

Statement of Research  
Dr. John Hymers

*PhD Thesis: Ludwig Feuerbach's Inversion of the Ontological Argument*

My thesis, firmly anchored at the intersection of the history of modern philosophy and the philosophy of religion, systematically teases out the logic of Ludwig Feuerbach's so-called anthropological reduction as typified in the *Essence of Christianity (EC)* and clarified in the works up to the *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*. Key to my work is a close analysis of the place of the ontological argument in Anselm and the major philosophers of modernity (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel), and how their employment of the argument provides the logic of Feuerbach's anthropological reduction. Feuerbach begins his *EC* by arguing for the conceptual unity between God and humanity. The two main parts of the *EC* work out this conceptual unity, i.e. Feuerbach's anthropological reduction, which is his answer to what he sees as the malaise of projection theory. But this religious deconstruction depends on the conceptual framework that Feuerbach works out in his extensive introduction to the *EC*; Feuerbach realizes that without a conceptual ground, projection theory is simply a bad infinity of possibly contradictory predicates. I offer the following three observations of this conceptual reduction: By attempting to prove that God is really humanity, Feuerbach offers a proof of God. By making the proof work completely at the level of concepts, Feuerbach provides an ontological argument. By moving from God to humanity, Feuerbach inverts the traditional direction of this economy. Thus, this thesis argues that Feuerbach provides an inverted ontological proof for the existence of God. This inverted proof silently grounds his belief in the evidential reduction of God to man, and thus the ontological argument unsurprisingly surfaces in the *EC*'s many ontotheological slips, in which Feuerbach often refers explicitly to humanity as the *ens realissimum*, and as the greatest possible thought (his reductive appropriation of Anselm's *id quo majus cogitari nequit*). In conclusion, I argue that by constructing a system in which an ontological argument provides a metaphysical being as the only possible ground of projection theory, Feuerbach's argument itself touches upon what Ludwig Heyde saw as the inescapable presence of the transcendent.

*Published Research in Philosophical Ethics*

Coupled with my interest in transcendental philosophy, my publishing career reflects a strong interest in the relationship between ethics and ontology. My article on Peter Singer, "Not a Modest Proposal: Peter Singer and the Definition of Person" (*Ethical Perspectives* 6 (1999) 2, 126-138) illustrates the arbitrariness inherent in Singer's concept of personhood, the most full concept of which I locate within the phenomenological ethical tradition. Emphasising Singer's difficulties in viewing personhood as extrinsic and discontinuous, I conclude by suggesting a model of personhood wherein individuals develop as persons, rather than into persons through external valuation.

In the coming months, an article I wrote on the Just War Tradition (JWT) will be published ("Regrounding the Just War's Presumption Against Violence in light of George Weigel," *Ethical Perspectives* 11 (2004) 1, forthcoming). It addresses those recent and influential American thinkers (typified by George Weigel) who have tried to de-couple the JWT from the presumption against violence. To the contrary, I strive to re-ground this presumption within the scholastic understanding of *violentia* as disordered force. As such, I associate just war with the peace-making tradition, and not with the military tradition.

Another article, to be published in the following year, addresses the developing field of the ethics of architecture (“The Ethics of Metaxological Architecture,” *Proceedings of the Irish Philosophical Society Fortieth Anniversary Conference*, ed. Thomas Kelly, Aldershot: Ashgate, forthcoming). Architecture is intimately rooted in the *ethos*, and thus has a special relationship with ethics. In this article, I argue that the judicious choice of green materials and techniques is not a sufficient response to any ethical questions that architecture may give voice to, because such responses themselves remain trapped in the technological hubris that gives rise to our present environmental malaise. Instead, I propose that an idealized concept of the architecture of Greek temples and Christian churches, which I term ecstatic architecture because it attempts to lift humanity from mere concern with itself, has the power to return us to the *ethos*, precisely because such architecture is not strongly anthropomorphic, but rather is given an ecstatic character through its transcendent dimension. A metaxological understanding of architecture, which recognizes human desires as situated within and not against nature, could embrace the principles of ecstatic architecture, and build such that we are returned to the natural *ethos*.

### *Current Research in Philosophical Ethics*

My present research program, an ethico-ontological investigation into the meaning of eating, is a dialogue between ethics and religion. I propose that Biblical religion sees eating as that which transforms our human being into ethical being. We see this most clearly in the *felix culpa* of Genesis, which I call the anthropological event: Adam only becomes human when he eats the forbidden fruit. Why? Because human being is ethical being, and the fruit condemns Adam to the knowledge of good and evil — and with these, mortality. Eating the forbidden fruit also introduced agriculture and labour, as well as modesty and shame. Thus, beyond simply introducing a subjective need to toil, suffer and die, Adam’s sin creates the very need to form economic communities, governed not only by laws of supply and demand, but also by the *mores* of an *ethos*. Since the Biblical tradition ascribes to this fateful repast a seemingly endless list of effects, I ask: is the anthropological event not perhaps the place to begin an investigation into the relation between ethics and religion?

The most immediate fruit of my research will be an article, entitled “The Ethos of Eating: The Dinner Table and Feuerbach’s Social Ontology,” which the Feuerbach Gesellschaft has invited me to present this October in Berlin. It addresses one aspect of this relation between religion and ethics: the question of the sacrificial meal. Although himself no sympathetic commentator on religion, many of Feuerbach’s works and letters of the 1850s and mid 1860s (mostly untranslated) provide excellent insight into the religious dimension of this core ethical question of eating. Whether looking to the Hebrews, the Greeks, the Romans, the Hindus, or the Christians, Feuerbach clearly shows how their ethical systems reflect the complex systems of religious sacrifice that each has developed; how each of these peoples attempts to unify itself with its god through a sacrificial meal; how the respective deities demand this sacrificial unity, and how this unification expresses itself practically in the ethical interaction between members of the given people. Clearly, I do not follow Feuerbach in his extremely reductive and suspicious moments, but I acknowledge his central insight: since religion is at the basis of any society, and since the sacrificial meal lies at the basis of most if not all religions, food must be considered as the ethical issue *par excellence*, whether we look to its production or its distribution, or whether we look to it as simple nourishment or to it as the foundation of companionship and family. Along with Feuerbach, I argue that the primitive practice of sacrifice, which has been preserved to this very day in Christian cultic practice, reveals not a confused attempt to placate the gods, but rather the simple human urge to form and preserve communities. But contrary to Feuerbach, I argue that such communal eating reveals, once again, the social, and thus ethical, face of the transcendent.