

Classical German Philosophy



Plan:

1. German Classical Philosophy as an integral philosophical system.
2. Immanuel Kant and his critical philosophy.
3. Idealism: Fichte and Schelling on the road to Hegel.
4. Hegel, the giant of the 18th century German philosophy.
5. Feuerbach as a necessary stepping stone for non-classic philosophy of the 19-20th centuries.

German classical philosophy is an influential line of philosophical thought of the late XVIII - early XIX centuries, which summed up the development of philosophy at this stage of Western European history. That was the final link in the development of the Modern Ages European philosophical rationalism and simultaneously a source, which genetically related to modern Western philosophy.

At the turn of the 19th century, Germany, overcoming its economic and political backwardness, was nearing a bourgeois revolution; just as in France, the socioeconomic revolution was preceded by a philosophical one.

An important role in the formation of classical German philosophy was played by the achievements of natural science and the social sciences.



Main Peculiarities of the Classical German Philosophy:

1. Philosophical systems, characterized by the depth of ideas and concepts were created while the German classical philosophy is a single whole spiritual formation;
2. The problem of dialectics was one of the central;
3. Idealism as the basic worldview orientation (with the exception of Feuerbach);
4. Coincidence of thinking and being as a matter of researches;
5. The core of this theoretical system was the idea of man's activity, freedom and sovereignty.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Kant was one of the greatest minds mankind ever knew and the founder of classical German idealism. ***It was with Kant that the dawn of the philosophy of the Modern Times broke.***

Kant's probing work includes two periods: Pre-critical and Critical ones.

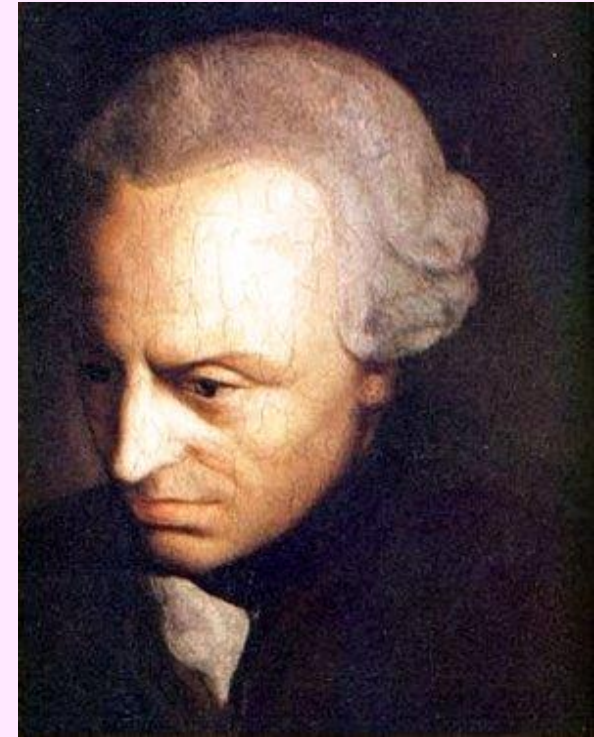
He believed that the solution of the problems of being, of morality and religion must be preceded by a study in ***the possibilities and the boundaries of human knowledge.***

Three famous Kant's questions :

1. ***What can I know?*** - the "Critique of Pure Reason" (1781) – the theory of knowledge;

2. ***What ought I to do?*** - the "Critique of Practical Reason" (1790) - Ethics;

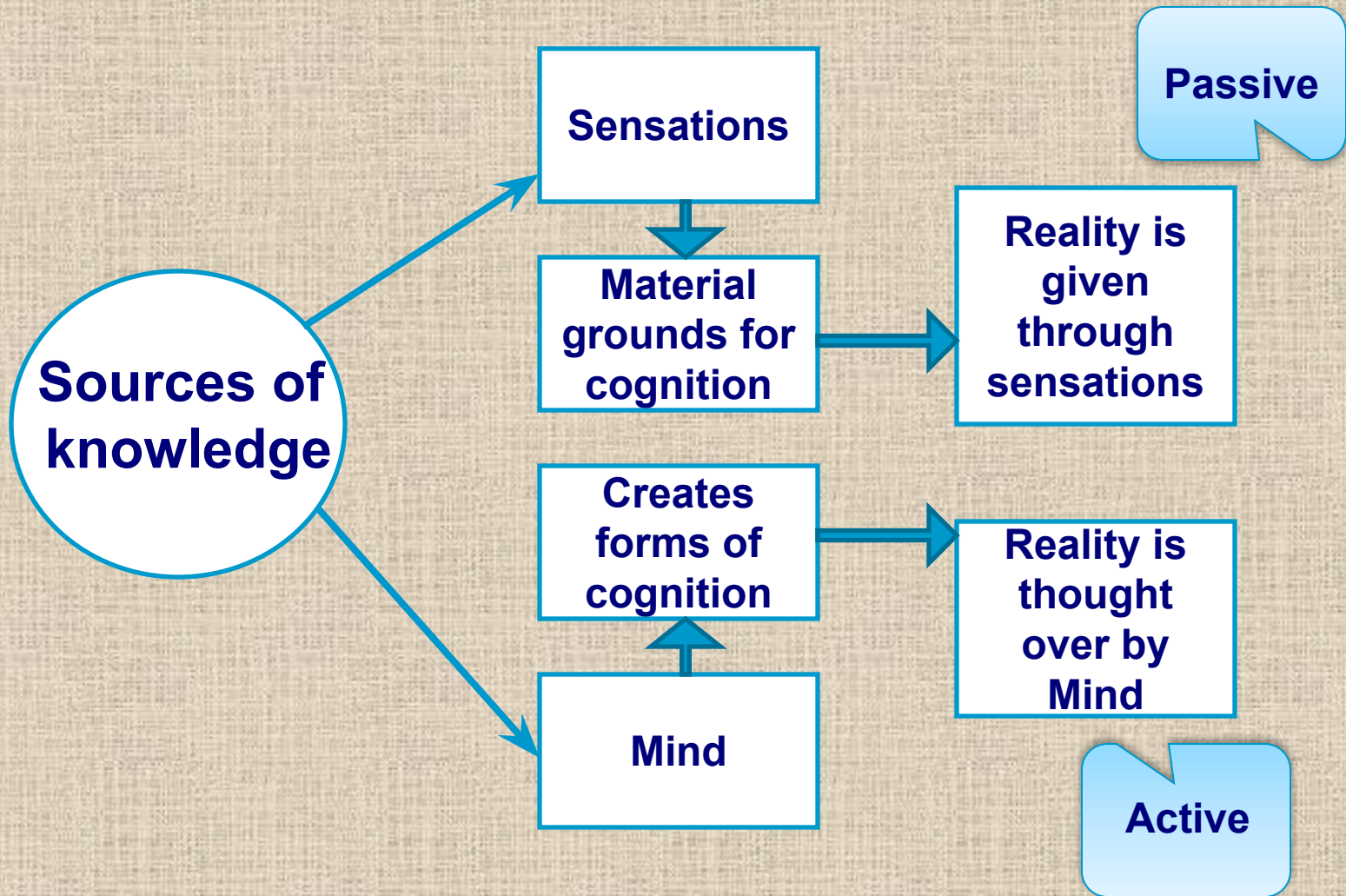
3. ***What can I hope for?*** - the "Critic of Judgment" (1790) – Aesthetics



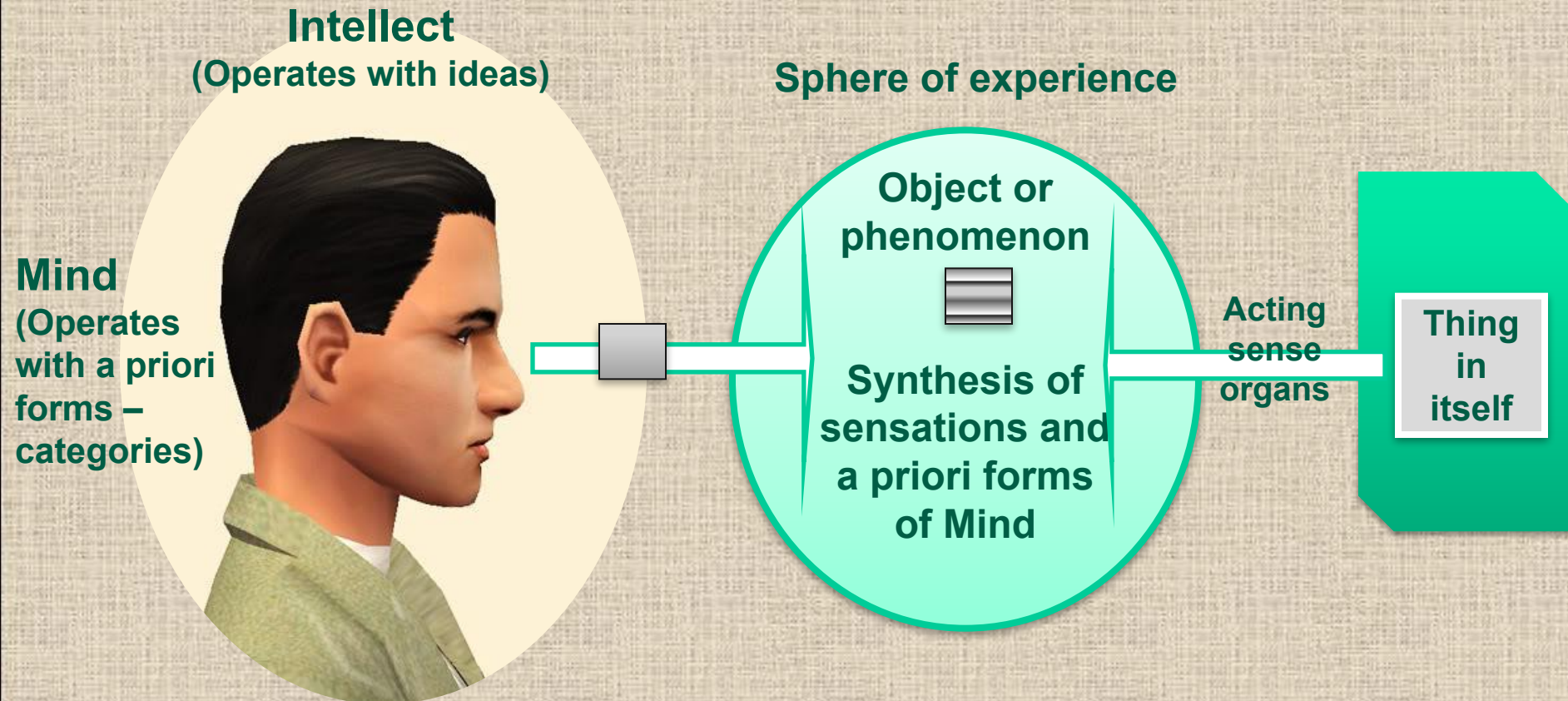
Categorical imperative:

"Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a Universal Law of Nature".

Kant's theory of cognition



Subject's intellectual activity



Kant's Categorical imperative:

“Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a Universal Law of Nature”.

Idealism: Fichte and Schelling on the road to Hegel

After Kant, classical German philosophy was developed by such outstanding philosophers as Fichte and Schelling. Both of them tried to overcome the Kantian opposition of phenomenon and noumenon by grounding cognitive activeness in some unitary principle - ***the absolute ego***, as in Fichte, ***or identity of being and thinking***, as in Schelling.



Johann Gottlieb Fichte

Johann Gottlieb Fichte(1762-1814) was one of the founding figures of German idealism. He was an important proponent of pan-German nationalism, and a pioneer of socialist thinking.

Fichte created his famous **doctrine of “Absolute Ego”** with his original insights into the nature of self-consciousness or self-awareness. The problem of subjectivity and consciousness motivated much of his philosophical rumination.

In his work **Foundations of Natural Right** (1796), Fichte argued that self-consciousness was a social phenomenon — an important step and perhaps the first clear step taken in this direction by modern philosophy.

A necessary condition of every subject's self-awareness, for Fichte, is the existence of other rational subjects. These others call or summon the subject or self out of its unconsciousness and into an awareness of himself as a free individual.



Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling

Schelling (1775-1854) is one of the three most influential thinkers in the tradition of German Idealism. His ideas were a stepping stone between Fichte and Hegel.

Schelling saw **the philosophy of art** as the culmination of his metaphysics. In nature the Absolute partially manifests the fusion of the real and the ideal through the production of organisms, but it is in the free creative world of art that we can find the intuition of the infinite in the finite product of the intelligence.

His **theory of identity** in fact characterizes him as an impressively rigorous logical thinker, who made a sort of **bridge between subjective idealism of Kant and Fichte towards objective idealism of Hegel**.

Schelling's continuing importance today relates mainly to three aspects of his work.

- ❖ *The first is his Naturphilosophie*, which opens up the possibility of a modern hermeneutic view of nature that does not restrict nature's significance to what can be established about it in scientific terms.
- ❖ *The second is his anti-Cartesian account of subjectivity*, which prefigures some of the best ideas of thinkers like Nietzsche and Jacques Lacan, in showing how the thinking subject cannot be fully transparent to itself.
- ❖ *The third is his later critique of Hegelian Idealism*, which influenced Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche and others, and aspects of which are still echoed in contemporary thought by thinkers like Jacques Derrida.



Hegel, the giant of the XVIII-XIX centuries

German philosophy

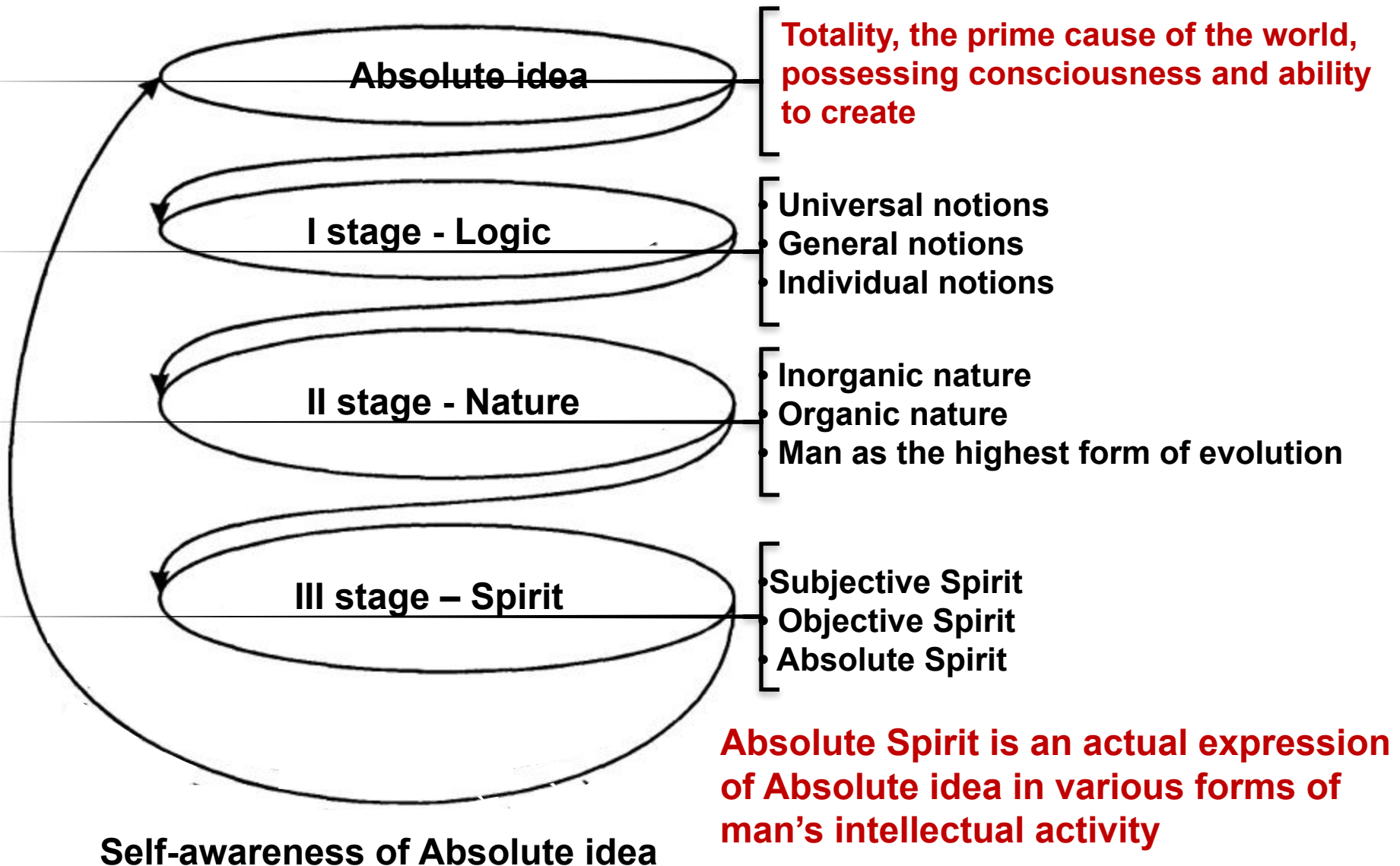
Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) is almost uncontested in the area of philosophical power and influence in our society today. He followed and agreed with many of the ideas of Plato, Rousseau, Aristotle, Kant, and so on. However, he was not just a mere follower; he took ideas and made his own, taking problem solving to a whole new level and proving other philosophies which the original philosophers themselves couldn't prove properly. *His two most important works were the "Phenomenology of Mind" (1807) and "The Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences" (1817).*



Main problems Hegel tried to solve and explain were:

- ❖ freedom of man in society;
- ❖ development and substantiation of objective idealism theoretical system;
- ❖ dialectics was created both as a method and theory;
- ❖ determination of inner sources of motion with contradiction as a core of the whole system of his philosophy;
- ❖ identity of thinking and being;
- ❖ universality of connections;
- ❖ principle of development.

Absolute idea life cycle



Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach

Feuerbach (1804-1872) most vital works were his "Essence of Christianity" (1841) and his "Essence of Religion" (1846). His critique of Hegel was important for the group known as "left Hegelians", of whom the most important product was Marx.

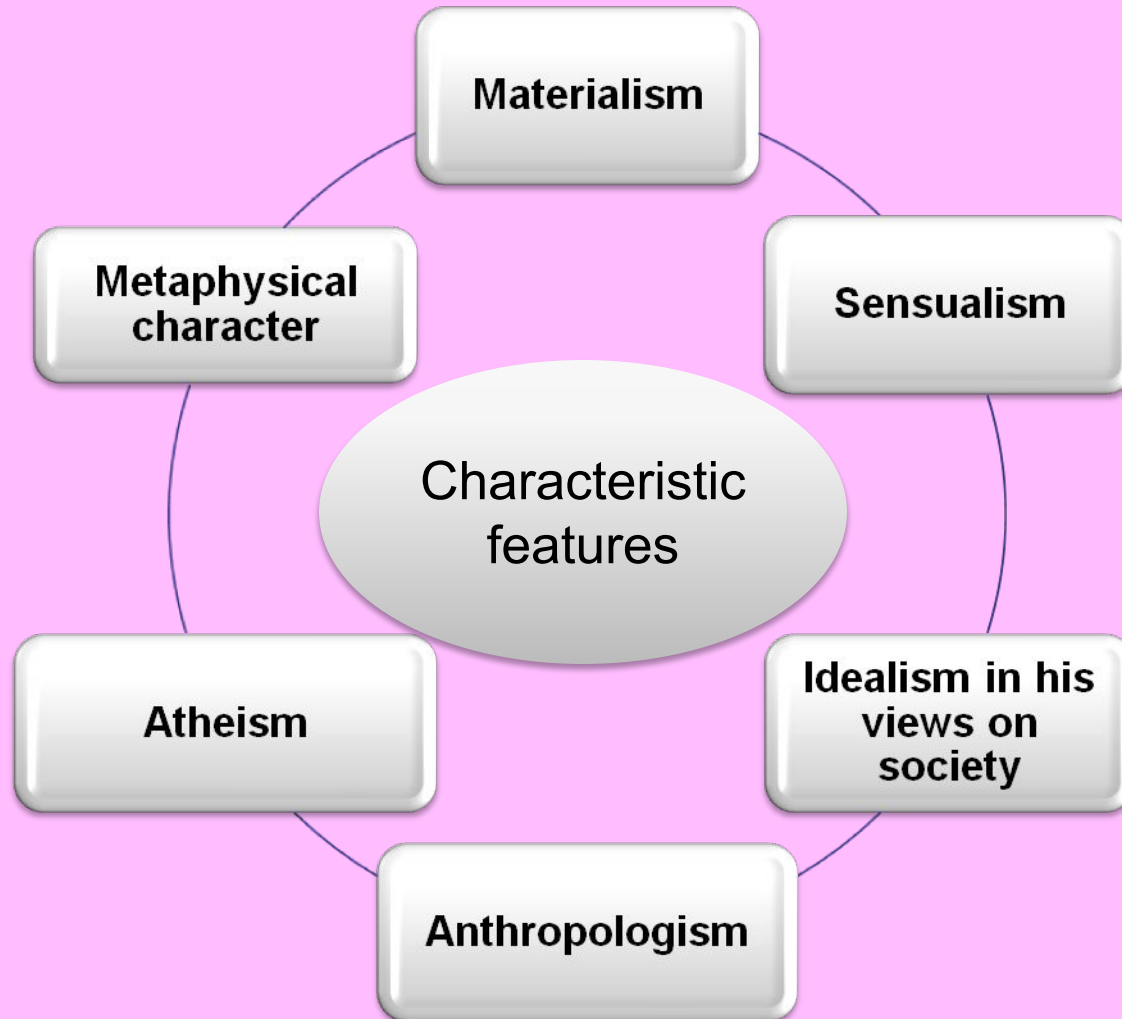
Feuerbach gave a **new anthropological interpretation of religion's phenomena**. He thought religion was principally a matter of feeling in its unrestricted subjectivity. So the feeling breaks through all the limits of understanding and manifests itself in several religious beliefs. But, beyond the feeling, is the fancy, the true maker of projections of "gods" and of the sacred in general.

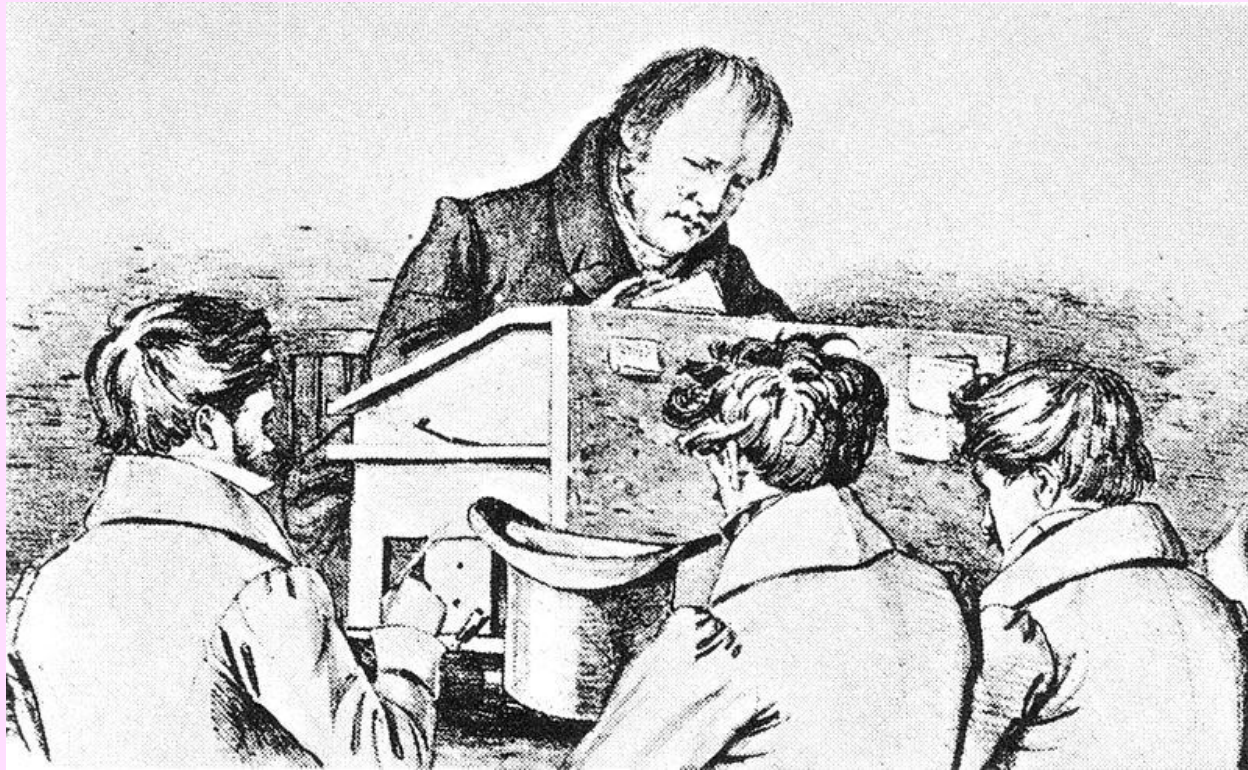


The main peculiarity of Feuerbach's teaching is asserting anthropology instead of theology. On the contrary of Humanism of the Renaissance that raised Man into the center of philosophies Feuerbach attempted to ruin the very idea of God. His God is a deified humanity.

Exposing the idea of man's uniqueness he becomes actually not exactly classical philosopher but the founder of a new non-classical philosophy of Western Europe.

Ludwig Feuerbach's philosophy





As for Classical German philosophy it entirely elaborated gnosiologism. So the further development of European philosophy was possible only by means of overcoming gnosiologism. In absolutization of the process of cognitive activity they worked out the principle of historicism, dialectical logics, the way of solving contradictions and limitless abilities of a subject to aware the Universe.

Conclusions:

German Classical Philosophy – an influential thought of philosophy of the Modern Ages, gave the conclusion of its development in the history of Western Europe. These are the philosophical teachings of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and Feuerbach. Their philosophical systems are connected ideologically and genetically. They are combined by the great attention to the nature of spirit, which is interpreted by the notion of activity and freedom. German classical philosophy made an essential contribution into the formulation of the question and development of the problem of interrelation between the subject and the object of cognition and worked out a dialectical method of cognition.

Questions for express-control

- 1. Who divided reality onto "things-in-themselves" and "things-for-us"?**
- 2. What did I. Kant consider as a source of morality?**
- 3. What is the key concept for Hegel's philosophy?**
- 4. What philosopher the contradiction between his theoretical system and method is intrinsic to?**
- 5. What German classic philosopher was a materialist?**