, p. 11-13).

However, his philosophical thought transcended his pantheistic, naturalist and republican influences in each of the philosophical areas he addressed, as he explicitly assumed himself to be a critical-positive enterprise of human civilization as he perceived within it both unfulfilled potential and misguided directions. Therefore, his philosophical dedication covered fifteen themes as issues that would only take centre stage at the present time:

- The statute of the sciences
- The West-East Dialogue
- Individual differences
- The statute of democracy
- Women's emancipation
- Individual basic income
- Communities of destiny
- Natural selection of living beings
- Sustainable development
- Dietetics as a right of citizenship
- Gymnastics as a right of citizenship
- Euthanasia as a right of citizenship
- Housing as a right of citizenship
- The socially responsible market
- Desire as part of the human unconscious

Within the scope of this article, the objective is to disseminate the potential benefits of the current revival of Feuerbachian thought to reflect on contemporaneity. Due to obvious limitations, it will not be possible to explore his approaches to the above themes in detail. However, I will expose them sufficiently to highlight how Feuerbach surpassed the pantheistic, naturalistic, and republican influences of his intellectual

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formation in favour of a civilizational critique that addressed both the Middle Ages and the Modern Age.

The role of Feuerbach as a critic of civilization, which guided him as a philosophical thinker, can be understood in relation to his concept, described by him as essential, of human self-objectification, which defined his concept of humanity as a historical subject, as natural as it is cultural.

According to Feuerbach, culture in the broad sense (including both values and techniques) characterised humanity as objectifying subjectivity, since the human race is made up of individuals whose individual lives were communal because they were exercised through the uninterrupted objectification of their subjectivities, which, objectified in relation to all other human subjectivities – "[...] humanity always begins in and with unity [...] - became objectively integrated into the lives of others to each subjectivity that had objectified itself. Thus, every human formulation, being its self-objectification, individually or collectively, relates human beings to each other: drawing something visible, touching others, producing new food with an unprecedented smell, emitting (directly by itself or indirectly with an external element) a sound that is still unheard. Even when repeated, each objectification of any subjectivity is concomitantly meaningful or re-meaningful when apprehended by the senses "[...] in which the human spirit converges all its forces, fullness, and reality." (Feuerbach, 1974, p. 40; 1967b, p. 574).

The self-objectification, at least in its entirety, had not been assumed by humanity, as the unity of the human race kept being self-objectified, as unconsciously as through the arts, as supernatural beings or religious doctrines. These did not fulfill the unifying and emancipatory function of humanity, whose self-objectifying vocation would simultaneously unite it through autonomous human beings. Feuerbach concluded that religions channeled the most essential human subjectivity, because it was directly related to its unity as a communal species, but still imperfectly or at least not fully (Feuerbach, 1974, p. 140-141): "What religion aims for inwardly, art aims for outwardly, as an object of the senses. What I have within me, I also want to have before me; what I represent, I also want to see" (Feuerbach, 1866, p. 338-339).

The Medieval Era was the peak of Catholicism because Catholicism channels the human tendency toward self-objectification into a supernatural projection of Christ as the personification of humanity, ignoring it as a real community possibility and corresponding to the customary servility to the ruling dynasties – all ordained by the Catholic Church, whose theology limited scientific knowledge, especially in the scholastic education provided by the first universities (Feuerbach, 1967a, p. 21-25).

Even the Modern Era, which replaced the medieval era with Protestant eruptions, did not lead to community self-awareness of the kind in its relations with nature, as it continued to conceal an unreal superiority of man over it, despite Feuerbach praising the innovative Lutheran reform for intimate subjectivity through the Christian faith, because it corresponded to modernization as opposed to traditional hierarchies, releasing subjective individualities as much as the Italian Renaissance did for artistic nudity and scientific investigation (Feuerbach, 1967a, p. 25-31).

Complete human self-objectification required not only the eradication of medieval remnants of customary dynastic vassalage and anti-scientific scholastic prejudices but also the community integration of modernly and subjectively emancipated individuals through alliances with nature, by a self-aware human race as part of it, without any illusions about the dynamic relationship between it and humanity as autonomous partners. Such human self-awareness would depend on a philosophical formulation corresponding to the future beyond modernity, whose application would complete the human unity promised by medieval and modern thinkers, by merely translating human senses into philosophy without a school (Feuerbach, 1974, p. 30-34; 2008c, p. 5).

The following section will examine how human self-objectification, as a Feuerbachian guiding principle, arose from pantheistic (philosophical), naturalistic (scientific), and republican (democratic) influences on Feuerbach, and how it enabled him to surpass them in a civilizational formulation that was as communitarian as it was ecocentric. According to the Feuerbachian (genetic-critical) method, applied to his intellectual elaboration and characterised by the consideration of the origins of any phenomena for their phenomeno-logical understanding, these influences are assumed as the comprehensive parameters of his philosophical evolution.

II. From Philosophical Pantheism to the Genetic-Critical Method

Under the influence of pantheism, Feuerbach's first two major works already presented a radically relational view of the cosmos. This foundational perspective, which saw all existence as both multiple and unitary, was not abandoned but rather refined in his later intellectual development. For Feuerbach, every entity exists in relation to others, and to exist is to relate. Cosmic is the set of existential, current, and potentially innumerable relationships between existences, even though they are finite in themselves. Space and time, as existential pillars, enable existences, although spatially and temporally finite, as well as their replacement by others, with greater or lesser finitude than those

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endlessly replaced as new conjugations occur, before the end of each existing being (Feuerbach, 1828; 1980).

Each existence unfolds within the realm of relationships, both limiting everything that exists and enabling infinite combinations between finitudes, combining them when favourable to each other and whose maximum potentiality leads to the creation of new entities, although also finite like those that gave them existence. To cease to relate is to cease to exist, for only relationships maintain—because they are—finite existences, despite being multiple and, eventually, generating others when combined to the maximum.[1]

Every existence is related to another, and any manifestation of any existence is therefore a projection of one onto another. Manifestation is an intrinsic aspect of the relationships between finite beings, made objective (among themselves) by these relationships, whether they are living beings or not: "[...] an individual in itself is in a way the other or many other individuals. And the things to be generated, to the extent that they exist in the generator [...], are contained in it, as they are not themselves, if in fact they are compared with the form they had when they were generated [...]. But if my awareness of myself were not the apprehension of men at the same time [...] I would be a plant (vegetative soul). [...] To the extent that I am a singular person, others are necessarily singular, or rather, to say that one is singular and that several are singular is the same thing (Feuerbach, 1828, p. 5-7). "In the heavens, nature spreads its power outwardly; it demonstrates its intensity not in intensive realities, but in extensive realities. [...] As every purpose [...] has a history behind it [...], you must recognise, from the very multiplicity of the stars [...] that [...] this small Earth is the fruit of the great cosmos. [...] The parts of an organic body are members [...] divisible only by external means, but united by their purpose, essence, which is their soul; for, taken together, they generate only one purpose, only one activity, only one feeling, which is life itself" (Feuerbach 1980 [1830], p. 70, 89, 90).

Furthermore, since manifested aspects of a phenomenon are objectively relative to other phenomena, it is up to the interpreter to understand them as indications of the foundation that makes it exist. The core of phenomenological interpretation is to uncover the essential correlation or relational foundation that brought a particular essence into being, since each essence is defined by the relationships that establish or maintain its existence.

[1] In his doctoral dissertation in 1828, reason is the comprehensive dimension of finitudes, connecting them by informing them as distinct entities. In the anonymous work published in 1830 (whose discovery of authorship would cause him insurmountable academic difficulties throughout his life due to the questioning of the immortality of the individual soul that he criticised there), the space-time continuum is the divine foundation of multiple finitudes (Feuerbach, 1828, part three and 1980, part two).

Because one understands something by analyzing and synthesizing its elements, thereby comprehending how it became what it is through a process of progressive self-objectification. Feuerbach called this method as organic-genetic, or genetic criticism: "this method consists of constantly linking the elevated with the seemingly common, the most distant with the closest, the abstract with the concrete, the speculative with the empirical, philosophy with life; it consists of presenting the universal in the particular [...]. The intermediate link [...] between the higher and the lower, the abstract and the concrete, the universal and the particular, is, [...] in the domain of science according to its essential properties" (Feuerbach, 2005, p. 37-38).

By assuming that human phenomena express essences with the quality of self-objectification, the Feuerbachian method understands them by detecting the sources from which they arise as existing, as expressions of the essences that qualify them. From there, its applications to the individual creative writing of the theologian-philosopher Abelard (correlating the themes of his writings to his beloved Heloise) and to Christianity as a religious tradition (correlating each Catholic sacrament to the absent communion of the human race) prove its applicability to both particular and general phenomena, concluding that:

- The erotic-romantic inspiration in Abelard's writing, although indirect, expresses the human need for self-objectification of one's individual qualities, because they are loved by oneself and by others: "The soul of man is what he recognises and experiences in himself as true and supreme, which determines his way of appreciating things, of being, of living, and of acting" (Feuerbach, 1967b, p. 86).
- Christian religious tradition expresses the previous religious progressions from polytheism to religious monotheism, engraved by the self-objectification of humankind, but with still insufficient human self-awareness: "The historical progress of religions is only that what was considered by the oldest religions as something objective is now considered as something subjective, that is, what was [...] worshipped [...] is now known as something human. [...] Man has objectified himself, but has not recognised the object as his essence; later religion takes this step; all progress in religion is therefore a deeper knowledge of oneself. (...) And our intention is precisely to prove that the opposition between the divine and the human [...] is nothing more than the opposition between human essence and the human individual, that [...] also the object and content of the Christian religion is entirely human" (Feuerbach, 2022, p. 52-53).

Unlike the pantheists who inspired him (mainly Bernardino Telesia and Giordano Bruno), Feuerbach's pantheism in his early works was already sui generis

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because it confers finitude on universal multiplicity. Consequently, he came to view self-objectification as inherent to all finite entities, which explained both their mutual limitations and any combinations that prolonged their existence. From that point on, his bias ceased to be pantheistic, which he began to associate with the East, whose imagination despised distinctions (distinguishing it from the West, whose imagery tended toward the fragmentation of reality): "German speculative philosophy is the direct antithesis of ancient Solomonic wisdom. While the latter sees nothing new under the sun, the former sees only the new; while the former loses sight of difference in the face of unity, the latter forgets unity in the face of difference; while the former takes its indifference to identity to the point of apathetic stupidity, the latter exalts its sensitivity to otherness and diversity to the point of feverish delirium [...]" (Feuerbach, 2012, p. 23).

The genetic-critical method[2] employs both analytical and synthetic procedures to determine the meaning of the phenomenon under study.

III. From Scientific Naturalism to Synergistic Reintegration with Nature

More than a decade before Charles Darwin published his theory of evolution (The Origin of Species), Feuerbach said in a public lecture: "If nature once created humans and animals through an original creation, without humans or animals already existing, why does this no longer happen? I answer: because everything in nature has its time [...]; it is because conditions existed before that are lacking now. But a day may come when nature will do the same, when the old species of men and animals will disappear and [...] new generations will arise. Only [...] revolutions that have never been repeated have produced organic beings, at least such as those found on Earth since its last great geological era. Also [...] the human spirit does not always produce original works, in any era; no! There is always a period in life [...], experiences, moments, conditions [...], it is such moments that produce original works; in others, it merely repeats itself, [...] in the course of habitual, common proliferation" (Feuerbach, 2009, p. 197-198).

The theme of nature in general is present in Feuerbach, explicitly and since his two early major works, already as an existential totality permeated by the universal rational dimension (Feuerbach, 1828, p. 13, 14, 15) or outlined by the double space-time continuum in which it is the source to which every being, living or not, returns through natural dissolution (Feuerbach, 1980 [1830], p. 20-24). It becomes fundamental to Feuerbach's philosophy for three reasons: by conceptually developing self-objectification as a living human distinction; by concluding that humanity's undeniable dependence on inhuman nature is the basis of all religious sentiment; and by finding its counterpart in naturally unconscious human desires.

As a naturally self-objectifying life, human life is not only subjectivity because it articulates itself with objects found in nature, but also and mainly because it objectifies itself in an unprecedented way, innovating it through material or immaterial creations inherent to the experience it exercises. Its natural self-objectification extends it within nature, as the other to which it directs its objectified subjectivity, because in nature it is made objective, although everything in it also challenges humanity. Since subjectivity itself, as self-objectifying as it is human, is exercised both from and through the objectivity in which nature consists, thereby differing from it (overcoming its previous pantheism): "nature is the essence that is indistinguishable from existence; man is the essence that is distinguishable from existence. The undistinguished essence is the foundation of the essence that distinguishes — nature is, therefore, the foundation of man. The [...] only positive philosophy is [...] man who [...] knows that the pantheistic being, which speculative philosophers or, rather, theologians separated from man and objectified in an abstract Being, is nothing more than his own indeterminate essence, but capable of infinite determinations" (Feuerbach, 2008b, p. 16-17).

As the direct counterpart of humanity in any temporal or spatial situation, nature directly influences any human self-objectification: "All sciences must be grounded in nature. A doctrine is only a hypothesis until its natural basis is found. This point is particularly relevant to the doctrine of freedom. Only the new philosophy will be able to naturalise freedom, which until now has been an anti- and supernaturalist hypothesis. Philosophy must once again unite with the science of nature, and the science of nature with philosophy. This union, based on mutual necessity, [...] will be more lasting [...] than that [...] has existed until now between philosophy and theology" (Feuerbach, 2008b, p. 19).

Conceived as a fundamental object of Feuerbachian thought, due to its growing opposition to philosophical traditions (by criticising Hegel[3] and both

[2] "Genetic-critical philosophy does not conceive or dogmatically demonstrate an object given by representation [...], but investigates its origin, questions whether the object is a real object, or a mere representation or a psychological phenomenon in general, and therefore distinguishes as rigorously as possible between the subjective and the objective. Genetic-critical philosophy mainly has as its object what has already been called the causae secundae (secondary causes)" (Feuerbach, 2012, p. 54-55).

[3] Interpreters of Feuerbach also differ on the degree of Hegelian influence on him, as his progressive break with Hegel characterises various phases of Feuerbach's work, from a letter sent to his former professor to present his doctoral dissertation (Serrão, 2019). For interpretations with more similarities between Hegelian and

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Western and Eastern cultures[4]), conceiving nature as a confluence of order and chaos, a subject-object that encompasses both the material and immaterial dimensions (conscious of living beings), a general foundation in which all entities in space and time are rooted, and a total environment that includes everything that exists as interrelated ingredients (Feuerbach, 2012, p. 24, 51, 62).

Feuerbach's thought examines human nature as a distinct object of study, which is self-objectifying, from inhuman nature (or non-human nature, as distinguished by Feuerbach), which is objectively all-encompassing and from which our first existential otherness emanates, because it is absolutely objective: "For me, 'nature' [...] is nothing more than a general term for beings, things, objects, which man differentiates from himself and his products. [...] nature is conceived only through itself; it is the being whose concept does not depend on any other being; it is only to nature that the difference between what a thing is in itself and what it is for us can be applied" (Feuerbach, 1967d, p. 4, 61).

This conception of nature, on which human beings are undeniably dependent, despite its relative reduction through technological development, also underpins Feuerbachian critiques of the illusory Western supremacy over it (subjugated, by Judeo-Christian tradition, to man as the image of the divine Creator) and from which colonialism, racism, and teleological ends to science or other natural creatures, imposed by white men, arise. (Feuerbach, 1967d, p. 6-7, 51-52, 62-63): “Because in the East, man does not forget nature because of man, he does not forget the splendor of the stars and precious stones because of the splendor of the human eye [...]. In relation to the Westerner, the Easterner is in the same situation as the country dweller in relation to the city dweller. [...] When man rises above nature with will and intelligence and becomes supernatural, then God also becomes supernatural. [...] The beginning of nature is placed in God, only where its end is placed in man. [...] ‘Order’, ‘end’, ‘law’ are words with which man translates the works of nature into his language” (Feuerbach, 1967d, p. 46, 51, 345).

Feuerbach discusses environmentalism without using the current terms “sustainability” or “sustainable development”. Unlike the purely conservationist tendencies of inhuman nature, which were absolutely espoused by the scientific naturalists of the 19th century whom he studied, Feuerbach adopts a constant alliance between human and inhuman nature[5] within his critical humanist ideal of the medieval and modern, as in: "Be good, dear earth, and give me a good harvest, says the religious man. Whether it wants to or not, it has to give me good fruit, says the irreligious man. The earth will give me when I give it what is proper to its essence, says the true man, neither religious nor irreligious; it neither wants to give, nor should it give [...] but it will only give good fruit if all conditions are met on my part [...]" (Feuerbach, 2009 [1851], p. 351).

During his dialogues with scientific naturalists, he published works in which he conceived human nutrition as immaterial (through specific tastes and even interacting emotions[6]) and adopted the medical bias of physiology, warning of the need to also highlight the internal organic synergy of each individual as a medicinal criterion. It should also be noted that several Feuerbachian issues were considered necessary objects of social policies for the popularization of gymnastics, comfortable housing, and adequate nutrition, as ideal correspondences between human and inhuman natures (Feuerbach 2021 [1866], p. 172-173; Feuerbach 2007 [1862], p. 25; Feuerbach 1994 [1868], p. 59-60). He defined poverty as an inhumane condition that is as immaterial as it is material in terms of basic needs, some of which are only accepted today: "Many vices and crimes occur among poor and uneducated people because they do not possess, and often do not even know, the means by which these evils can be successfully prevented. [...] In short, the will can do nothing without the help of material and physical means, morality can do nothing without gymnastics and dietetics" (Feuerbach 2021 [1866], p. 112-113).

Feuerbachian thought, it is worth mentioning Tomasoni's work (Tomasoni, 2022, p. 108-131; Filho, 2018).

[4] Feuerbach concluded that nothingness cannot exist, a position stemming directly from its own definition (the basis of Eastern thought): "As the opposite of being, nothingness is a product of the Eastern imagination [...]. Nothingness is precisely nothing — [...] and nothing more can be said about it; nothingness refutes itself" (Feuerbach, 2012, p. 60). Just as it rejects Western traditions of primordial chaos: "In nature, degrees of development [...] are undoubtedly moments, but [...] of the simultaneous totality of nature, and not of a particular totality, [...] which is in turn only a moment [...] of the totality of nature. [...] Now, I ask precisely: why constitute such a beginning in general? Is it [...] immediately true and universal?” (Feuerbach, 2012, p. 25, 29).

[5] “The genuine behavior toward an object is the behavior according to the difference that this object has from me, according to its essence; this behavior is certainly not religious, neither is it irreligious, as the common and educated masses think, who only know the opposition between belief and disbelief [...], but not a third, higher than both” (Feuerbach, 2009 [1851], p. 351).

[6] “Man, however, does not only eat with his senses; he eats and also digests — what is eating without digesting? — with his brain, with the organ of thought. The brain is the stomach, the digestive organ of the senses, [...] aesthetic taste, which in other languages means logical taste, judgment, understanding, knowledge itself as such — as clear proof that taste is not only a matter of the palate, but also of the brain itself, that food has not only a corporeal meaning, but also a mental one, and consequently, man not only absorbs food into his stomach, but also into his head. [...] Yes! Man is what he eats. But he does not eat only through his oesophagus; he also eats through his trachea [...]. Eating or drinking air means breathing. For this reason, the ancients called air a food, a nutrient, and this was entirely correct; because only with the participation of air, with the influx of oxygen, does food become arterial blood” (Feuerbach 2007 [1862], p. 22-23).

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The following table summarises the Feuerbachian dimensions characteristic of nature:

Table 1: Characteristics and Feuerbachian Dimensions of Nature.

Nature	Ordered	Material	Spatial	Unitary
Chaotic	Mutant			
Ideal		Subject-object		
Temporal			Fundamental	
Multiple				Non-teleological

Source: Feuerbach (2012 [1839]).

IV. From Democratic Republicanism to the Human Community

Among the cultural forms that characterise humanity in the historical exercise of self-objectification of its subjectivity, citizenship stands out. Its self-objectified fullness is indicated by the progressive direction in which it was emerging, countering medieval servitude and questioning hierarchies, as in the Protestant postulation of subjectively intimate access to the Christian Creator. But subjective liberation, according to Protestantism, increasingly widespread throughout Europe, needed political influence that only democratic republicanism (and not other forms of republicanism or, even less, parliamentary monarchical options) could provide, so that the European republican impulse of the time could serve as a platform for a future human community without planetary exceptions.

In this sense, human self-objectification had already historically achieved the republican requirement for individual cultural activities to be increasingly liberated: "Man is entitled to multiple predicates. Whatever man names or expresses, he always expresses his own essence. Therefore, language is the criterion for the elevation or baseness of humanity's level of culture. [...] The name Man means, in general, only [...] man as [...] distinct [...] from his public qualities in general [...] as if the quality of thinker, artist, judge, etc., were not a characteristic property [...]; as if in art, science, and so on, man was outside himself. [...] Man is the existence of freedom, the existence of personality, the existence of law." (Feuerbach, 2008b, p. 18-19).

As the greatest political opponent of the European dynasties, Feuerbach embraced democratic republicanism, which would erupt in the democratic revolutions of 1848 (including in favor of German democratic unification), participating as a candidate for radical democrats and, even though defeated at the polls, he still changed his residence to attend the open meetings of the elected Constituent Assembly, trying to influence it, however his main attempts to institutionalise an autonomous University and Magazine also failed (Tomasoni, 2022, p. 12): "What the thinker has in knowledge before consciousness, the practical man has in his impulse. But the practical impulse in humanity is the political impulse, the impulse to participate in the affairs of the State, the impulse to suppress the political hierarchy, the folly of the people [...]. What is now sought in the realm of politics is what the Reformation sought and planned in the realm of religion." (Feuerbach, 2008a, (1842), p. 6-7).

His republican activism, whose historical necessity was indicated to him by the gradual replacement of medieval Catholicism by modern Protestantism, was aware of the inadequacies of Protestantism and even of the republics then possible, clarifying that future human progress would require a collective diversification that even European republicanism did not yet encompass: "The so-called modern era is the Protestant Middle Ages in which we only [...] preserve [...] Roman law, criminal law, old-style universities, etc. With the dissolution of Protestant Christianity [...] we will enter a new era. The spirit of this era, or of the future, is that of realism. [...] The Protestant is a religious republican. Therefore, in its dissolution, [...] Protestantism leads to republicanism. If [...] we recognise the earth as the place of our destiny, then Protestantism leads directly to the republic" (Feuerbach, 2008a [1842], p. 7-8).

The ideal (Feuerbachian) republic would, in turn, be democratic to the point that all individualities or human essences would be self-objectified in a political community that is absolutely inclusive of the various individual existences manifested: "Man is the fundamental essence of the State. The State is the realised, elaborated, and explained totality of human essence. In the State, the essential qualities or activities of man are realised in particular "States", but [...] brought back to identity. The head of State must represent all "States"; before him, all are equally necessary and equally justified. The head of the State is the representative of universal man" (Feuerbach, 2008a, (1842), pp. 19 and 20). Therefore, as communal as it is pluralistic in identity: "The essence of man is contained only in the community, in the unity of man with man—a unity that, however, is based only on the reality of the distinction between I and you. Solitude is finitude and limitation; community is freedom and infinity" (Feuerbach, 2008c [1843], p. 73).

Feuerbach responded in a debate with philosopher Max Stirner, who questioned the individuality formulated in Feuerbach, arguing that by

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considering intersubjective relationships as constitutive of any human subjectivity does not prevent, instead promotes its self-objectification as it objectifies different subjectivities, whose differentiation, because it is always relational, implies that only the subject that is different when self-objectified in relation to others is individual. Human subjects are individual because they are self-objectified under various relationships with each other, in which their essential differences self-objectify different, unrepeatable existences. Each individual is unique precisely because they are not the only one: "What does it mean to 'realise the gender'? To realise a disposition, a capacity, a general determination of human nature [...] therefore, if man passes from adolescence to youth, from school to life, from slavery to freedom, from indifference to sex to love, he spontaneously exclaims in all these transitions and others like them: 'Only now have I become a human being', because only now has he become a complete human being, only now has he satisfied an essential impulse, hitherto unknown or violently repressed, of his nature. [...] There is therefore an essential difference between my and mine: one thing is mine that can disappear without me disappearing, another thing is mine that cannot disappear without me disappearing at the same time. [...] Ethical relationships are therefore sacred [...], sacred only because they are relationships between man and man, therefore, self-affirmations, self-satisfactions of human essence" (Feuerbach, 1845, p. 200, 203).

Following the defeat of the European revolutions of 1848, Feuerbach (which led Feuerbach to define his communal utopia more clearly in political and economic terms). In the 1850s, he began to place his humanistic and communal hopes in the American continent, where European dynastic traditions had not spread, and in scientific-naturalistic progress, whose advances would not be interrupted by dynastic censorship, for future democratic developments of the human race. In the exact same work, he explained the basic property regimes (without excluding others) whose guarantee would be in accordance with the community, as human as it was republican, which he preferred:

1) A general property of naturally common and unique goods that Feuerbach considered reasonable for socialization: "Not only a democrat, but also a socialist and communist, of course, only in the reasonable and general sense of the word, the natural scientist necessarily becomes; for nature knows nothing of the arrogance and fictions by which man has rightly restricted and stunted the existence of his fellow man. Air by nature belongs to everyone and therefore to no one; it is the common property of all living beings; but dogmatism has turned even air into a commodity [...]" (Feuerbach 1971 [1850], p. 359-360).
2) Fundamental individual properties, whose attribution to individuals enables them to relate to others without being at the mercy of others for their personal subsistence: "nature certainly knows property, but only what is necessary and indistinguishable from life; it gives each being what it needs; it did not create one to go hungry. The necessity of hunger owes its existence solely to the arbitrariness of the State [...]. A look at nature, therefore, elevates man above the narrow limits of painful law [...]. The 'good old law' divided humanity into nobility and plebs, nobility and rabble [...]. But Natural Science knows no difference between a noble womb and a bourgeois one, it only knows a common origin for all people and the same one" (Feuerbach 1971 [1850], p. 360, 362).

Feuerbach also took a stand on women's emancipation, already discussed in its political aspect thanks to American suffragettes, explicitly consistent with his previous view of women as qualifiers of human nature[7]: "Let women also engage in politics! They will certainly be as good politicians as men, only politicians of a different kind, perhaps better than us. [...] In short, the emancipation of women is a cause and question of universal justice and equality, to which humanity currently aspires [...], but which will be frustrated if women are excluded from it. [...] Although I have constantly defended and recognised the difference between the sexes as an essential difference, not only physical but also spiritual, I have never concluded from this that the female spirit is inferior. Men and women are not only different in body, but also in spirit, but does this difference necessarily lead to the subordination and exclusion of women from spiritual and universal occupations?" (Feuerbach, 1870 apud. Serrão, 1999b, p. 236-237).

Feuerbach's self-objectification also led to the pioneering exploration of the unconscious in human subjectivity and a corresponding ethical stance. A self-objectifying subjectivity is made up of internal impulses that are externalised, both as individual identities and as community-collective identities. Individuals self-objectify their individual propensities to be happy through their coincidence with objects that are either their own or external to themselves, at the same time the human race self-objectifies increasingly inclusive communities through continuous progression that always contains some historical conservation. For merely conserving or

[7] During the debate with Max Stirner: "Isn't your essence, or rather [...] your self, a masculine self? Can you separate masculinity from what is called 'spirit'? Isn't your brain, the most sacred part of your body, the one at the top, a male-oriented brain? Are your feelings and thoughts non-masculine? [...] But while man essentially and necessarily refers to another self or being – to woman. Therefore, if I want to recognise him as an individual, I cannot restrict my recognition solely to you, but I must extend it at the same time beyond you, to your partner (Feuerbach, 1845, p. 197-198).

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progressing is not in accordance with self-objectification, as it consists of an unfolding of what previously existed and, therefore, uninterrupted revolutionary or conservative movements without exceptions do not endure or even leave objective reminiscences for the future (Feuerbach, 2009, p. 310-311).

Impulses come from human nature, therefore, from natural objectivity or from inhuman nature that underpins our planetary existence, to which we owe even our fundamental self-objectifying characteristic and everything else that is innate because it is naturally inherited regardless of the relationships established during human self-objectification.

Human impulses, although objectively natural to humanity, relativise human freedom, both individually and collectively, as they are unconscious until sufficiently self-objectified. However, human beings, despite being naturally driven, are free because they tend toward self-awareness of their impulses within the scope of human self-objectification exercised individually, collectively, and always historically, since it makes us historical beings when exposed to other beings, including non-human ones, as we become self-objectified. Feuerbach anticipated the theme of unconscious desires and their Freudian neurotic conflicts by conceiving desire as “a slave to necessity, but a slave with the will to freedom,” making us always focused on the future by the "[...] impatient and revolutionary desires of man. [...] But what someone is, or has by nature or by birth [...], also determines, consciously or unconsciously [...] the essential destiny of man's life" (Feuerbach, 1967f, p. 47, 54, 177).

Drawing on human nature, Feuerbach questioned the authenticity of religiously self-objectified desires for immortality, omniscience, and omnipotence, denouncing them as fetishes that substitute for natural desires for a completely self-objectified life[8], despite being finite: "There are many desires of man that [...] their fulfilment would be the most bitter disappointment [...]. One such desire is [...] that of eternal life. If this desire were fulfilled, men would feel bored [...] and would wish for death. [...] Normal, natural death, the death of a fulfilled man who has lived what he had to live, is not horrible at all. [...] Only unnatural death, unhappy death, the death of a child, a young person, a man in his prime revolts us [...] and produces the desire for a new life. [...] Just as the desire for eternal life is also the desire for omniscience [...] it is only an imaginary desire [...]. Man does not wish to know everything, he only wishes to know that which he has a predilection and special tendency for. Even man endowed with the instinct for universal knowledge [...] is satisfied with the general [...]. Likewise, man does not want to be able to do everything, but only that for which he feels a special tendency; [...] he seeks a certain, defined perfection [...] that is within a certain sphere” (Feuerbach, 2009, p. 308-309).

From the objective human nature of desires, which precedes and accompanies their self-objectification through impulses, Feuerbach derived an ethic based on the implicit awareness, among self-objectifying subjects, of their objectively constructed interdependence: “Heteronomy, not autonomy, the autonomy of others, of the other, is my law” (Feuerbach, 1994 [1868], p. 428). This derives directly from the individual position that provides the corresponding freedom in the exercise of impulses, aligning them for their self-objectification without internal collisions and with fullness: "Did duty decree renunciation? What madness! Duty decrees enjoyment. We must enjoy. Renunciation is only a sad exception to the rule, which should only happen when necessity imposes it. [...] Follow your impulses and inclinations without hesitation, but follow them all! Thus, you will not be a victim of any of them" (Feuerbach, 1967e [1846], p. 162-163).

[8] Feuerbach experienced bereavement when his daughter Mathilde (1844) died at less than 3 years of age (Tomasoni, 2022, p. 11). For him, suicide is also a manifestation of human life, whether euthanasia due to its inability to coincide with its essential object, or agonising because it is the only means of coinciding with it. There are no suicides without reasons. (Feuerbach, 2021, p. 42-46).

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Key aspects of Feuerbachian republicanism is outlined in Table 2:

Table 2: Summary of Feuerbachian Republicanism.

Citisenship	Self-objectification	Essential Impulse	Fundamental rights
Individual	Unique identity	Political participation	Housing, dietetics, gymnastics, euthanasia and basic properties
Collective	Communitarian-human	Progression with conservation	Common natural goods + female equality

Source: Feuerbach (2008a [1843], 1845, 1967e [1846], 2009 [1848-9], 1971 [1850], 1967f [1857], 1994 [1868]).

V. Conclusion: A Pioneering Critic of Anthropocentrism in General

Applying Feuerbach's genetic-critical method (Feuerbach, 2012, p. 55), which correlates a phenomenon with the others whose confluence gave rise to it, which according to Feuerbach's own philosophy, the hypothesis has been proven that his philosophical thought both converged with and surpassed pantheistic, naturalistic, and republican intellectual influences to formulate a then-original bias of humanity, conceiving it as a natural creature that self-objectifies its subjectivities, among its members and before organic and inorganic nature. Although provided by inhuman nature, the human nature of self-objectification makes us historical creatures, for it is not exercised absolutely, but through progressive unifications of the human race as our subjectivity, individual and collective, emanates more and more during our experiences of relationships with each other and with nature in general.

The Feuerbachian concept of self-objectification or human nature of objectifying one's own subjectivities, as formulated and encountered, coinciding with external objects and converting their subjectivity into them — consciously or unconsciously — permeates, directly or indirectly, all of Feuerbach's elaborations in which pantheistic philosophical, naturalistic scientific, and republican political influences were received and reworked by Feuerbach in:

- *1828:* "[...] because when I feel I'm separated from the other, I'm just me, and the other is for me an other, not me; and so, it's not possible to make the other participate in my sensations" (Feuerbach, 1828, p. 10).
- *1830:* "The human being, a particular being, is inflamed by the consuming fire of his selfishness and singlehood; through love the human gives himself up, renounces everything that is particular and finite about him" (Feuerbach, 1980, p. 18).
- *1834:* "These individuals are the standard individuals of the genre, [...] central points of humanity, sovereign powers in which the human spirit converges all its forces, fullness and reality" (Feuerbach, 1967b, p. 574).
- *1835:* "We carry within ourselves an objective world and a subjective world. And we are nothing other than the organs of this objective world, which we represent and realise, certainly according to our constitution, in a [...] perfect or atrophied manner. The spirit itself, however, is the objective world within us, independent and unaffected by us" (Feuerbach, 1967g, p. 102).
- *1839:* "Deep down, we are not indifferent; the impulse to communicate is a primal impulse, the impulse toward truth. [...] What is true is not exclusively mine or yours, but universal. [...] Demonstration is therefore solely the means by which I remove the form of what is mine from my thoughts, so that others may recognise them as their own." (Feuerbach, 2012, p. 34-36)
- *1841:* "The identity of the subject and the predicate is revealed [...] in the [...] development of human culture. [...] Predicates have their own autonomous meaning; they impose themselves on man through their content; [...] they confirm and witness to themselves. [...] Human essence is, therefore, an infinite wealth of diverse predicates, but precisely because of this, an infinite wealth of diverse individuals. Every new man is at the same time a new predicate, a new talent of humanity" (Feuerbach, 2022, p. 60-62).
- *1843:* "Historical epochs only come into being, therefore, when what was previously only something thought and mediated becomes the object of immediate certainty [...] therefore, when what was previously only thought becomes true" (Feuerbach, 2008c, p. 57).
- *1847:* "I don't want to add to the countless number of chimaeras already in existence with new ones conjured up in my brain; I only think [...] based on the revelation of human nature" (Feuerbach, 1967h, p. 297).
- *1849:* "Man [...] not only has the instinct to walk, but also [...] to remain at the stage corresponding to the purpose of his being. From these opposing impulses arises the struggle of history, the struggle of our present as well. [...] Even revolutionary people do not want to progress indefinitely, but have a specific goal, upon achieving which they will

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rest. That is why it is always other men, young men, who continue to weave the thread of history that is interrupted by the old progressives as soon as they reach [...] the limit of their being and their reason" (Feuerbach, 2009, p. 310).

- *1850:* "Being is one with food; to be is to eat; what is, eats and is eaten. Eating is the subjective and active form of being, being eaten is the objective and passive form, but both are inseparable. [...] Oh fools, who [...] have not seen that the open mouth is the entrance to the interior of nature [...]. Spirit is light, consuming fire, but fuel is sustenance. [...] food only becomes brain when it is digested, when it becomes blood. [...] The fact remains: food is a matter of thought. [...] We receive substances from the outside world and return them, only in a different form, they are eliminated. And the more or less we give of ourselves, the more or less we have to receive" (Feuerbach, 1971, p. 352-354).
- *1857:* "[...] that which is thought is not merely a thought, but an unthought, an existing thing. Only desire comes into being, desire not itself but the will for that which is not to be. [...] only desire is an exclusive property of man; power, action, is a common good, in which the outside world has as much participation as he does" (Feuerbach, 1967f, p. 42, 48-49).
- *1862:* "Man, however, does not eat only with his senses; he also eats and digests [...] with his brain, with the organ of thought. The brain is the stomach, the digestive organ of the senses [...], it is true, it only refers to aesthetic taste, but in other languages it means logical sense, judgment, understanding, wisdom itself, in short—as clear proof that taste is not only a matter of the palate, but also of the brain itself, that food has not only a bodily meaning, but also a mental one, and, consequently, man not only absorbs food in his stomach, but in his head as well" (Feuerbach, 2007, p. 22).
- *1866:* "Now, however, the object is not only the object of sensation for us, it is also the basis, the condition, the presupposition of sensation; within our skin we have an objective world, and that is why we transpose outside it a world that corresponds to it. [...] But what is breathing? Nothing more than a carnal conjunction of our blood with the external atmosphere, and in particular a coupling with the oxygen in the air. [...] Without breathing there is no oxygen, at least for us, without oxygen there is no fire or heat, without heat there is no feeling [...]. With beings of the same gender but different sexes, we generate beings similar to us, but external; with beings of a different type, with whom we connect solely through our digestive system, we generate ourselves. The process of generation, in both senses, is precisely the true identity of subject and object, a real identity, sensibly founded, neither transcendent nor fantastic" (Feuerbach 2021, p. 197-198).
- *1868:* "Where outside of myself there is no you, no other man, one cannot speak of morality either. [...] Happiness, not concentrated in one and the same person, but shared among several people, including you and me, not unilateral happiness, but bilateral or omnilateral happiness, is the principle of morality. [...] active participation in the happiness or unhappiness of others, being happy with the happy and unhappy with the unhappy — but only to remedy evil as much as possible [...] — only this is morality" (Feuerbach, 1994, p. 408, 413, 415).

Table 3 summarises how Feuerbach conceived the progressions of human self-objectification, up to the period in which he lived and the next degree to be reached in the future:

Table 3: Self-objectified humanity in Feuerbach.

Feuerbach	Humanity	Religion	Science	Moral	Politics
Contemporary era	Self-objectification	Human unity and unity with nature	Interdisciplinary	Ganzer Mensch	Community-human
Modern era	Self-subjectification	Protestant	Multidisciplinary	Individualistic	Liberal-national
Medieval era	Objectified	Catholic	Theological	Hierarchical	Imperial-dynastic

Source: Feuerbach (1974 [1830-1], 1967a [1833], 2022 [1841], 2008a [1842], 2008b [1842], 2008c [1843], 1967c [1844], 2021 [1866]).

In the aforementioned Feuerbachian sense, historical progressiveness resulted from the intermittent yet uninterrupted exercise of human self-objectification, through which humanity was constituted, concomitantly with its self-awareness among human beings and in relation to nature. Hence, modern intimacy broke with medieval servile objectification (or self-objectification), and future human unification would break with modernity by establishing partnerships with nature, no longer conceiving it as teleological and susceptible to illusory human supremacy.

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By conceptually emphasising human self-objectification, however, I do not postulate its Feuerbachian centrality, whose elaboration was based on a conceptual tripod that includes him, but also the concepts of human sensibility (or sinnlichkeit) and human wholeness (or ganzer Mensch).

Common to interpretations of Feuerbach is his focus on the binomial of humanity and nature (Serrão, 2019, p. 240-241, Tomasoni, 2022, p. 9, Reitmeyer, 1999, p. 126-127): "Contemplate nature, contemplate man! Here you have, before your eyes, the mysteries of philosophy" (Feuerbach, 2008b, p. 16).

The concept of Sinnlichkeit highlights human sensitivity as absolutely diffuse, without predetermined focal points as in other natural creatures, and making humanity open to the totality apprehended by human senses, emotions, and thoughts always united among themselves by human nature (Feuerbach, 2005). The concept of ganzer Mensch highlights human integrity as a Feuerbachian normative ideal, as inherent, both as individual potentiality revealed by internal impulses toward personal happiness, and as communal and environmental potentiality of the human race, indicated by historical progressions of collective self-awareness (Serrão, 1999b).

Therefore, Feuerbachian philosophy is based on this conceptual tripod, with the following correlative order: Sensitivity (Sinnlichkeit) – Self-objectification (Selbstobjektivierung) – Integrality (ganzer Mensch). These are the fundamental Feuerbachian concepts, because:

1) Diffuse sensitivity (Sinnlichkeit) refers to self-objectification, as absolutely sensitive beings are constantly urged to relate to everything contingent upon them: "But is externalization indifferent to their thoughts and sensations? [...] and the more energetic their sensation, the more necessary the externalization [...] the more it expresses itself, also externally [...]" (Feuerbach, 2005b, p. 196-197);
2) Self-objectification refers to human integrity (ganzer Mensch), as human beings integrate when objectified among themselves and become cumulatively self-aware of their own possibilities that have not yet been realised: "Renunciation, resignation, self-denial, abstraction make man gloomy, bored, sordid, lascivious, fearful, petty, envious, perfidious, malevolent, but sensual pleasure makes him cheerful, courageous, noble, open, communicative, participatory, free, good. [...] It is therefore fortunate for us that man has, in addition to an impulse toward unity, also an impulse toward multiplication, and in addition to an impulse toward knowledge, also a sexual impulse" (Feuerbach, 2005b, p. 201);
3) Wholeness (ganzer Mensch) refers to sensitivity (Sinnlichkeit), as integration between human beings and nature broadens their sensitive subjectivity: "Memory (imagination) is the surest guide leading from the realm of life to the shadow realm of the spirit. In memory, the being of the senses is the being of thought, the physically absent is present, the image of the object replaces or represents the object itself for me. [...] Thanks to the medium of memory, I can then wander from place to place and elevate myself [...] from a modest provincial to the dignity of a cosmopolitan being and, in that capacity, rich in spirit [...]. What then is this spirit of mine? Nothing but the representative of the world, of the universe" (Feuerbach, 2005b, p. 204).

Therefore, self-objectification (in its double sense of subjective coincidence with external objects and objectification of one's own subjectivity) is a Feuerbachian concept that articulates both concepts of sensitivity (Sinnlichkeit) and integrity (ganzer Mensch), since being humanly integral is the full human correspondence when self-objectified to everything that is sensitive to it. Ganzer Mensch can occur, occasionally, as human individuality and during one's individual life, still it would only occur lastingly in a community of human diversity, without exception, since only in this democratic order would any human beings exercise self-objectifications absolutely conscious of corresponding exclusively to Sinnlichkeit.

The future human unity would correspond to partnerships with inhuman nature, exercised with technological self-consciousness without teleological illusions, but under political democracy inclusive of individual differences. This Feuerbachian project of human emancipation[9], outlined during his philosophical formulation, was critical of the human civilization set up during the passage from European paganism to medieval Christianity and maintained or accentuated by European Modernity. In which the anthropocentric civilizational option for North-Western, male and white supremacy over nature in general had excluded or reduced human conditions to racial-colonial servitude, female inferiority, animal over-exploitation and forest devastation.

Although not defined within a constitutional model (political or economic), Feuerbach's project was consistent in offering a communal alternative for human diversity as an interlocutor of inhuman nature, focusing on eliminating all material and immaterial poverty by guaranteeing common ownership of naturally provided goods and fundamental individual rights inherent to human nature. Guaranteed by the democratic community, such properties would enable the pioneering rights to dietetics, housing, gymnastics, and

[9] With whom the communist philosopher Karl Marx, mistakenly and initially, found affinities that he later, but without polemicising with Feuerbach, disowned. Considering the contrasts between the philosophies of Feuerbach and Marx (Lopes, 2024).

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female equality in citizenship. These would become ecocentric community goals, provided that new objective human bonds revealed by interdisciplinary sciences were extracted from subjective religious bonds and that moral virtues, still confined to religions[10], were assumed as belonging simply to humanity.

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[10] "The task of philosophy is not to refute faith, nor to prove it, but only to grasp it (begreifen), to clarify it (erklären)." (Feuerbach, 1866, p. 327).

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