

THE INVERTED ESSENCE
THE YOUNG HEGELIAN CRITIQUE OF RELIGION 1835-1845

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Nathan W Bjorge

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Committee Signatures

Inese Radzins, Coordinator

Date

Deena Aranoff, Member

Date

Anselm Ramelow, Member

Date

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Chapter 1

The Young Hegelians in Historical Context

Centered around the University of Berlin the Young or Left Hegelians were a loosely organized group of radical writers, philosophers, journalists and political activists including Ludwig Feuerbach, the young Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, the philologist Bruno Bauer, the libertarian individualist Max Stirner and the socialist Moses Hess.¹ Hegel had been virtually deified at the University of Berlin in the years immediately following his death in 1831. However, a revolt was in the works against the officially established way of interpreting his philosophy and the Young Hegelians were in the forefront of this reassessment.

In this thesis the central role of the critique of religion among the Young Hegelians will be explored, tracing it through the theology and philosophy of several figures against the background of their historical context. The role of different aspects of Hegel's logic as well as the inseparability of the religious thought and political radicalism of the Young Hegelians will be illustrated.

This introductory chapter is divided into three sections. First, the basic players on the stage in question will be defined and described. Second, the general philosophical orientation of the Young Hegelian movement will be summarized. Third, the larger German and European political context of the movement will be described.

I. Dramatis Personae

Who were the Old or Right Hegelians? These terms were used by the Young Hegelians to distinguish themselves from the Hegelian orthodoxy from which they sought to break free. The Old Hegelians did not call themselves this; to themselves they were simply the Hegelians. Nevertheless the term as used by the Young Hegelians designates a specific group of philosophers and theologians with a definite interpretation of Hegel.

The Old Hegelians were comprised of two main overlapping groups. First, there was Hegel's circle of disciples and academic successors at the University of Berlin. This group included Georg Andreas Gabler who was appointed to Hegel's chair in 1835, and Carl Friedrich Goschel, widely viewed as Hegel's chief disciple and successor. Second, there was the group of contributors to the principal orthodox Hegelian journal, the *Yearbook for Scientific Critique (Jahrbücher für Wissenschaftliche Kritik)*, which had a theological and conservative orientation and spearheaded the campaign against David Strauss during the *Life of Jesus* controversy.²

The basic formula of the Old Hegelian position can be expressed in the equation form = content. That is to say, the religious *forms* of Christianity (symbolism, stories, devotional sensibility, etc.) express the same *content* as rationally formulated philosophical truth. Hegelianism has no new truths, it merely confirms the identity of Christianity with speculative reason. Therefore Hegelianism *is* Christianity. In his 1829 work *Aphorismen über Nichtwissen und absolutes Wissen*,

Carl Goschel claims that Hegel's philosophy is simply the restatement (*ubersetzung*) of Lutheran Christianity in "total agreement with the word of God."³

In contrast, the Young Hegelians rejected this masked subordination of philosophy by religion. Rather, they used philosophy to critique religion and subordinate it to reason. Friedrich Engels said of the Old Hegelians that they were, "cobweb-spinning eclectic flea-crackers [who] had taken possession of the chairs of philosophy."⁴

The Old Hegelians represented the academic establishment at the University of Berlin yet their orthodoxy was itself under threat from the Prussian authorities who, alarmed by the polemical activity of the Young Hegelians, came to suspect the Hegelian philosophy as such of being too liberal and heterodox. In 1840 King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia, who's government had supported Hegel, died and was replaced by Friedrich Wilhelm IV who was more conservative. Hegelianism lost its official political patronage under the new reactionary minister of culture J.G. Eichorn. The philosopher F.W.J. Schelling, formerly a colleague of Hegel's, but now in old age and a conservative, was dispatched to Berlin to check and refute Hegelianism at the University.⁵

The uproar began in 1835 with the publication of Davis Strauss' *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, which argued that the gospel narratives were primarily mythological, not historical material.⁶ This sparked off the Young Hegelian movement and led to a critical reexamination of Hegel's philosophy.

In 1841 *The Essence of Christianity* by Ludwig Feuerbach was published.⁷

This is arguably the most important philosophical work of the Young Hegelians. In it, Feuerbach extends the implications of Strauss' work on the gospels to articulate a general critique of all religion. Engels said, "One must himself have experienced the liberating effect of this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was general; we all became at once Feuerbachians."⁸

Feuerbach's argument is that the phenomenon of religion is an imaginary projection of fundamentally human circumstances and ideals. Religion is the *inverted essence* of human social existence, experienced as if it had a human independent materially transcendent being. Religion is a projection of human activity that has become *alienated* from human beings because it is no longer recognized as human, but rather as eternally transcendent truth. However, "The religious object of adoration is nothing but the objectified nature of him who adores," Feuerbach writes.⁹ Or, as Engels summarized,

With one blow it pulverized the contradiction, in that without circumlocutions it placed materialism on the throne again. Nature exists independently of all philosophy. It is the foundation upon which we human beings, ourselves products of nature, have grown up. Nothing exists outside nature and man, and the higher beings our religious fantasies have created are only the fantastic reflection of our own essence. The spell was broken. The "system" [of Hegel] was exploded and cast aside.¹⁰

These views were highly controversial and there was significant censorship and political repression of the Young Hegelians.¹¹ All significant Young Hegelian journals were censored and eventually banned. Strauss, Feuerbach and Bauer were fired from their teaching positions. Marx and other major figures in the movement who did not already have teaching careers were effectively blackballed from teaching

in Prussia. By 1845, all of the Young Hegelians had been censored and excluded from the University system and the movement was effectively dead as a political force.¹²

However, larger events were upon the horizon. In 1848 revolution broke out across Europe and many of the former Young Hegelians were directly involved in support of the general uprising. Within a year the revolution was crushed and a renewed period of political reaction had set in. It was the end of an era, with the Young Hegelians dispersing to exile or other fates.¹³

The Young Hegelian movement had two main contexts of collective social expression. The first was a political club that met from 1840-1845 at Toppel's wine cellar in Berlin. They called themselves "The Free", and were an important gathering place for the Young Hegelians and their political supporters.¹⁴ The second context of Young Hegelian activity was journalism.¹⁵ The *Halle Yearbook for German Science and Art* (*Hallische Jahrbücher für Deutsche Wissenschaft und Kunst*) was the initial outlet for their writings. The *Halle Yearbook* had been founded in 1837, initially as a moderate journal, but it had been radicalized by 1840.¹⁶ Banned by the Prussian censors in 1841, it was replaced by two specifically Young Hegelian journals: the *German Yearbook* (*Deutsche Jahrbücher*) founded by Arnold Ruge and the *Rhineland Times* (*Rheinische Zeitung*) founded by Moses Hess. Karl Marx became editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung* in 1842, but both papers were again suppressed in 1843.¹⁷ Ruge and Marx then teamed up and attempted to launch the *German French Yearbook* (*Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*) in Paris, outside the range of Prussian censorship. However the new journal was banned in Prussia and folded after a single

issue, bringing an end to the publishing activity of the Young Hegelians as such.¹⁸

II. Philosophy of the Young Hegelians

Turning now to a general outline of the philosophy of the Young Hegelians: this can be divided into two distinct yet related moments. The first moment is that of a theological turn and corresponds to the initial split between the Young and Old Hegelians and extending roughly over the years 1835-1841, from the publication of *The Life of Jesus* to *The Essence of Christianity*.¹⁹ The themes of this phase are the emphasis of practice over theory, materialism over idealism, secular humanism over Christian orthodoxy, continued dialectical process over completed totality, and negation over the positive.

The second moment involves a political turn presupposed and based upon the earlier theological moment and fully manifest by 1841 in the pages of the *Deutsche Jahrbücher* and lasting until the end of the movement in 1845.²⁰ The political turn occurs along the terrain of the religious critique, so the critique of religion is actually central to both phases of the movement. There is another split, this time within the Young Hegelians themselves between the Socialists/Communists and the Radical Republicans. Feuerbach, Hess, Engels and Marx led the Socialist wing of the Young Hegelians whereas Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner were the major Republican figures. The themes of this phase involve a confrontation between the values of the individual and the community, “the unique one” and “the people,” the republic and the commune, the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat, or more abstractly between the logics

of unity and mediation.

An important aspect of the Young Hegelians is that their concrete political situation radicalized them. What had started as a theological, conceptual debate increasingly broadened. They began to put an emphasis on practice, which generated a political aspect. The relationship of critique to practice differed from thinker to thinker. For example, Bruno Bauer thought critique alone would be the basis of a revolutionary transformation of the world, whereas Marx insists in his *Theses on Feuerbach* that human socio-political activity is primary and that all theorizing is subordinate and relational to this practical historical context.²¹ Theory doesn't vanish in this recognition, but Marx sees theory as itself an aspect of practice, caught up in an inseparable dialectic with its practical contexts.

What is “critique,” a central concept constantly deployed by the Young Hegelians? Cornel West writes, “The mode of theoretical activity of dialectical thought is *critique*: the demystifying of an apparent static surface and the disclosing of an underlying process whose emergence negates, preserves and transforms this surface.” Furthermore,

The basic problematic of dialectical thought is *socio-political crisis*: a crisis linked in a complex manner to prevailing structures of domination. The chief aims are to keep alive the notion of a different and better future, to view the present as history, and to promote engagement in transforming this present.²²

West is not writing here about dialectic in the way Hegel used it, which was to posit a completed *telos* of reality in the self realization of the Spirit (*Geist*). It was Hegel who saw the future completed, history ended and the present fixed. Rather,

West is defining dialectical thought in the Young Hegelian (and Marxist) usage: revolutionary, practical and political in aspect. This is the nature of critique for the Young Hegelians: not merely an appropriation of Hegel's logic as such, but a transformation and radicalizing of that method.

The Young Hegelians are therefore involved in a double movement, attempting to both critique Hegel as well as incorporate his insights. Ultimately this leads to an attempt to critique the central idealist notion of self-consciousness and a turn towards materialism in Feuerbach and Marx. For the Young Hegelians there is also a return to a more primitive sense of critique as used by Kant. For him, philosophical critique is a questioning of the system of knowledge, of philosophy itself.²³ Additionally, the Berlin radicals saw a political component to their project, a link between theory and *praxis*, a way to figure out how to make the world better, not merely repeat and deify the received set of ideas.

Regarding Hegel's own philosophical modes of thought, these are usefully summarized in the first part of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* which English translator William Wallace calls, "The only complete, matured, and authentic statement of Hegel's philosophical system."²⁴ It was first published in 1817, then again in 1827 and 1830 greatly augmented by material from Hegel's lectures on the text.²⁵ Hegel's lectures occurred nearly every Summer in Berlin on logic, based on the text of the *Encyclopedia*, which he would follow and comment upon in his classes.²⁶ It was therefore present in the theoretical background of Hegel's circle of disciples at the University of Berlin.

Hegel postulates three possible modes of thought which form the, “Stages or ‘moments’ in every logical entity, that is, of any notion or truth whatever.” These are the Understanding, the Dialectical and the Speculative.²⁷

The Understanding, Hegel says, “Sticks to fixity of characters and their distinctness from one another: every such limited abstract it treats as having a subsistence and being of its own.”²⁸ Furthermore, “Thought is here acting in its analytic capacity, where its canon is identity.”²⁹ J.N. Findlay writes that the role of the Understanding is, “To separate off what each thing is, in and by itself, from whatever it is only in connection and collaboration with other things, and whose separate nature, thus cut adrift, becomes free from the change and development which variable contexts bring about.”³⁰

Here, Hegel’s logic is similar to the traditional Aristotelian logic, where the self identity of the logical substance or subject is the basic unit which is then described through predication of attributes.³¹ However, the Hegelian logic now diverges from the Aristotelian because the strict ontological separation between the objects of the Understanding cannot actually be achieved, but is only approximate and apparent. Findlay comments, “For to Hegel the notion of a content that can with success be held quite apart from other contexts which oppose or complete it, is not anything that can be conceived or symbolized: there is, in fact, a logical flux, a passing of contents tracelessly into one another.”³² As Hegel writes, “Understanding is not an ultimate, but on the contrary finite, and so constituted that when carried to extremes it veers round to its opposite.”³³ Findlay continues,

There is, therefore, a second necessary ‘moment’ in logical thought, always emerging out of the fixing, separative acts of the Understanding, a moment which breaks down and destroys the fixities and separations thus produced, and which, after restoring fluidity, makes the emergence of new fixities and distinctions possible.³⁴

This is the second logical moment of the Dialectical, a characterization that can be applied to Hegel’s System as a whole in virtue of the presence of this transition in each of its specific triads. However, this is the moment of the Dialectical as such for the Hegelian logic, for the point of transition out of the immediacy of the Understanding. Or as Hegel writes, “To see that thought in its very nature is dialectical, and that, as understanding, it must fall into contradiction - the negative of itself - will form one of the main lessons of logic.”³⁵

The third, or Speculative, moment of philosophical thought is a return to the unity denied the Understanding on its own terms, but achieved via the passage through the mediation of the Dialectical. It involves what Findlay calls “a mediating justification”, whereby the object of Speculative knowledge “becomes mediated on every side and not merely self-attested.”³⁶ It is the content of the subjective Understanding, Hegel writes, “Realized or translated into objectivity.”³⁷

The threefold division of the Understanding, Dialectical and Speculative as immediate unity, mediation and regenerated unity is also displayed in the three broadest and most general categories of the Logic, namely Being, Essence and the Notion. The former triad relates to modes of thought whereas these later three categories can be used to describe the stages of any process at all in Hegelian terms.³⁸

Turning now to this comprehensive triad of categories, Being is the aspect of

immediate unity which will be developed to its completion in the Notion.³⁹ For Hegel, no being in its immediacy can stand by itself outside of mediation. He writes, “The problem or aim of philosophy is often represented as the ascertainment of the essence of things: a phrase which only means that things instead of being left in their immediacy, must be shown to be mediated by, or based upon, something else.”⁴⁰

“Essence” is the second most general aspect of the Hegelian logic, corresponding to the mediation of the Dialectical. There is a potential confusion regarding the name Hegel uses. By calling this moment “Essence” (*Wesen*), Hegel apparently means to relate the word etymologically to the German verb “to be” (*gewesen*).⁴¹ For this is not the phase of the discernment of essence in an Aristotelian sense, of the nature of a thing located as a self-contained principle within it. Rather, according to Charles Taylor, Essence, “Is the realm of mediacy, for [...] Essence is inescapably mediate in Hegel’s sense, that is, we can only get to it via another: we come to Essence by reflecting on Being, seeing that it does not suffice to itself, and hence referring back beyond it to what underlies it.”⁴² This is a shift in perspective, “From the particular thing which it was in Being [...] to the system of interconnected things.”⁴³ Or in Hegel own phraseology, “The part, if it is to be something true, must be not an isolated member merely, but itself an organic whole.”⁴⁴

The Notion is the speculative synthesis or totality uniting and holding together both aspects of the previously distinct moments of Being and Essence.⁴⁵ The Notion has “many of the properties of a Platonic or an Aristotelian *eidos* (Form)”, Findley notes, and is therefore akin to a metaphysical essence in the Aristotelian tradition,

where the spiritual Platonic Forms are united with their immanent material instantiations rather than projected into a transcendent realm.⁴⁶

The Notion is also describable as Spirit or mind (*Geist*). The Notion is the expression of the self-active and self-creative Spirit of the universe. It is the self-recognition of that which is mediated in, as and through itself, the assertion of the essential unity of Spirit.⁴⁷ The universality of the Notion is both a moment of unity, in the returning of Spirit to itself, and also of mediation. It is, according to Findley,

An inherent reference of the individual instance to the species and genera present in it. The individual becomes a specimen, a concrete embodiment of organizing universality, and lives together with other similar specimens in a world organized by the same universal.⁴⁸

The highest, most universal Notion Hegel calls the “Idea,” which is “the absolute truth.”⁴⁹ Or as Findlay characterizes it:

The outcome of the *Logic* of Hegel, its absolute Idea, is thus simply the axiomatic convergence, which can also be viewed as a coincidence, of what is and what ought to be, but which is also the Categorical Imperative that this convergence or coincidence should be unendingly pursued, and the religious blessedness of realizing it to be eternally achieved.⁵⁰

However, as will be seen in the chapters to follow, the grand Speculative unity of the Notion proposed by Hegel’s philosophy would be split and torn asunder in the controversies among the Hegelians along the fault line of religion. The synthesis of the Notion, combining identity and non-identity or unity and mediation in a second order unity, is disrupted by the critique of the Young Hegelians. The first two moments of the logic fall apart again and renew their theoretical war upon each other.

The Idea represents the isomorphism of thought and being as the ultimate

position of Hegel's logic which places an equals sign, as it were, between subject and object. Hegel naturalizes the status quo by identifying its various manifestations with an underlying metaphysical pattern.⁵¹

This methodology has political implications. Heinrich Heine in his *Religion and Philosophy in Germany* writes how:

An arrant blockhead, bearing, I believe, the cognomen Haxthausen, published a pamphlet wherein he solicited the Government of the King of Prussia to have regard to the consistent parallel demonstrated by philosophy as existing in the organization of the world, and to mark more strictly political distinctions; for as in nature there are four elements, fire, air, earth, and water, so in society there are four analogous elements, the nobility, the clergy, the burgesses, and the peasants.⁵²

In this example, the class structure of society is being justified by showing its identity with a (purported) philosophical knowing.

However, there is another side to Hegel's philosophy. If the completed philosophical Notion expresses the unity of thought with being, then *alienation* describes their disjunction and contradiction, the "unhappy consciousness" where, as Charles Taylor writes, "Men feel that their substance lies in something outside them." Alienation, Taylor says, "Has the sense of a reconciliation which is felt as absent."⁵³ Indeed, much of Hegel's work, including in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the lectures on the philosophy of history describes the "one-sided" nature of human thought which must be overcome and reconciled through processes of relational mediation.⁵⁴

There are therefore two aspects of Hegel's logic, the paradigms or logics of unity and mediation. I would suggest a grammatical analogy: the aspect of unity is

nominative: based on the essentialism of the subject/substance which always returns to itself. It is “positive”, solipsistic and recognizes only itself in the other. It corresponds to the Understanding and to the Speculative, as well as to the categories of Being and the Notion. In contrast, the aspect of mediation is *propositional*: based on relation, mediation and process. It “negates” the self-sufficiency of any Thing-in-itself and insists on its dialectical ex-stasis in, as and through its other. It is expressed in Hegel’s Dialectical thinking, as well as the logical category of Essence. The logic of unity is found in the identity of form and content in the religious Notion as understood by the Old Hegelians. Conversely, the Young Hegelians emphasize the logic of mediation, exploring the incomplete and ongoing process of reality.

The same distinction appears during the political turn among the Young Hegelians. Bauer and Stirner emphasize the logic of unity, espousing the triumph of the absolute self-consciousness (Bauer) or ego (Stirner) over and against a subordinate world of false relations that would limit the expression of its will. On the other hand, Moses Hess, Engels and Marx base their thinking on Feuerbach’s idea of the “species being” or communal human nature. Therefore, the logic of mediation comes into play to describe the ideal relationship of the human community to nature and itself.⁵⁵

III. The Political Context

Turning now to the political dimension of the Young Hegelian movement, it was an expression of social tension and disapproval directed towards the repressive

and censorious governance of the German states and the political oppression of the general continental European situation.⁵⁶ Great Britain had a constitutional monarchy which had been successful at implementing a series of economic reforms to address their social conflict and release pressure from the political steam kettle.⁵⁷ On the European continent, however, half a century after the French Revolution the traditional feudal nobility remained very much in power. There was a slow economic strangulation of the lower classes by the upper. Legalized serfdom was still present throughout Central and Eastern Europe.⁵⁸

To understand the ideological relationships of the Young Hegelians to this context it is first useful to formulate a general typology of the European political spectrum, post Waterloo and pre-1848. This consisted in three broad groupings: liberals, radicals and conservatives.⁵⁹

Liberals: Occupying the center of the political spectrum liberals were typified by the constitutional monarchists.⁶⁰ They were for reform and greater freedoms, but were for a retention of bourgeois privilege. Therefore they supported their kings against the threat of “mob rule.”⁶¹ For liberals, “the people” were the educated property owning males, while the “mob” or “rabble” were everyone else, that is to say, the actual majority of the population.⁶² The political subject was the property owning subject. Society and the economy were viewed as self-regulating, therefore liberals were for free trade and the free market.⁶³ They were opposed to aristocratic privilege which they saw as blocking the free advancement of property owners who had (allegedly) gained material status through their own merit and effort, rather than

from noble birth.⁶⁴ They were for industrialization, but against labor unions because they were seen as interfering with the natural working of the free market.⁶⁵ There was an anti-clerical element to liberalism because the church was seen as supporting absolutism.⁶⁶ Liberalism was, broadly speaking, the position of the Bourgeoisie, of the middle and upper classes who had profited by the development of market capitalism as the basic economic structure of Europe.

Radicals: The Young Hegelians were located in this category. The political Left in Europe connected itself to the 1789 French Revolution and embodied a widespread pan-European popular revolutionary sensibility with a developed political symbolism and rhetoric. They sang the Marseillaise and used symbols like the tricolor flag, the Phrygian cap and the liberty tree.⁶⁷ Throughout Europe people were actively anticipating the moment when they would hit the streets as part of a general uprising.

Socialists were just beginning to appear at this time and the majority of radicals were instead Revolutionary Republicans.⁶⁸ Republicans were similar to liberals, but they took the universalism implied by the idea of democracy further. For example, they were against property ownership restrictions on suffrage.⁶⁹ Republicans were for a strong interventionist government and opposed laissez faire liberalism, but their economic views were not well developed.⁷⁰ They were for action and change over liberal passivity and had a pronounced anti-clericalism.⁷¹

Socialism or Communism (these terms were synonymous at this time) was similar to Republican radicalism and shares many of its features as described above, but Socialists went even further in their goals.⁷² Their focus was on the people and

collective struggle, rather than the individual. They were also virtually the only group at this time raising the issue of woman's suffrage.⁷³ Many early "utopian" Communists, such as Charles Fourier's followers, were pacifist and anti-Jacobean.⁷⁴ Part of Marx's contribution to the dialog was to merge Communism with the revolutionary activism of the Republicans, thereby transforming its political praxis.⁷⁵

Socialism had existed since the 1820's but was by no means the consensus position for the radical Left in the way it would become in the late 19th and 20th centuries. It is important not to over-anticipate this influence and back read it into an earlier context.⁷⁶ The origins of modern political Socialism and Communism lie in the involvement of the predominantly urban lower classes in the more general revolutionary sensibility. Mostly located in France and especially Paris this movement was small but growing. Nevertheless, the worker's angle was an important aspect of the '48 revolution and the political agitation leading up to it. For example, in 1831-4 there was an uprising of silk weavers of Lyons. Their slogan was "Live working or die fighting."⁷⁷ The Silesian weavers were also protesting in 1844.⁷⁸

Unions were poorly developed in Europe at this time. The medieval trade guilds had been abolished in Western Europe after the French Revolution as a hindrance to the free market. Nevertheless, guild practices and protocols persisted among workers and provided a basis for collective organization.⁷⁹ The largest success of the emerging Labor movement at this point in the 19th Century was possibly Norway, where the Worker's Union of rural Proletariat was 20,000 strong and comprised about a fifth of the population of Norway.⁸⁰

Conservatives: Conservatives were the absolutist monarchists and included the nobility, the feudal estates, the religious authorities and their allies. They arose in response to the democratic Republican movement and were the counter-revolutionary faction.⁸¹ They believed that tradition is the source of a well regulated society and invoked the divine justification of religion for their support of the status quo.⁸² Religious doctrine was the source of truth, not reason. They had the support of the Pope and the Catholic church, as well as many Protestant groups.⁸³ They were pro-agricultural and anti-industrialization.⁸⁴

With regard to the general political situation, Europe of the 1840s was largely agricultural.⁸⁵ Industrialized areas included England, especially in the area around Manchester, the Prussian Rhineland, Belgium, and Bohemia, then a part of the Austrian Empire. Major cities like Paris, Berlin and Vienna also had a developed industrial economy.⁸⁶ Friedrich Engels was from Manchester, and it was from his knowledge of this area and its population of Proletariat workers that he wrote *The Condition of the Working Class in England* in 1845.⁸⁷ This work had a decisive influence on Marx and the development of Socialist theory among the Young Hegelians, who saw the situation in Manchester as an anticipation of the conditions within a future, fully industrialized greater Europe.⁸⁸

In the rural context property ownership was in the hands of a very few, either the landed nobility or bourgeois landlords. Peasants, the majority of Europe's population, worked for or rented from these owners of the agricultural means of production (*i.e.* the land itself) and therefore often remained in a state of poverty

regardless of the success of their products on the market.⁸⁹

In Eastern and Central Europe serfdom persisted and peasants worked without pay for their noble landlords.⁹⁰ Concerning conditions in these areas Jonathan Sperber writes:

These were economic relations based on compulsion, not on market exchange, and particularly in the poorest and most backward of these areas of feudalism, say the Hapsburg provinces of Transylvania or Galicia, such compulsion was physical and literal, characterized by the liberal use of the whip and the stick.⁹¹

A third sector of the economy were non-industrialized crafts and manufacturing, mostly textiles and metal working.⁹² For example, in Silesia weavers used a system of “outworking,” where capitalists supplied raw material, collected and sold the finished products of groups of workers operating out of their homes or small workshops.⁹³ Outside the skilled labor of the crafts was “unskilled” labor such as construction workers, domestic servants and porters.⁹⁴

Regarding the upper classes, landowners were predominant due to the agricultural nature of the economy.⁹⁵ The dominance of the Bourgeoisie was strongest in the west. Meanwhile, the feudal Aristocracy was still in control of the east, entrenched and reactionary, threatened by the encroaching modernization of the west.⁹⁶ A middle class had also developed in the west but was largely absent in the east where there was a more rigid serf/free dichotomy with a large lesser nobility consisting of up to 13% of the population and existing in place of a middle class. The middle class of Western Europe included small businessmen, teachers, clergy and civil servants and was no more than 20% of the population. Only about ½% to 1% of

the population were nobility in the West.⁹⁷

The European national states of the mid-19th century were very different from today. Universal suffrage for males was non-existent, much less for women. Property restrictions for the right to vote meant that only 5% of the male population could vote in France.⁹⁸ The states fulfilled no social welfare functions beyond a limited involvement in education. There was little or no direct involvement of the government in the market beyond tariffs, trade taxes and some support for infrastructure such as roads and railways.⁹⁹

The French Revolution had advocated a secular political Republicanism, but this had been subsequently overturned in France and the church restored. However, the Enlightenment and the 1789 revolution had undermined and called into question the role and dominance of religion over society.¹⁰⁰ Christianity was outwardly politically strong and dominant throughout Europe, but alternative currents were present, as brought out in the *Life of Jesus* debates in Germany. In Catholic areas, especially France and Italy, anti-clericalism was common among the educated middle and upper classes who openly rejected religion, while the peasants were largely piously religious.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, in Protestant contexts religious ambivalence was most common among the lower classes. For example, in Berlin many of the working class did not attend church services.¹⁰²

From 1845-7 there was a potato crop famine throughout Europe creating economic crisis and political unrest among those portions of the lower classes who were most effected. A significant recession followed the famine creating further

destabilization. As Sperber writes, “A basic precondition for the revolution was the gradual decline in popular standards of living over the previous twenty to twenty-five years.”¹⁰³

It was street demonstrations in Paris which finally set off the '48 revolution, which in Germany was called the “springtime of the peoples.”¹⁰⁴ Great Britain did not participate in the revolutionary uprising, and all street demonstrations were contained. Any attempted agitation by Chartist and Irish elements were outmaneuvered and controlled by the police.¹⁰⁵ The '48 movement involved mass working class and bourgeois uprisings, but with little co-ordination between the classes and their different political interests. The Left was divided not just between liberals and Republicans but also between the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat. This lack of cooperation between revolutionary groups led to the defeat of the revolution due to the superior unity and organization of the counter-revolutionary movement, according to Marx's reading of events in his *The Class Struggles in France* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.¹⁰⁶ Finally, nationalist tendencies provided a check on the deeper development of a broader revolutionary consciousness on an international basis.¹⁰⁷

Conservatives gained ground in the parliament as the upper classes succeeded in creating a reactionary counter-revolutionary alliance with elements of the Bourgeoisie. This power block also succeeded in maintaining control of the state armies which were used to gradually crush the movement on the streets. After months of barricade and street fighting in France, Italy, Germany, Poland and the Austrian

Empire Louis Napoleon, grand nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, succeeded in having himself elected President of France in December of 1848, eventually seizing full power and establishing a dictatorship by the end of 1851.¹⁰⁸ Napoleon III (as he was eventually titled) moved quickly to put down the revolution, even launching an invasion of Italy to restore the Pope to power in the Papal States where he had been overthrown.¹⁰⁹ The Czarist government of the Russian Empire launched similar incursions into Romania and Hungary.¹¹⁰ Victory was achieved by the political Right throughout Europe, placing their power block firmly back in control.¹¹¹ However, there were some positive political changes from the revolution of 1848. Serfdom was abolished in Eastern and Central Europe, although it continued within the Russian Empire.¹¹²

How are the Young Hegelians located within this terrain of political events? The short answer is that they were part of the theoretical and political lead up to the '48 revolution. Immediately after Hegel's death, the Hegelians as a whole initially had high hopes for the Prussian state, for its embodiment, in the form of the modern bourgeois national state of the historical culmination promised by the dialectic.¹¹³ The degeneration of Prussian society in the 1830s into an absolutist monarchical police state in the service of the ruling classes disillusioned the Young Hegelians. Their response was to radicalize. It dawned on them that, after all, history had not completed itself with the self-recognition of the Absolute Spirit.

The Free saw themselves as a political party with a revolutionary character, like the Jacobins. Political parties, common in England and France, were a new type

of political form in Germany society of the time, but public political clubs and other café and tavern based groups were everywhere. There was Café Pilfax in Pest and Romberg's Coffeehouse in Cologne. Sperber notes that, "By the 1840's, cities and towns throughout Europe were honeycombed with such informal meetings; they were the main forum of [public] political discussion."¹¹⁴ As a revolutionary club with a developed philosophical ideology The Free also share some similarities with secret societies like Freemasonry and the Communist League, for whom Marx and Engel's wrote *The Communist Manifesto*.¹¹⁵

Larger political divisions between the liberals, Republicans and Socialists are mirrored within the Young Hegelians. Indeed, the Young Hegelians are the origin of much of the modern, post 1848, theoretical terrain of the political Left. Bruno Bauer was a Radical Republican. Strauss and Feuerbach espouse a secular humanism. Max Stirner can be defined as a Libertarian. Finally, Marx and Engels are the principal theorists of Socialism and Communism. Marxism in particular is anticipatory of later political developments. The events of 1848 represent a tipping point in the evolution of the Left away from a Jacobean and towards a Socialist basis of collective radical action.

The following chapters will present six key figures of the Young Hegelian movement and carry out a close contextual reading of their thought. In so doing, the necessary relationships between their theology and philosophy, on the one hand, and their politics, on the other, will become explicit. The critique of religion initiated by David Strauss and culminating in Feuerbach has political ramifications because of the

integral role played by the church in Prussian governance. Therefore, to critique religion in Prussia of the time is to critique and challenge the State. Religion and politics are thereby unmasked as flip sides of the same coin, leading to the radicalization of the Young Hegelians and their political turn in and through the critique of religion.

Chapter 2

David Strauss' *Life of Jesus* and the Origin of the Young Hegelians

In 1835 C.E. the European theological establishment was rocked to its foundations by the philosophical critique of religion initiated by the publication of *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* by David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874).¹ Directly inspired by the resulting controversy as well as by themes within Strauss' own thought the Young Hegelian movement was formed. Although *The Life of Jesus* is now remembered as an important origin of modern historical biblical criticism the work is actually deeply Hegelian in its argument and played a role in the interpretive debates surrounding Hegel's philosophy of religion.² This chapter will examine this Hegelian connection in detail, showing how Hegel's philosophy of religion acts as a thread connecting Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* controversy and the origins of the Young Hegelians.

David Strauss is often omitted from historical accounts of the Young Hegelians. At first glance his concerns seem largely philological and theological, rather than philosophical and political. However, theological and religious questions were central to almost all of the Young Hegelians. Bruno Bauer, a leader of the movement, was also directly involved in textual criticism of the gospels, writing a *Critique of John* and a *Critique of the Synoptics* in 1840 and 1842 respectively.³ Indeed, a close reading of *The Life of Jesus* itself, particularly the "Concluding Dissertation," as well as Strauss' secondary writing, especially the polemical

pamphlet *In Defense of My Life of Jesus Against the Hegelians*, show that philosophical issues are embedded in the very structure of the book's argument. Finally, the very term "Left" Hegelian was created and defined by Strauss in his *Defense* pamphlet, where he divides his critics into "Right" and "Left" camps. Those who opposed the conclusions of *The Life of Jesus* and supported a conservative and/or traditional way of understanding the Bible in relation to Hegel's philosophy were the Right Hegelians. The Left Hegelians, in contrast, were those who supported Strauss' conclusions. At first these were few, but soon a whole movement sprung up around this label.⁴

Turning now to *The Life of Jesus* itself, lives of Jesus were an extremely common genre in the 19th and 20th centuries, over seven thousand such works having been published circa 1860-1940.⁵ In fact, Strauss' book is a direct reply to Schliermacher's own *Life of Jesus* with which Strauss had been dissatisfied.⁶ Hegel himself had also written a "life of Jesus" as a young scholar.⁷ However, Strauss' work is by far the most famous, influential and controversial example of this genre.

Strauss' intention in his *Life of Jesus* is to deploy a Hegelian argument that mythological imagery and symbolism, not historical fact, is the basis of religious consciousness, and to show that the gospels are therefore not to be read as an account of history. Strauss' book is a foundation text of modern biblical criticism, presenting a philological argument that the stories attributed to Jesus in the gospels are largely mythological material that had come into being in the early Christian community.⁸ Explicit Hegelianism is largely invisible (but not absent) from the text except at the

very end, where Strauss anticipates and lays the groundwork for Feuerbach, stating that as the idea of Christ can no longer be associated with the historical Jesus it can now be seen as an expression of human *Geist*, striving to realize its ideal and representing this mythologically in association with the figure of Jesus.⁹ One implication of this is that the historical, actually existing person of Jesus is not the God-man, but only a normal human being to whom such an identity has been mythologically attributed.¹⁰ This argument and the book itself caused enormous controversy.¹¹

What is the precise relationship of Strauss' argument to Hegel's philosophy? Hegel was attempting to reconcile religion and philosophy by distinguishing them as phases or moments in the movement of the self realization of the universal Spirit. The essence of religion for Hegel is the *Bilder*, the picture or representation. This would include the various stories, myths and symbols of religious life.¹² In contrast, the essence of philosophy, which is the highest mode of Spirit, is the *Begriff*, or "Notion." This is a form of thought or understanding whereby Spirit is transparent to itself as knowing self-aware self-consciousness.¹³

In terms of the relationship between the "picture thinking" of religion and the thinking proper of philosophy Hegel had claimed that these are different in form, but the same in content. This formula sufficed for a time in Hegel's wake. "In this distinction", Strauss writes, "We found respect for the biblical documents and church dogmas reconciled as nowhere else with the freedom to reflect on them."¹⁴

But then uncertainties arose. A major issue for a liberal protestant like Strauss

was one of reason being brought into congruence with an explicitly Christian faith grounded in the bible. How does the philosophical Notion emerging from religion in the final movement of the dialectic relate, not just to the teachings concerning the bible, but to its historical aspect as well? Strauss posits two possible answers to this question, each with a resulting conclusion. *Either* history and the Notion connect and match, in which case all is well with Christianity's traditional understanding of itself, *or* history and the Notion are disjunct, in which case history is part of the contingent form, and not the necessary content of the philosophical Notion. It does not raise itself to the level of the Notion and is negated from the essence of religion, which is the content raised to the Notion in the final moment of the dialectic.¹⁵

Strauss studied Hegel to discern which option was the case. What was the role of history in the dialectic? He found that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* was so abstract in its relationship to history that the precise functioning of the moment of *aufhebung* was a "total ambiguity."¹⁶ Strauss found two options in his reading of Hegel for the functioning of *aufhebung* in the moment of raising to the notion, and therefore of the possible mediation of religion and philosophy with regard to history. These are positive and negative. In the positive role, "The historical appeared to be held firmly together with the idea." Conversely in the negative role, "History appeared to be dropped away passively as merely represented when face to face with the completed concept."¹⁷ In this case history plays the role of a mere appearance (*Vorstellung*) and is not a thing-in-itself. The former, positive conclusion is distinctive of the Right Hegelians. However, Strauss takes the later negative option.

The project of *The Life of Jesus*, Strauss states, was to enact a general critique of the bible itself along this line. He compares this project to that of the *Phenomenology* where Hegel does not begin by positing the Absolute Idea or philosophical notion as an immediately intuited starting point as in the intellectual intuition of the absolute “I” that gives the grounding for the philosophical system building of Fichte and Schelling. Rather, the *Phenomenology* leads the subject through many stages of development within itself to become and know itself as the Absolute Spirit. Therefore, immediate sense perception is the point of beginning for Hegel, as it was for the Cartesians and Empiricists, and not the intellectual intuition. Furthermore, the starting point of immediate sense perception must be subjected to *critique*, and either negated or developed to arrive at truth. Likewise, for Strauss the traditional content of theological dogmatics as well as the narrative content of the Bible are an immediacy within Christianity which must be itself critiqued and evolved and not simply accepted as a given *a priori* truth.¹⁸

Strauss writes, “In [Hegel’s] system everything that is immediate is drawn into a process of mediation, which leaves it neither in its original form nor in its original value.”¹⁹

Strauss understands religion as essentially mythological, not rational as philosophy is. In this he is strongly influenced by the so-called “mythic school” of the 18th century philologist Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729-1812) and his followers, who saw myth as the central form of religious expression.²⁰ Therefore the traditional beliefs and stories of Christianity as depicted in the gospels remain at the level of the

representation and are not translated into the Notion. It is important to understand that mythology has a positive function for Strauss because it is the authentic essence of religion. Religious mythology doesn't hide or obscure the historical truth or core of religion. Rather, religion *is* mythology. Or stated schematically: religion = representation = mythology.

Therefore, while there can be a historical basis for religious myths this is not the religious part of those myths. The result of this logic is that the historical aspect of Christianity drops away entirely for Strauss. His conclusion is completely negative in this regard. Regarding the determinations of the historical material Strauss is strictly rational and empirical. He rejects biblical accounts as unhistorical "when the narration is irreconcilable with the known and universal laws which govern the course of events."²¹ All miracles are out. Strauss rejects any supernaturalism as irrational, Hegel having shown that Spirit is immanent, expressing itself as the real actuality of the world and not as a heavenly transcendence.

As already noted, Strauss' Christological conclusion is that the historical Jesus is not the God-man. The concept or notion of the God-man is that of humanity as a whole. Here is an anticipation and link to Feuerbach's philosophy. As Strauss puts it, "Is not the idea of the unity of the divine and human natures a real one in a far higher sense, when I regard the whole race of mankind as its realization, than when I single out one man as such a realization."²²

This relates to Hegel in that Spirit or the Idea is realized in the movement of humanity and history as a whole. The historical Jesus is therefore contingent and

ultimately unnecessary to this process. Jesus the God-man drops away and is critically negated.

Strauss says regarding the critic following his own point of view, “He is distinguished from the naturalistic theologian, and the free-thinker - in proportion as his criticism is conceived in the spirit of the nineteenth century - he is filled with veneration for every religion, and especially for the substance of the sublimest of all religions, the Christian.”²³ However, this substance is humanity itself as self-consciousness and Spirit, not the mythology of Christianity and the Bible. It is important to understand that Strauss is at pains to differentiate his critique of religion from the earlier enlightenment critique of religion by Voltaire, Hume *et al.* Strauss is attempting a “third way” between uncritical religious orthodoxy on the one hand and simple atheism on the other. What is important about Christianity is its teachings, not its history.

Strauss calls for Christianity to be submitted to a two fold critique. First, historical, which Strauss performs in *The Life of Jesus*, and second dogmatic, which he leaves to others. “It is only after the faith has passed through both of these trials that it is thoroughly tested and constituted science.”²⁴ This thread will be picked up by the Young Hegelians, most notably Bauer and Feuerbach, in their own works.

Setting aside the historical Jesus is an advance:

If Christianity in its progressive advancement in doctrine and practice, rejects more and more of those temporal and national limitations by which the actions and teaching of Jesus were circumscribed; this is not to surpass Christ, it is rather to give a more perfect expression of his inner life.” But Strauss goes even further, “[But] an historical individual is that which appears of him, and no more [...] and what

lies beneath this phenomenal existence as the essence, is not the nature of this individual, but the human nature in general.²⁵

And again:

The attempt to retain in combination the ideal in Christ with the historical, having failed, these two elements separate themselves: the latter falls as a natural residuum to the ground, and the former rises as a pure sublimate into the ethereal world of ideas. Historically, Jesus can have been nothing more than a person, highly distinguished indeed, but subject to the limitations inevitable to all that is mortal.²⁶

For Kant, the essence of religion is a call to what Strauss calls the “ideal of mortal perfection deposited in the reason.”²⁷ However, this understanding is still situated in a mode of alienation, for moral perfection remains separated from human actuality, but for Strauss Hegel had solved this by showing the unity of human existence as self-consciousness in Spirit. Therefore the self-consciousness of the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* is the true incarnation of the absolute. Self-consciousness suffers through the Calvary of alienation before finding and resting in as and for itself as Spirit. Therefore, humanity as such is the Christ. Jesus is merely a religious myth or picturing of this unity of humanity and spirit - but he is not an exclusive and unique event. Rather, for Strauss the notion of self-consciousness realizes itself in and through all history.

This then is “the absolute sense of Christology,” that, “Humanity is the union of the two natures - God become man, the infinite manifesting itself in the finite, and the finite spirit remembering its infinitude.”²⁸ Nature is subjugated progressively by Spirit, “until it lies before him as the inert matter on which he exercises his active power [...] by the kindling within him of the idea of Humanity, the individual man

participates in the divinely human life of the species.”

Hegel says in his writings that the Absolute Spirit must appear to itself as a particular individual at a certain stage in the dialectic, and that Christianity fulfills this need.²⁹ This can be read as saying that Jesus is the God-man in the System, but Strauss reads it as saying that the *appearance* of this having been a fact is what is important. In other words, Jesus being literally the God-man is not what’s important to the unfolding of Spirit in its dialectic, but only that he appears before the collective consciousness of humanity *as if* he were the God-man.³⁰

In Strauss’ thought, the Christian faith is not the endpoint of the dialectic and must itself be transcended to overcome human alienation. In fact, it is precisely because of the traditional understanding of the uniqueness of the God-man that humanity is seen as excluded from a similar unity with Spirit. In Hegel, only when Spirit is grasped as universal within the universality of thought is the movement of Spirit complete. But, adds Strauss, the historical Jesus as God-man should have dropped away and been negated by this point. It is not part of the final Notion except as a past formative moment in the dialectic. Strauss links this to Hegel’s idea that the resurrection is the continuation of the meaning of Jesus as Spirit by becoming the universal self-consciousness of the community which has been raised to the right hand of the Father, which is to say, overcome alienation and returned to the Notion.³¹

What would Hegel himself have thought of Strauss’ views? Peter Hodgson, the editor of the English edition of Hegel’s lectures on religion, thinks Hegel would have occupied a middle position in the debate, neither supporting the negation of

religion by the left, nor the pure adherence to traditional orthodoxy of the right.³² There is significant merit to this judgment. However, this may also be an easy way out of the question, leaving unexamined fundamental tensions, ambiguities and contradictions in Hegel's own complex writings on religion.

Nowhere in Hegel's lectures does he pose and directly address the issue of biblical historicity in the way Strauss does. Indeed, the way Strauss frames the issue is one of the original aspects of *The Life of Jesus*. Nevertheless, there are several points in the lectures where his discussion relates to aspects of Strauss' work.³³ An examination of these passages complexifies Hegel's thought such that it is no longer clear that he fits so neatly in the center category, or any of the three categories of the *Life of Jesus* debate. In fact, in some of these sections Hegel's own direct influence on *The Life of Jesus* and the Young Hegelians becomes clear.

In his 1827 lectures on the philosophy of religion Hegel discusses the raising of the content of the images (*Bilder*) to the Notion. He acknowledges that,

The difficulty comes of separating, in a content what is content as such, or thought, from what pertains to the representation as such", furthermore, "Philosophy is reproached for removing the content, too. This transformation is therefore held to be a destruction.³⁴

He then gives two examples of such a separating of content and representation. The first example is the story of the garden of Eden in Genesis, where he says,

When the story arrives at the eating of the fruit, it begins to become dubious whether [the] tree should be taken as something historical, as a properly historical tree, and the eating as historical, too; for all talk of a tree of knowledge is so contrary [to ordinary experience] that it very soon leads to the insight that this is not a matter of any sensible

fruit, and that the tree is not to be taken literally.³⁵

In the same passage Hegel also compares the Genesis account to the Greek myths of Pandora and Prometheus which he sees as similarly allegorical and therefore non-historical. Elsewhere in the lectures he says concerning the story of the Fall: “This representation is very profound and is not just a contingent history but the eternal and necessary history of humanity - though it is indeed expressed here in an external and mythical mode.”³⁶ Here then is an unambiguous example of Hegel’s use of the dialectic in precisely the exclusive, negative, Left Hegelian manner.

Hegel also gives a second example of the elevation of religious representation to philosophy, which is a discussion of the stories of Jesus in the gospels. Here is one of the few, possibly the only, direct reference in the lectures to the relation of the historical Jesus to the dialectical elevation of religion. Here, Hegel switches modes and clearly takes the inclusive, positive, Right Hegelian approach to the moment of the *aufhebung*, an assumption that underlies all his discussions of Jesus, particularly in the Consummate Religion section of the lectures. He says,

Still, there is something historical that is a divine history - a story indeed, that is supposed to be history in the proper sense, namely the story of Jesus. This story does not merely count as a myth, in the mode of images. Instead it involves sensible occurrences; the nativity, passion and death of Christ count as something completely historical.³⁷

What’s going on here? One way to read this is to see that in the first example of the Fall Hegel relates to the Bible stories in accord with the Christian tradition of reading the old testament allegorically. The gospels, however, he sees as historical. Yet the implications of mythic content also being present in the gospels is completely

unexamined and passed over by Hegel. Strauss, obviously, has not passed over this consideration which leads to his own results. So does Hegel really occupy the center position in the Left/Right debate, or does he switch back and forth between the two options? For example, notice the suspicious way Hegel dodges the whole issue of miracles in the New Testament, an issue that Strauss will not avoid.³⁸

Finally, there is the whole import of the Consummate Religion section of the lectures, where Hegel presents the positive content of the final dialectical elevation of religion to the Notion. This absolute religion, Hegel says is “consciousness relating itself to its essence,” that is as the self-consciousness that grasps itself as Spirit, *Geist* or God.³⁹ Would Paul or Luther have recognized this as Christianity? In other words, is the Consummate Religion as posited by Hegel really historical Christianity at all, or is this actually a form of pantheism? Hegel gives unconvincing answers to the charge of pantheism in the first part of lectures, yet the problem persists.⁴⁰ But if some kind of pantheism really is the upshot of Hegel’s philosophy, then it is the Right Hegelians who have misread Hegel as an orthodox Christian, and not the Left Hegelians, who grasped the transcendence of traditional Christianity implicit in the dialectic and sought to reread the Christian religion and its Biblical sources in a more consistent manner than Hegel had from the position of Hegel’s own ultimate philosophical conclusions.

To sum up: David Strauss’ influence was immense, first on the development of the historical critical method of reading the Bible, which has become firmly established as an important basis for approaching the text of the Bible. Arguably, it is

no longer possible to negate or “get behind” the problems that Strauss poses. One can agree or disagree with Strauss, but one cannot ignore him.⁴¹

Finally, although this has been largely forgotten, *The Life of Jesus* is a radical political text, closely related to the issues that undergirded the revolutions of 1830 and ‘48. As Marilyn Massey writes in her study *Christ Unmasked: The Meaning of The Life of Jesus in German Politics*:

Throughout Germany, in state bureaucracies, coffeehouses, and beer halls, as well as in church pulpits and basements, *The Life of Jesus* would be discussed not as a technical academic treatise but as a political symbol - or rather as divergent political symbols of sedition against the state, on the one hand, and political free choice, on the other.⁴²

It is this context that connects *The Life of Jesus* and the thought of David Strauss to the radical activism and writing of the Young Hegelians which led to the development of Marxism and the modern political Left. In terms of his relationship to the Hegelian dialectic Strauss emphasizes the role of negation in the critique of religion through his displacement of the mythological Jesus of the Gospels and Christian orthodoxy with the problematic of the historical Jesus. This critical move constituted the break with the Old Hegelians and created the opening for the Young Hegelians to emerge as a distinct movement along the fault line of religion.

Chapter 3

Cieszkowski and the Wisdom of History

Like many of the Young Hegelians August Cieszkowski is a fascinating character. A member of the Prussian nobility, Cieszkowski was associated very early with the Young Hegelians but his influence was decisive.¹ He has one major work from his Hegelian period, *Prolegomena to the Wisdom of History (Prolegomena to Historiosophie)*, published in 1838, which argues for a shift to praxis in the basic orientation of critique.² Cieszkowski emphasizes the continued and ongoing movement of the dialectic, which orients his thought towards the future, rather than the past as Hegel's had been. In 1838, the same year as the *Prolegomena* was published, Cieszkowski relocated to Paris from Berlin and fell under the influence of Proudhon's circle where he wrote a series of radical economic pamphlets. When the revolution broke out in '48 he returned to Poland to participate in the uprising, then remained there the rest of his life, living on his ancestral land. He became increasingly mystical in his later years, writing several volumes of a study of the Lord's Prayer showing that it contained a prophecy of a coming utopia.³

Turning now to the *Prolegomena*, Cieszkowski's model of history reveals a Hegelian three fold structure. In fact, its symmetry is arguably more "Hegelian" than Hegel's, who deviates from his usual pattern with a four stage model in the *Philosophy of History*: (1) Oriental, (2) Greek, (3) Roman and (4) Germanic.⁴ In Contrast, Cieszkowski proposes the schema: (1) antiquity, (2) Christianity, and (3) the

future. The age of antiquity was characterized by feeling and Christianity by thought. The future will synthesize their duality by praxis.⁵

Cieszkowski quotes from Goethe's *Faust*, "In the end will be the act!" In other words, the complete self-realization of the Idea is *not yet*.⁶ It is this 'not yet' that sets the Young and Old Hegelians apart, separating those who supported and justified the status quo from those who rebelled against it. It is a schism that is inescapably political, dividing Left from Right.

Antiquity, the age of feeling, is aesthetic in orientation and its highest expression of the Spirit is the immediacy of art and the beautiful. Antiquity is completed in the Greeks who represent the epitome of art culture.⁷ Culture, Cieszkowski argues, is the "aesthetic formation" of humans.⁸ Therefore, art and culture are linked. However, in antiquity aesthetic formation is directed solely towards particulars, or human individuals, and it has not achieved the synthetic "substantiality" of the State, which is the self-relation of humanity in a rationally free community. Therefore, more is needed than the aesthetic to complete the realization of Spirit in history.

Cieszkowski's reflections on aesthetics are carried out against the background of a dialog with Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*.⁹ He makes the generally Hegelian point that aesthetics is not the end point of the System, as it had been for Schiller and Schelling in his early *System of Transcendental Idealism* of 1800.¹⁰ Aesthetics gives way to philosophy and to rational thought, which moves towards the freedom which is not adequately expressed in the immediacy of feeling

and art.¹¹

The second age of Cieskowski's system is that of Christianity and thinking. Here, he deviates from Hegel, who corresponds thought with the last stage of the dialectic where Spirit stands in the form of the speculative notion. In contrast, Cieskowski posits thinking in antithesis primarily with feeling of which *practice*, not thought, serves as the synthetic term of mediation and completion. Art is the being-in-itself of the sensible external immediacy of the beautiful. Conversely, thinking is the reflexive interiority of the subjective being-for-itself.¹² Praxis, the third term of this dialectic, is the being-*from*-itself which sublates and resolves this duality of subject and object.¹³ It is related primarily to the *will* rather than to thought.¹⁴

As Hegel's system stops with thought his philosophy of history is not final, but merely stands as the culmination of the second Christian age of thinking. Cieszkowski calls Hegel "the second Aristotle of our own time," and sees him as the transitional figure ending the second age of thought and founding the third age of action, in the way Aristotle marked the transition *into* thinking at the end of the first age and the beginning of the second.¹⁵

The problem with Hegel for Cieszkowski lies in his relationship to absolute idealism, which remains situated in the sphere of thinking as the highest and ultimate reality. Therefore, for Cieszkowski, Hegel's philosophy recounts and comprehends the development of Spirit "under the form of thought," because the coinciding of Spirit and thought is the distinctive feature of the second age. Cieszkowski writes,

This coincidence can well fall apart once more but the result of the achieved coincidence is already an attained result. Hence, the

separation will not become a falling apart any more but rather a continuation out of itself, that is, a separation which will always remain identical with itself. But with that the seed of the dissolution of this standpoint is already given, and with that at the same time it also suggests why we are even now at a world-historical turning point in the conversion of facts into acts. That is, consciousness occupies a distinct place in the true system of philosophy; thus the universe is not therefore closed with it. [...] the Spirit will henceforth unfold itself with a wholly other determination in its extending movement. It will, from now on, find itself at home in objective and absolute metamorphosis.¹⁶

The being-from-itself of praxis Cieszkowski distinguishes from a “being-outside-of-itself” of Spirit, which is the mode of alienation. However, being-from-itself produces out of itself without alienation in a manner that is “truly active and self-active.”¹⁷ In contrast nature is a being in, for and from otherness rather than itself. To be in, for and from itself is a characteristic of Spirit’s freedom of self-positing, whether this is disguised from itself in alienation or freely expressed in thinking and action.

Hegel represents “the end of philosophy.”¹⁸ In the impending third age consciousness must “proceed out of itself” and posit itself as the self-actualized free subject in practice, not merely in theory. Praxis will resolve the contradictions between feeling and thought, art and philosophy, the heart and the head, the sensuous and the reflective and between object and subject. As art was negated by philosophy, therefore leading to moribund cultural decadence, so will praxis negate the negation of art and reinvigorate culture in unity with Spirit. Thus Spirit will complete itself, rather than remaining in the one-sidedness of idealism, and become “the absolute absolutely.”¹⁹ This is “the destiny of the highest, practical, social life.”²⁰

There are three ways that Spirit will actualize itself through praxis in the coming third age. Spirit will complete itself (1) subjectively, in achieving the correct formulation of the will to free and rational action, (2) objectively, in the manifestation of the social and political life of the State and (3) absolutely, by “absolute action.”²¹ The will therefore will have its own phenomenology of praxis as it passes through future stages of development towards its achievement of totality. Politics will supplant art and philosophy as the highest human activity.

Cieszkowski’s broadly lays out the project and attitude of the Young Hegelian reading of Hegel’s philosophy. His importance also lies in his turn towards the concern for immanence and materiality that will be so central to Feuerbach, as well as the focus on praxis that is distinctive of Marx. The *Prolegomena* implies an obvious link to revolutionary politics, but Cieszkowski himself was still a liberal centrist like Strauss at the time he wrote it. He looks towards the full and real self-completion of the status quo as Hegel’s philosophy had promised. Social freedom will be achieved through a cultural renewal of art as opposed to transforming the economic reality. Socialism had yet to emerge as a tendency among the Young Hegelians and the *Prolegomena* contains no real discussion of political economy.

Chapter 4

The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach

Ludwig Feuerbach began his philosophical career as a student at the University of Berlin where he attended Hegel's lectures. In 1829 he received his doctorate and a professorship.¹ However, almost immediately his early work *Thoughts Concerning Death and Immortality* (*Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit*), published in 1830, got him into trouble. In this work he denied the existence of a transcendent deity and the possibility of the continuation of personal life after death. Only humanity as a whole is potentially immortal. Feuerbach was fired from his academic position for writing this book but was able to begin to teach again in 1834.² In 1837 he married and lived in rural retirement at his wife's farm in Bruckberg from 1837 to the late 50's, where he wrote many of his later works, unimpeded by official censors and the need to toe the academic theological party line.³ Because of his retreat in Bruckberg Feuerbach was not personally and socially involved with the Young Hegelians. He didn't travel much but communicated via correspondence.

Arnold Ruge invited Feuerbach to write for the *Hallische Jahrbücher* and Feuerbach became a frequent contributor.⁴ *Towards a Critique of Hegelian Philosophy* (*Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Philosophie*), which appeared in the *Hallische Jahrbücher* in 1839, signaled Feuerbach's development of his own philosophy via a Left critique of Hegel.⁵ In 1841 *The Essence of Christianity* (*Das Wesen des*

Christentums) was published. Although later widely considered Feuerbach's main work, David McLellan asserts that *The Essence of Christianity* was not as important among the Young Hegelians at the time of its initial publication as Engels would later imply was the case in his essay on Feuerbach as quoted in the first chapter and written much later in his life in 1888. Instead, Bruno Bauer was the central leader of the movement at this time and Feuerbach was merely seen as following his lead.⁶ However, after 1843 Feuerbach became central in the Young Hegelian movement, writing the *Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy* and the similar but longer *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*.⁷ These were influential on Marx and were the source of the "species" (*Gattung*) concept which would appear in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844.⁸ Feuerbach, like Marx, conceived of his project as an end of philosophy. "Man should become the subject matter of philosophy and philosophy itself should be abolished."⁹

Following Strauss' lead, Feuerbach deploys the human "species" (*Gattung*) as a philosophical category. *Gattung* literally means "genus" or natural grouping.¹⁰ Here Feuerbach's Aristotelian and empirical tendency runs counter to Hegel's Platonic idealism. Knowledge for Feuerbach, as for Aristotle, is through knowledge of the species and genus of phenomenon, not through the noetic grasping of the Form/Notion as in Hegel and Plato. Feuerbach does to Hegel what Aristotle does to Plato, by locating the forms in matter, rather than in a relationship of metaphysical transcendence.

Towards a Critique of Hegelian Philosophy (1839) is an important early direct

critique of Hegel by Feuerbach which sets the stage for his mature position on the critique of religion in *The Essence of Christianity*. Feuerbach opens by contrasting the philosophy of *identity* (Fichte with his absolute “I,” Schelling’s “oriental” unitary mysticism) with the philosophy of *difference* in Hegel and Feuerbach’s thinking, which emphasizes the “sensibility for the manifold.”¹¹ Feuerbach compares Hegel’s philosophy to taxonomy. “Hegel’s spirit is logical, determinate,” based on laying out structural stages and levels.¹² For example, in the *Philosophy of History* there is a progression through historical stages, “but he ignores all that is common and identical in all of them.”¹³ Hegel’s progression of history has each stage continually better and overcome the previous, not co-operate or co-exist. Any completed historical totality must itself possess diversity, Feuerbach points out, as the final moment of the dialectic is a particular as well as an universal being. It has determinate being because it has actual existence within a world of varied circumstances. Totality for Feuerbach is the “totality of nature,” not of some particular being within nature.¹⁴

Christianity is the absolute religion for Hegel, who sees it as religion that has achieved its totality. Instead, Feuerbach argues that Christianity should rather be seen as one aspect of the internally diverse totality of *all* human religious activity. Hegel emphasizes the differences of Christianity from other religious traditions, rather than what it has in common with them as itself a religion.¹⁵

With regard to the status of Jesus Christ Feuerbach asks, in a similar manner as Strauss did in the *Life of Jesus*, whether a species realizes itself through only one particular individual. Feuerbach denies that a particular person such as Jesus, or

anyone else, could be a unique, universal Messiah.¹⁶ Feuerbach adopts a Straussian relationship towards the biblical and traditional narrative of incarnation and argues that religion is a historical phenomenon and therefore natural. He rejects all supernaturalism.¹⁷ Feuerbach now historicizes Hegel's philosophy just as he has Christianity. What this means is that there can be no "Absolute" philosophy for Feuerbach. There are only particular, historical philosophies.¹⁸

Feuerbach critiques Hegel for beginning his *Logic* with the category of pure Being and its abstract aspects. Why not begin with real being or the natural universe he asks?¹⁹ "What other meaning can being have except that of real, actual being? What therefore is the concept of being supposed to be as distinct from the concept of existence and reality?"²⁰ There is no pure beginning point for philosophy, Feuerbach argues, no pure conceptually abstract being with which to begin the dialectic.

So how is philosophy to proceed? It should investigate language, which is a vehicle for the inter-subjective mediation of thought. Therefore, Feuerbach thinks, through the understanding and the use of language thought can develop species-consciousness, or understanding of itself. "Language is nothing other than the realization of the species."²¹ Feuerbach is pointing out the communicative basis of language, it is always in some sense "for others."²² Feuerbach emphasizes rationality as a basis for communicative understanding. Language use should be about showing people why they should think X, not just that X is the case because it is said so. Linguistic communicative reason acts as a vehicle to mediate human species life, it "presupposes reason, as a common principle and measure in us".²³ Therefore, reason

and language are not “private” for Feuerbach, but preeminently inter-subjective. There are interesting parallels between this view and that of Habermas’ theory of communicative reason, where there is also an emphasis on the role of language in inter-subjectivity.²⁴

Any philosophical system, Feuerbach thinks, is a means towards understanding reality, and is not an end in and of itself, as Hegel posited with his idea of philosophy as the absolute self-recognition of Spirit in, as and through itself as thought.²⁵ The ability of any system to critique itself is essential, but Feuerbach finds this ability lacking among Hegel and his followers.²⁶ Hegel, Feuerbach claims, really begins with the concept of the Absolute Idea and of idealism and proceeds to prove and demonstrate that everything is in accord with this position. However, has sensuous reality *really* been negated by idealism?²⁷ Feuerbach questions Hegel’s transcending of sensuous reality by Spirit in the form of thought. Feuerbach wants to do away with the concept of an Absolute Idea that transcends and is the ground of nature. Rather, nature is its own ground, without any metaphysical transcendence lying behind it.²⁸ Feuerbach rejects anything like Schelling’s philosophy of nature. “The unity of thought and being it claimed to have achieved was only the unity of *thought* and *imagination*.”²⁹ For Feuerbach the condition of all criticism is the making of the distinction between subjective and objective, between thought and reality, between ideology and fact.³⁰ Otherwise philosophy is mysticism.

Hegel’s method of doing philosophy was an improvement over Schelling, Feuerbach writes, because of his focusing on the negative role of critical thought and

reflection which interrogates the immediacy of any intuition.³¹ Inspired by yet going beyond Hegel, Feuerbach calls for a new “genetico-critical” philosophy which will critique ideas from the standpoint of an understanding of their contextual origin.³² What Feuerbach is proposing is the idea of philosophy as a critique of ideology, “which questions whether an object is a real object, only an idea, or just a psychological phenomenon; which, finally, distinguishes with utmost rigor between what is subjective and what is objective.”³³ The isomorphism of thought and being in the unity of subject and object as it was theorized in German Idealism is a mysticism that ultimately deletes the need for genetico-criticism and “negates the very question about truth.”³⁴

Yet, Hegel had arrived at the isomorphism of the speculative Notion by first passing through the stages of the unhappy consciousness of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. These stages express various phases of alienation, where there is a disconnection between thought and being. This means that the critique of ideology is inherent in Hegel, although perhaps not fully actualized by him. This means that Feuerbach is really exploring implications of the Hegelian paradigm, rather than leaving it entirely, which is what makes Feuerbach a Young Hegelian philosopher.

Philosophy for Feuerbach should replace metaphysics with natural science. In its attention to speculative categories German Idealism has neglected “the *natural* grounds and causes of things which form the fundamental principles of the genetico-critical philosophy.”³⁵ Nature is the all inclusive reality. Therefore, human beings with nature together constitute the universal being, rather than Hegel’s Absolute Idea.

Furthermore, the human being is universal because it has all of reality as a possible object of knowledge.³⁶ In Feuerbach's philosophy, the idea of the species life of humanity replaces and supplants the self-consciousness of idealism. These ideas are the basis of Feuerbach's radical humanism.

In the preface to *The Essence of Christianity* Feuerbach argues against Hegel that, "I unconditionally repudiate absolute, immaterial, self-sufficing speculation - that speculation which draws its materials from within."³⁷ Feuerbach instead endorses an empirical methodology drawn from the senses. "I do not generate the object from the thought, but the thought from the object."³⁸ Idealism is to be replaced by realism or materialism, and speculative philosophy with natural philosophy. Feuerbach,

places philosophy in the negation of philosophy, i.e., it declares that alone to be the true philosophy [...] which is incarnate in Man; and hence it finds its highest triumph in the fact that to all dull and pedantic minds, which place the essence of philosophy in the show of philosophy, it appears to be no philosophy at all.³⁹

What is the essence of Christianity? Feuerbach states his basic position as follows:

Man - this is the mystery of religion - projects his being into objectivity, and then again makes himself an object to this projected image of himself thus converted into a subject."⁴⁰ In other words, "there is no distinction between the *predicates* of the divine and human nature, and, consequently, no distinction between the divine and human *subject*."⁴¹

Human beings are distinguished from animals by having a consciousness that can have their species essence as an object.⁴² Religion is the species-consciousness which is consciousness of the infinitude of human essence. Mind knows through having an object of knowledge. Therefore in species-consciousness humanity

objectifies its own essence in an object of contemplation. “The absolute to man is his own nature.”⁴³ Feuerbach replaces Hegel’s absolute idealism with absolute humanism. The individual is limited, but the species is potentially infinite. God is the “highest conceivable being,” that is to say a projection of human species-consciousness.⁴⁴

However, religion is unaware of this self-projection, like the unhappy consciousness of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* which has not yet recognized itself as Spirit in its object. This unconsciousness of religious projection is bound up with the negative aspect of religion for Feuerbach. “To enrich God, man must become poor; that God may be all, man must be nothing,” he argues.⁴⁵ For example, human love has been alienated by being projected into God rather than being recognized as our own human attribute. For Feuerbach this leads to religious fanaticism, the “love” which “delights in the blood of heretics and unbelievers.”⁴⁶ Therefore for Feuerbach liberating humanity will involve the overcoming of religion via the self-recognition of humanity in religion, short circuiting the gap in the subject created by alienated consciousness, thereby dissolving religion and returning the qualities of divinity to the immanent human being.

Feuerbach relates his thought to Schliermacher and the theology of feeling by applying his characteristic inversion. He writes, “If feeling in itself is good, religious, i.e., holy, divine, has not feeling its God in itself?”⁴⁷ Therefore, “Feeling is atheistic [...] it denies an objective God - it is itself God.”⁴⁸ Feeling is not feeling of God, but feeling of feeling. It is “blissful in its own plenitude.”⁴⁹ However, the theology of

feeling makes the object of feeling (God) seem to be actually objectively separable from feeling. This disrupts the implicit unity of species-consciousness and results in continued alienation. Nevertheless, “Man cannot get beyond his true nature.”⁵⁰ Religion does not transcend the anthropological horizon but is always a projection of the specifically human. “In religion, consciousness of the object and self-consciousness coincide,” although this is masked by alienation.⁵¹ Religion is therefore always a disguised anthropology.⁵²

The phenomenon of religion includes more than just feeling, it includes a symbolic dimension as well, corresponding to Hegel’s picture thinking. For Feuerbach religious picture thinking is the deflected and alienated species-consciousness of humanity imaged as an objectified symbol, projected as an other rather than grasped as the thought itself. Religious imagery is “the imagination made objective.”⁵³ Tradition sees symbols as expressive of divine reality behind them, but for Feuerbach the symbol *is* the religious reality, there is nothing “behind” the symbol other than human imagination and practical reality. One important implication of Feuerbach’s anthropology of religion is that religious symbolism is not arbitrary because it is a projection of the content, needs, wants and desires of a concrete human reality.

Indeed, for Feuerbach religion is necessary for the development of specifically human consciousness. “Religion is man’s earliest and also indirect form of self-knowledge. [...] Man first of all sees his nature as if out of himself, before he finds it in himself.”⁵⁴ To reach towards the infinite in religion is both essentially human and

essential to the development of self-consciousness for Feuerbach because cognition of the infinite is cognition of the infinite potential of the human essence. Therefore, humanity could not have skipped religion in its development and still have been human. What is lacking is the element of self-recognition in religion, the re-appropriation of human self-essence from alienation.

The *Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy* (1843) formed the basis for the longer and rewritten *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* issued later the same year.⁵⁵ This chapter will focus on the former, as the two texts repeat many of the same ideas and the *Theses* is more concise. In these works Feuerbach generalizes the implications of his philosophy of religion into a critique of philosophy as such.

Feuerbach contrasts his own “speculative theology” with traditional theology. Speculative theology “envisions, determines, and realizes in this world the divine essence transported by ordinary theology out of fear and ignorance into another world.”⁵⁶ The method of speculative theology is that of dialectical inversion, which can be applied to Hegel’s own version of idealist speculative philosophy. “We only need always make the predicate into the subject and thus, as the subject, into the object and principle. Hence we need only invert speculative [Hegelian] philosophy and then have the unmasked, pure, bare truth.”⁵⁷ Hegel’s Spirit is “a ghost of ourselves existing outside us”, a ghost which haunts Hegel’s philosophy as “the departed spirit of theology.”⁵⁸ Hegel is the last stand of theology. He sees thought as subject and being as predicate, whereas the reverse is the case. Being is subject and

thought predicate.⁵⁹

Feuerbach calls for a “practical philosophy,” “For only intuition of things and essences in their objective actuality makes the human being free and devoid of all prejudices.”⁶⁰ Empiricism, not the speculative Notion is the basis of knowledge for Feuerbach. “Before you think the quality you feel the quality.”⁶¹ Since felt sensation precedes thought philosophy must not begin with thinking but with “the principle of sensualism” of empirical sensation and the materialism of physical embodiment.⁶² “The self-consciousness of the old philosophy, separated from the human being, is an abstraction without reality. The human being *is* the self-consciousness.”⁶³

Interestingly, Feuerbach ends the *Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy* with an affirmation of some of Hegel’s ideas in the *Philosophy of Right*. The rational State is the achievement of human species totality. “The state is the realized, cultivated, explicit totality of the human essence,” whose qualities and activities “are realized in particular classes, but brought back to an identity in the person of the head of the state.”⁶⁴ Furthermore, “The head of the state is the representative of the universal human being.”⁶⁵ *The Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy* is therefore not a Socialist tract; it is a liberal endorsement of constitutional monarchy as the highest political expression of human species-life. It would lie with Marx and the Communist wing of the Left Hegelian movement to draw out the more radical implications of Feuerbach’s thought.

In terms of the relationship of Feuerbach's philosophy to the larger context of the Young Hegelians, his influence is decisive. *Towards a Critique of Hegelian*

Philosophy is a consistent engagement with Hegel's logic in terms of categories of the logic of mediation as opposed to those of the logic of unity. This can be seen in Feuerbach's emphasis on the species rather than the individual, as well as his focus on language as a vehicle of mediation and the genetical-critical method as an attention to contextual understanding. Feuerbach naturalizes Hegel's logic, denying the existence of the Absolute Idea as the metaphysical ground of the unity of the System. Finally, in *The Essence of Christianity* Feuerbach places the critique of religion front and center as a central concern of his philosophy, a role it shares for many of the Young Hegelians.

Chapter 5

Bruno Bauer and Revolutionary Atheism

Bruno Bauer is the major figure linking the Young Hegelian critique of religion with the political program of revolutionary Radical Republicanism. Arnold Ruge called him “the Robespierre of theology.”¹ The main agitator of the Berlin scene, Bauer was arguably the closest to being the leader of the Young Hegelians as a whole.²

Bauer has a strongly theological angle to his version of Hegelianism, in that the critique of religion is central to his philosophy, but he is also the principal figure of the political turn of the Young Hegelian movement where the ideas developed in the preceding theological debate were applied to the larger activist and revolutionary context of the times. For Bauer critical atheism is a political force overturning the established order. This is an explicit radicalization of Hegelianism, pushing Young Hegelian thought beyond the boundaries of liberalism and pitting it against both Church and State.³

This theme is particularly visible in Bauer’s polemical ultimatum *The Trumpet of the Last Judgment Against Hegel the Atheist and Antichrist* (*Posaune des tungsten Gerichts uber Hegel, den Atheisten und Antichristen*) printed in 1841 at the height of Bauer’s struggle with the Prussian university bureaucracy. Therefore this chapter will focus on this text as representative of his thought. However, it should be noted that Bauer changed significantly in his views over his life, especially during the decade of

the Young Hegelian movement.

Bauer began his philosophical career in 1828 as a student at the University of Berlin. He heard the elder Schleiermacher lecture, but rejected his approach and joined the circle of disciples surrounding Hegel, then at the height of his fame. He attended Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of art and religion, and would eventually help to edit and publish the talks on religion after Hegel's death. Bauer completed his studies and received his teaching license in 1834.⁴

Initially, Bauer was associated with the Old Hegelians, and concerned himself with the compatibility of Hegelianism with orthodox Lutheran Christianity. In fact, his description of his initial encounter with Hegel written in 1839 just prior to his turn away from the Right Hegelians bears out this initial orientation. Paradoxically, what first interested Bauer in Hegel was the "right" Janus face of his philosophy: Hegel as the crusader for the reconciliation of religion and reason, torn apart by Kant and the enlightenment, but restored by Hegel in the triumphant unification of the speculative Notion where the rational and the real are one. Bauer remembered,

Only Hegel, whose lectures I had heard from the first hours, held me immediately captive. For me it was as if, in these penetrating and simple truths, that nothing new came to be known but only the revelation of inborn knowledge, and from them my weak spirit was given back its calm and certainty. How great was that man's simplicity and openness in the search for truth, and how holy his anger, when he spoke of how the very pillars of the church itself were apparently being destroyed by the ones who had been set up as its teachers and shepherds, and how great was the sorrow of his spirit, when he revealed how dogma and the display of eternal truth were cast aside and disdained by the moderns. (*die Neuern*).⁵

Yet even in this seemingly pious context Hegel has an aspect against the status

quo of orthodox religion. The “teachers and shepherds” are the priests and ministers of the established churches.

Bauer was an extremely prolific writer. According to Lawrence Stepelevich’s bibliography for Bauer included in the English edition of the *Trumpet* Bauer published 82 items including several books and many articles just in the years 1838-45.⁶

Bauer taught from 1834-39 at the University of Berlin and published articles in a conservative vein in the major Old Hegelian journal the *Jahrbücher für Wissenschaftliche Kritik* as well as his own theological journal *Zeitschrift für spekulative Theologie* which ran from 1836-38.⁷ Bauer’s basic project in these writings was to demonstrate how the New Testament portrays the unity of the Idea that has its developing moments within the Old Testament.⁸

From 1835-6, Bauer acted as a front man for the Old Hegelian counter attack on David Strauss during the *Life of Jesus* controversy. Bauer wrote several articles attacking Strauss’ positions in the pages of the *Jahrbücher*, but Strauss’ challenge exposed the weaknesses of the Old Hegelian position and Bauer’s direct involvement in the debate may have played a role in his eventual ideological defection.⁹

Bruno Bauer first met Karl Marx in 1836 in the context of the graduate student discussion society the “Doctor’s Club.”¹⁰ Marx also attended his class on the book of Isaiah, which raises interesting questions regarding the background influence of Isaiah’s eschatological viewpoint on Marx’s own thought.¹¹ After his turn to the Left in 1840, Bauer and Marx were allies, but Marx looked askance at the polemical

theatricality of The Free.¹² Later, Marx would critique the contemplative orientation of Bauer's thought, and estrangement from concrete political praxis.¹³

Bauer's shift to the Left began in 1838 in a large two volume transitional work *The Religion of the Old Testament Presented in the Light of the Historical Development of its Principles*, where Bauer attempts "to render the gospel stories into the expression of reason," with a sustained demonstration of the presence of the Hegelian Idea in the Bible.¹⁴ However, Bauer was on a slippery slope, for if the gospel narrative is an expression of the dialectic of self-consciousness then it would take only one step further to follow Strauss into the critical inversion of Left Hegelianism: that the dialectic has posited the form of the religious narrative of the bible, not the other way around.¹⁵

By 1840 Bruno Bauer had fully accepted Strauss' conclusions, shifting his position over to the Left camp of the *Life of Jesus* debate and advocating atheism. This roughly corresponds to his appointment in 1839 to the faculty of the nearby University of Bonn.¹⁶ In 1840 Strauss also published a *Critique of the Gospel of John*, his first work fully adopting the Left Hegelian position towards the critique of religion as it had then developed.¹⁷

Bauer's three volume *Critique of the Synoptic Gospels*, issued from 1840-42 expresses his mature theological position as a Young Hegelian. In it, he goes further than Strauss to negate the historical Jesus entirely and see Christianity as a completely mythological construct fabricated whole cloth by the early founders of what became the Christian community. Bauer writes:

To the question of whether Jesus was an authentic historical figure we replied that everything relating to the historical Jesus, all that we know of him, relates to the world of fancy, to be more exact - to Christian fancies. This has no connection with any man who lived in the real world. The question is answered by its elimination for the future.¹⁸

Bauer's position contrasts with Strauss, who thought there had been a historical Jesus, but that the gospel narratives were a religiously mythologized re-imagining of a charismatic, but ultimately human and non-divine person. The taking of ideas to their extreme conclusions is typical of Bauer's philosophical tendencies, as is the urge for negation. For Bauer, the negation of religion unveils self-consciousness as the absolute self-realized as criticism. The cause of atheism becomes a militant crusade of world-historical importance, the bringing of self-consciousness to its full realization.¹⁹

Bauer's campaign of criticism while at Bonn brought to a head his confrontation with the Prussian authorities who saw all their fears regarding the subversive nature of Hegelianism confirmed. Johann Eichorn, the conservative minister of culture, had begun official proceedings to investigate Bauer's religious orthodoxy placing him in danger of losing his teaching license. In response, Bauer upped the ante and staged a dramatic return to Berlin in 1841.²⁰ Recognized by the Young Hegelians as a leader within their movement, Bauer viewed his return as a spiritual battle with revolutionary implications for the whole of Germany and Europe. *The Trumpet of the Last Judgment* was issued in conjunction with this action. The Last Judgment heralded in its title, interpreted via ironic reversal, is the apocalypse of the final battle of reason over religion. Bauer was quickly outed as the author in an

article appearing in the Berlin journal the *Athenaum*, probably written by Eduard Meyer, who was one of the leaders of The Free.²¹

On March 29, 1842 Bauer's teaching license was officially revoked after he had returned to Bonn for the spring semester. He was permitted to complete the lectures he was giving and would again be back in Berlin in May.²² Bauer issued militant statements following his dismissal. In a letter to Arnold Ruge he declared, "I shall not rest until I have exploded all the theological faculties. I shall do everything and try everything."²³

During a visit from Karl Marx in Bonn the two rebel philosophers played a stunt. In an inverted Palm Sunday parade they rented two asses and rode them through the streets before the shocked respectable citizenry. "We shouted for joy, the assess brayed," Bauer reported.²⁴ It was a satirical performance with a political subtext. Here were the martyrs of criticism and atheism!

1843 saw the publication of *Christianity Exposed*, which was an interpretive re-presentation of the atheism of the Enlightenment figure Johann C. Edelman. Bauer argues for the importance of the free thought atheism of the Enlightenment and against its forgetting in the subsequent resurgence of Christianity.²⁵

However, by 1844 the Young Hegelian movement was losing steam. Bauer began a new journal, the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, where he repudiated his political activism and advocated a stance of "pure criticism."²⁶ This marks the beginning of Bauer's movement back to the political Right, the viewpoint that would predominate over the later part of his life. In their book *The Holy Family*, Marx and

Engels are intent to criticize this turn in Bauer away from the dimension of praxis.²⁷

After the revolution of 1848 Bauer was influenced by the positivism of August Comte which took him away from Hegelian philosophy and his own earlier thought.²⁸ Bauer's writing became increasingly nationalistic and anti-Semitic, condemning the irrationality of Judaism in the face of the superior "positivistic-scientific" Germanic perspective.²⁹ In 1882 Bruno Bauer died a supporter of Bismarck's absolutist German Empire.³⁰

There is an emphasis on negation in Bauer's Young Hegelian period. Three examples stand out. First, Bauer's *Critique of the Synoptic Gospels* goes further than Strauss to fully negate the historical life of Jesus. Second, there is the anti-Semitism of his *On the Jewish Question* (1842) where the unity of self-consciousness excludes the foreign element of Judaism, which must therefore be negated from any future historical coming to totality.³¹ Third, in the *Trumpet of the Last Judgment*, where Bauer reads Hegel as an atheist, negating the theistic aspect of Hegel's thought.

The Trumpet of the Last Judgment Against Hegel the Atheist and Antichrist is a radical reading of Hegel, drawing out the latent and implicit tendencies in his thought, oriented towards the leftward turned visage of the Janus faced Hegel. Bauer uses an ironic and satirical narrative voice, that of an over the top ultra-orthodox pious Christian accuser, who reads Hegel and discovers all the atheistic and anti-religious tendencies in him. The narrator laments and denounces these deviations, all of which Bauer actually approves. The *Trumpet* was issued anonymously as a hoax and stunt played on the Prussian censors. This shows Bauer's political audacity. Its

style mimics pietistic writings of the time aimed against liberalism especially those of Henrich Leo who had written an article attacking the Young Hegelians and who may be Bauer's specific satirical target.³²

What does Bauer find in his reading of Hegel? For Bauer, critique itself is the divine, the critical self-consciousness recognizing itself as the absolute after the manner of the Hegelian Spirit. Therefore, for self-consciousness to view the absolute as an other is for it to remain in alienation. Religion is a false consciousness and an illusion that must be unmasked. Critique is this unmasking, which uncovers and actualizes self-consciousness as the free rational subject that is its own unalienated ground. Furthermore, Bauer links politics and the revolutionary mission of establishing a republic to the overthrow of the Christian religion by atheism and reason.³³

In reading the *Trumpet*, it is necessary to invert its prima facie meaning. However, Bauer usually writes in such a manner that once in possession of this interpretive key it is very easy to determine his actual intended meaning by a simple reversal of the narrative voice's intention. Therefore, in this discussion I will attempt to directly summarize Bauer's basic argument in its un-coded form, translated out of its ironic reversed representation, rather than go through a passage by passage process of lengthy quotation followed by interpretive inversion. It should be noted that, read in this way, the text replicates the negative dialectical critical movement of atheism (*i.e.* the negation of Christianity) on an analogical level within the rhetoric of the text's own discourse.

Bauer's atheist reading of Hegel critically negates Hegel's own theistic tendencies despite the fact that it was the religious aspect of Hegel that had originally drawn Bauer to him. The negation of Hegel's theism carried out in the *Trumpet* might also therefore be read as representative of the psychological and ideological inversion that had been carried out within Bauer himself. In other words, the fervency of the Christian denouncer mirrors Bauer's own fervency for atheism and Radical Republicanism.

Turning to the text itself, Schliermacher's theology of feeling and Schelling's "Positive" philosophy are a compromise with religion.³⁴ Only the insights of Hegelianism can make a clean break with all religion. The Old Hegelians, "deviate much more from the principles of Hegel than the Young Hegelians," who see the potential for the full negation of religion inherent in critique.³⁵ Bauer is drawing a line in the sand and declaring himself for all or nothing. He is for atheism and against all accommodation with religion and error. The Young Hegelians, "struggle openly against Church and State. They have inverted the cross and threaten to upset the throne itself."³⁶

Bauer sets self-consciousness "on the throne of the all-Highest."³⁷ "God is dead for philosophy and only the self as self-consciousness lives, creates, acts and is everything."³⁸ Regarding the principles of Hegel Bauer declares:

If we go back to the actual teaching of the master, the latest disciples [*i.e.* the Young Hegelians] have added nothing new - they have only torn away the thin veil which briefly concealed the thought of the master. [...] The center point of this philosophy [is] its destruction of religion - for which we affirm that this is the core which, after the husk [of theism] has been removed, is that from which every consequence

of the system can be brought into the light.³⁹

Bauer addresses objections to the Hegelianism as atheism interpretation. For, example, what about Hegel's pantheism? Bauer calls this aspect of Hegel the, "substance relationship [...] in which the individual spirit is related to the universal, which as substance, or [...] Absolute Idea as to that which has power over it. The individual spirit will abandon its particular uniqueness and set itself in unity with the Absolute Idea."⁴⁰ However, for Bauer this aspect of Hegel's thought is a husk that hides the truly atheist kernel of Hegelianism. Read consistently, that is to say from a Young Hegelian viewpoint, this atheist aspect of Hegel will emerge as the true import of his thought. Bauer, "has no wish to be as God, but only to be ego = ego, [...] to win and enjoy but the freedom and self-pleasure of self-consciousness. This philosophy wants no God, nor Gods as the heathen, it wants but man and his self-consciousness."⁴¹

This focus on self-consciousness raises the question of whether Bauer is really a reversion of Hegelianism back to the identity philosophy of Fichte and the early Schelling, where the absolute "I" is the ground of reality. In Bauer's version of Hegel there is a de-emphasis and dropping away of the speculative and an emphasis on the dialectic. The place of mediation and sublation in the System is replaced in favor of negation and the unity of self-consciousness.

Bauer reads various texts from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* to make the argument that religion is completely a self-projection of self-consciousness. Bauer focuses on those sections of the *Phenomenology* where Hegel critiques the theology

of feeling of Jacobi, later the background for the similar position of Schleiermacher. In these passages Hegel is strong in his criticism of the religious feeling of the sublime and infinite as a basis of linking the subjective individual with the objective divine. Hegel says this is “an illusion played with mirrors.”⁴² In feeling the subject has not gone beyond itself or, as Bauer puts it, “what I ascribe to that Higher and Infinite Being,” in religious feeling, “has no objective meaning [...] but is rather merely the explication of that which I do, how I am determined, and how I inwardly move myself.”⁴³

Hegel challenges the theology of feeling with an ethical issue. If I am reconciled to God by feeling, then this is a false reconciliation because I am only fixed in myself.⁴⁴ I may think myself good and saved from sin via the reconciliation of feeling, but nothing has actually happened to transform myself, I remain solely within the orbit of my own subjectivity. Here Hegel critiques and rejects a basic Protestant/Lutheran orientation towards religious faith.

Hegel answers the theology of feeling with the “substance relationship” of pantheism. The finite subject dies to itself and sublates itself into a moment of the universal substance, the Absolute Idea. Individual consciousness discovers itself to be only a moment of the larger totality of the World-Spirit. Hegel’s pantheism implies the negation of the immediacy of pietistic religious faith, so Hegel is already beyond orthodox Protestantism at this point of the dialectic. For Hegel the universal substance separated from the immediacy of a religious faith will now “perfect itself through inner development.”⁴⁵

But Hegel goes further than pantheism, Bauer now argues. Pantheism will itself be negated as the dialectic progresses. The totality of the World-Spirit achieves totality through self-recognition, and this is accomplished via the self-recognition of self-consciousness as the absolute. Therefore all moments of determinate being are ultimately recognized as moments of self-consciousness. This is the ultimate position of Hegelianism, Bauer argues, and what is meant by saying that substance is subject. The absolute subject of Spirit is the substance called self-consciousness, not God.⁴⁶

Therefore, the substance relationship of pantheism is not the final position of Hegelianism, even if Hegel himself did not fully realize this, but only another stage in the journey of the unhappy consciousness of the *Phenomenology* towards its totality and self-apotheosis in, as and through self-consciousness. Ultimately, the idea of the pantheistic World-Spirit is negated and reabsorbed in the absolute Spirit of self-consciousness. “Self-consciousness is the only power of the world and history, and history has no other sense than of the becoming and development of self-consciousness.”⁴⁷ The philosophy of absolute Spirit is therefore equivalent to absolute humanism.

Bauer now relates the atheist implications of Hegelianism to politics and reads Hegel as a Jacobean. “The philosophers are the most consistent and unrestrained revolutionaries,” because their thought negates religion and therefore overcomes the primary form of human alienation.⁴⁸ “Knowledge has been freed, and the mind and its related determinations have taken on a new form - the form of freedom and self-consciousness.”⁴⁹ This freedom is the activity of Critique. Bauer lauds the French

Revolution and the Enlightenment as correctly positing human reason at the center of universal importance. Bauer quotes Hegel's lauding of French thought at length, mostly from passages in his lectures on the history of philosophy.⁵⁰ Hegel did have great respect for the French and in his youth shared in the general enthusiasm for the possibilities of the Revolution of 1789, but Bauer's reading pushes Hegel to the extreme, portraying him "as a Jacobean joyfully waving a red flag."⁵¹

Bauer repeats the generally Young Hegelian theme of religion as alienation. In religion self-consciousness contemplates itself, but although it is the active agent in the process it sees itself as if it were "the passive side to which the universal reveals itself and renders itself comprehensible as the divine."⁵² Nevertheless, although self-consciousness has not fully recognized itself it does contemplate its own essence as the infinite. "In religion," Bauer writes, "The inner appears as the outer, and as the infinite is separated from itself finite imagery must be introduced. The infinite must be caught up in the debased bonds of the sensuous, i.e. presented as a sensible and empirical object," like a god. Self-consciousness then desires return and reconciliation with this object, "But it does not know that in religion man is longing only for himself and for his own essence."⁵³ Therefore, to achieve union with the divine self-consciousness need only achieve self-recognition, whereupon it returns to its own infinite essence.

Self-consciousness is essentially free. "It permits itself to be imposed upon by nothing."⁵⁴ For Bauer, there is a further link between the freedom of self-consciousness and art. Art, like religion, is a projection of humanity, but in art this

self-activity is recognized. Therefore, in Bauer's thinking art is superior to religion and should replace religion.⁵⁵

Bauer is "for the State against the Church."⁵⁶ Therefore, the Church must be negated, he insists. The State is the fullest manifestation of objective or externalized Spirit for Hegel. Therefore, for Bauer its rationality and position in the dialectic is superior to religion and if politically placed in power over religion it will cause religion to wither away and be negated. "The State, in regard to the Church, is infinitely authorized, and the Church, in the face of this State, must collapse. [...] Therefore the decline and death of the Church! The State alone is to be the true and reasonable reality."⁵⁷

The rejection of religion is "the awakening of consciousness."⁵⁸ Hegel himself had thought that although the movement of Spirit was completed in philosophy, that nevertheless the Church was an integral and legitimate vehicle of the reconciliation of the Christian community with Spirit, the Church "in which these particulars [*i.e.* the worshippers] will become certain that in the Object of their belief [Jesus] they have their self-consciousness."⁵⁹ Bauer argues that this involves the members of the Church having their self-consciousness outside of them in the person of Jesus. Rather, they should recognize *themselves* as self-consciousness to become Spirit. Jesus as the God-man must be recognized as myth, as religious projection and negated. Then "man will rely upon himself and his own power, and know himself as the Lord of the World, and [will] not go outside of himself to overcome the world and subject it to himself."⁶⁰

Three key elements of Bauer's philosophy of absolute self-consciousness can be summarized as follows: first, it focuses on self-consciousness as the absolute subject of reality in a manner similar to that of the identity philosophy of Fichte and the young Schelling. Second, Bauer has a non-practical orientation. The activity of critique is itself freedom, therefore, by implication, changing how people think is sufficient to change the world. Third, all religion is fetishism and idolatry, that is to say, worship of an object imbued with false properties. All religion is to be negated by critique.

In conclusion, Bauer's emphasis on absolute self-consciousness involves a reassertion of the logic of unity within the context of Young Hegelian thought. In this he is strongly distinguishable from Feuerbach, who articulated his philosophy in terms of the human species-being, rather than that of self-consciousness. Therefore, the role of mediation no longer has a central role to play in Bauer's thought. This tendency was to become more explicit in the philosophy of his colleague Max Stirner.

Chapter 6

Max Stirner and Radical Egoism

Max Stirner was the pen name of Kaspar Schmidt. Like some of the other Young Hegelians Stirner was a student of philosophy at the University of Berlin where he fell under the sway of Hegel while attending his lectures. Completing his studies in 1834, Stirner taught at a private girl's school until 1844 when his only book *The Ego and its Own (Der Einzige und sein Eigentum)* was published.¹ He was associated with The Free and the scene around Bruno Bauer at this time. Although he married into a large sum of money, the creamery he invested in failed and Max Stirner would die in poverty in 1856.²

In *The Ego and its Own* Stirner proposes an explicit philosophy of egoism, asserting that the ego and its self-interest is the absolute ground of all meaning and value. According to Etienne Balibar, "Above all, Stirner is a radical *nominalist*: by this we mean that in his view every 'generality', every 'universal concept' is a *fiction* concocted by institutions to dominate the only natural reality," which is the individual and their unique ego.³

The ego is absolute in its sovereignty over and against any other, much like self-consciousness was for Bruno Bauer's philosophy. Indeed, Stirner continues Bauer's approach but takes it even further, pushing Bauer's philosophy of absolute self-consciousness to radical conclusions. Stirner adopts an ironic and derogatory style, much like Bauer and Marx. In *The German Ideology* Marx satirically compares

Bauer and Stirner to Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.⁴

“Nothing is more to me than myself,” says Stirner, who uses heroic terms to describe the ego, its “courage” and “invincibility.”⁵ The ego and its will should be the basis for value, not outside values on the ego. The individual is sovereign for Stirner, not society or any kind of species-being as in Feuerbach’s humanism. A possible critique of Stirner’s egoism would be to examine the ways that the ego subject is itself posited by and in mediation with society. Where is the boundary Stirner’s philosophy requires between the ego and society such that the ego can stand apart from society and determine and command its values from an external vantage point? If there is no such possible standpoint where the ego exists free of mediation with its context then it cannot have the autonomy that Stirner’s philosophy demands of it.

For Stirner, life is a never-ending “combat” based on power.⁶ The victor, however briefly, becomes the master, while the defeated becomes the slave and servant, obedient to the imposition of the will of the master. “But both remain *enemies*, and always lie in wait.”⁷ All relationships are implicitly hierarchical and authoritarian. Co-operative and egalitarian relationships are absent in Stirner’s thinking.

Throughout the text of *The Ego and its Own* is an extended metaphor comparing religion to the “spooks” of illusory ghosts projected by human subjectivity. “The divine; that is, [...] the uncanny, the spooks, the power’s above’.”⁸ Yet Stirner continually appropriates divine and religious metaphors to delineate egoism, just as Bauer did to describe the ontological priority of self-consciousness. Is

Stirner's idea of the ego perhaps itself a religious concept?

The ego must overcome the restrictions and alienation of conscience, reason, thought, ideas and religious faith, everything that appears as a objective alien power or compulsion or law that would restrict the ego's own absolute self-assertion. Stirner advocates absolute individualism. With regard to thoughts, ideas and values he declares:

I decide whether it is the right thing in me; there is no right outside me. If it is right for me, it is right. Possibly this may not suffice to make it right for the rest; that is their care, not mine: let them defend themselves. And if for the whole world something were not right, but it were right for me, that is, I wanted it, then I would ask nothing about the whole world.⁹

The ego is not abstract for Stirner. He rejects conceiving of the subject as self-consciousness after the manner of Fichte and Bauer. Rather, the corporeal, embodied self is the ego.

Man corresponds in the culture of today to what the heathen Stoics set up as 'the wise man'; the latter, like the former, a - *fleshless* being. The unreal 'wise man', this bodiless 'holy one' of the Stoics, became a real person, a bodily 'Holy One' in God *made flesh*; the unreal 'man', the bodiless ego, will become real in the *corporeal ego*, in me.¹⁰

In other words, the absolute ego equals Max Stirner the human being, at least for him, as the ego is also one's own self if one is not Max Stirner but some other person.

This focus on the ego as the embodied self raises issues of how Stirner conceives the human subject. According to Fredric Jameson, Stirner's emphasis on embodiment is interested in "how abstract ideas get replaced by real bodies."¹¹ In Hegelian terms self-consciousness finally materializes itself. "Now Absolute Spirit

gets an individual lived body and restores itself by expropriating its own physical existence.”¹² Karl Marx’s critique of this position is worth examining at this point. However, Jameson insists “it is certainly wrong (or at least not enough) to say that Marx rejects this return to the body.”¹³ For Marx, the problem with Stirner’s embodied ego is not its embodiment, but that it justifies its will without reference to its own mediated positing by nature and society. In other words, the self, conceived as embodied or otherwise, can never abstract itself absolutely from its context to set itself over and against its world because it is itself always already being posited by that context. Or, as Jameson puts it, for Marx, “individual reality is to be found and achieved there where social reality is also to be found.”¹⁴

One implication of his radical nominalism is that Stirner is against nationalism and the State. Ideas like “Emperor, Pope, Fatherland, etc.” are yet further “fever-fantasies” of external demands against the ego. Rather, for Stirner, “I take the world as what it is to me, as *mine*, as my property; I refer all to myself.”¹⁵

Ownership is the characteristic and essential expression of the ego for Stirner, as it directly implements the mastership of the ego’s will. “My power is *my* property. My power *gives* me property. My power *am* I myself, and through it am I my property,” Stirner declares.¹⁶ “What then is my property? Nothing but what is in my power! To what property am I entitled? To every property to which I - *empower* myself. I give myself the right of property in taking property to myself.”¹⁷ This argument is circular in form, but its philosophical grammar is recognizably Hegelian. The ego is its own ultimate and absolute ground and justification, exactly analogously

to Hegel's Spirit.

Stirner addresses himself to Socialist critics of an unimpeded right to the accumulation of private property. He writes:

The conflict over the 'right of property' wavers in vehement commotion. The Communists affirm that the earth belongs rightfully to him who tills it, and its products to those who bring them out. I think it belongs to him who knows how to take it [...] If he appropriates it, then not only the earth, but the right to it too, belongs to him. This is *egoistic right*: it is right for me, therefore it is right.¹⁸

Stirner rejects the Communist idea of public or common property, citing the example of Proudhon's *What is Property*, published in 1840.¹⁹ "Proudhon, like the Communists, fights against *egoism*. Therefore they are continuations and consistent carryings-out of the Christian principle, the principle of love, of sacrifice for something general, something alien."²⁰ Rather, for Stirner, "What I have in my power, that is my own."²¹ Or more simply, "liberty belongs to him who *takes* it."²² "With this the war of all against all is declared. I alone decide what I will have."²³

In these passages Stirner may not have proved that "the war of all against all" should be the case, but he has described the actual state of affairs of free market Capitalism. Here Stirner's ego is revealed to be not just any ego, but the ego of the Bourgeoisie, of the subject whose power in society is an expression of their accumulated wealth. Or, as Marx wrote in his trenchant style, Stirner, "Merely gives an ideologically high-sounding expression to the most trivial sentiments of the petty bourgeois."²⁴

In the section of *The Ego and its Own* entitled "Men of the Old Time and the New" Stirner outlines his own version of the progressive stages of history after the

triadic Hegelian form of the philosophy of history. There are three stages: the “Ancients” superseded by the Christians who are in the process of being superseded by the modern age.²⁵ The Ancients fought against the world and its limitations, spiritualizing their aspirations, “and this is the result of the gigantic work of the ancients: that man knows himself as a being without relations and without a world, as spirit.”²⁶ Then came the transition to Christian age, which fulfills itself in the reformation where, “the consciousness of freedom, ‘self-consciousness,’” is achieved.²⁷ However, for Stirner, Christianity loves the abstract spiritual man, not corporeal human beings.²⁸ Developed to this extreme Spirit is no longer concerned with the actual material world at all, and so it itself now vanishes. “We must finally become conscious that the Spirit, which alone the Christian loves, is nothing; in other words, that the Spirit is - a lie.”²⁹ Personal interest should now replace “spiritual” interest.

Feuerbach had argued that Spirit is an alienated projection of humanity and that fulfillment of the needs of human species-life is the true goal of history. However, Stirner rejects the idea of the species-being of humanity as a further alienating abstraction. Rather, my individual self is the ultimate ground of projection and what I must return to.

To God, who is Spirit, Feuerbach gives the name ‘Our Essence’. Can we put up with this, that ‘Our Essence’ is brought into opposition to *us* - that we are split into an essential and an unessential self? Do we not therewith go back into the dreary misery of seeing ourselves banished out of ourselves?³⁰

Stirner further critiques Feuerbach’s views concerning morality. Although

Feuerbach has uprooted Christian faith, Christian social morality persists in his thought. “Moral faith is as fanatical as religious faith!” Stirner declares.³¹ Therefore, for Stirner morality must be critiqued as much as religion. Feuerbach’s philosophy doesn’t go far enough, because he thinks if the transcendent aspect of religion is deleted the remaining positive moral content is fine; it just needs to be applied within the human domain rather than projected into a non-existing transcendent metaphysical realm.³² Stirner rejects this humanistic morality as limiting egoism and self-interest. Morality is still an alienated self-consciousness of the ultimately supreme ego self. For Stirner, liberals like Feuerbach are trapped by the unexamined limitations of morality.³³ For example, for Stirner any idea of the “sacredness” of liberty is useless; to *will* liberty is everything.³⁴

According to Etienne Balibar, Stirner anticipates postmodernism by critiquing all universal notions as false.³⁵ All meta-narratives such as “Christianity, humanity, the people, society, the nation or the proletariat [...] are indeed abstractions which, from Stirner’s viewpoint, means they are fictions.”³⁶ The problem for Stirner lies in self-contradiction, for what is the meta-narrative of the absolute ego then ... another fiction? Isn’t Stirner’s supreme ego really a class projection of the bourgeois individual: the projection of the self-image of the rational, paternal and dispassionate gentry, standing aloof in their philosophical repose of mastery over the world?

In his book *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* Albert Camus has this to say about Max Stirner: in the philosophy of absolute egoism,

Individualism reaches a climax [...] This bitter and imperious logic can no longer be held in check, except by an I which is determined to

defeat every form of abstraction and which has itself become abstract and nameless through bring isolated and cut off from its roots. [...] Since every I is, in itself, fundamentally criminal in its attitude towards the State and the people, we must recognize that to live is to transgress. Unless we accept death, we must be willing to kill in order to be unique. [...] But to decree that murder is legitimate is to decree mobilization and war for all the Unique. Thus murder will coincide with a kind of collective suicide. Stirner, who either does not admit or does not see this, nevertheless does not recoil at the idea of any kind of destruction. [...] And so, among the ruins of the world, the desolate laughter of the individual-king illustrates the last victory of the spirit of rebellion.³⁷

Chapter 7

Socialism and the Genesis of Marxism

“The critique of religion is the prerequisite of all critique” - Karl Marx¹

In this chapter I will undertake a close reading of the texts of the early Marx focused around the period of his involvement with the Young or Left Hegelians and its immediate aftermath, culminating in the formulation of Historical Materialism in *The German Ideology* and the drafting of *The Communist Manifesto*.²

Marx arrived at the University of Berlin in 1836 where he met Bruno Bauer, who influenced his adoption of Hegelianism.³ Marx would maintain a connection with Bauer for seven years. At one point they planned a never realized *Journal for the Study of Atheism and the Morality of the Finite Subject*.⁴ Bauer’s rebellious leadership style finds its imitation in Marx’s characterization of the Young Hegelian project as, “a ruthless critique of everything existing.”⁵ It was in this intellectual context that Marx first articulated his own philosophical position and underwent his engagement, critique and break with Hegel.

This was Moses Hess’ impression of Marx from a letter to a friend after they were introduced:

He is the greatest, perhaps the one genuine philosopher now alive and will soon [...] draw the eyes of all Germany [...] Dr. Marx - that is my idol’s name - is still very young (about twenty four at most) and will give medieval religion and politics their *coup de grace*. He combines the deepest philosophical seriousness with the most biting wit. Imagine Rousseau, Voltaire, Holbach, Lessing, Heine and Hegel fused into one

person - I say fused, not thrown together in a heap - and you have Dr. Marx.⁶

Eventually, Hess invited Marx to become editor of the pro-Young Hegelian journal he was publishing, the *Rheinische Zeitung*.⁷ It was banned by the government the following year, putting Marx on the front line of the German Left's struggle over censorship with the State.

Marx and Friedrich Engels met briefly in 1842 and again in 1844, when they began their lifelong collaboration.⁸ Marx had relocated to Paris after the defeat of the *Rheinische Zeitung*. Together with Arnold Ruge he had a plan to escape the range of Prussian censorship by publishing a new radical journal out of France. Called the *German French Yearbook (Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher)*, its title was intended to propose a political linking of concerns between Germany and France.⁹ It lasted only a single issue. Banned in Prussia, copies were seized by customs and orders were issued for Marx's arrest should he attempt to reenter the country.¹⁰

In May of 1844 Marx and Ruge broke off their collaboration and exchanged statements of position in the French radical paper *Vorwärts* over the summer. Beyond their immediate differences over the failure of the *German French Yearbook* Ruge had disagreed with Marx over the importance of the worker's uprising among the Silesian weavers. Marx had supported the revolt, writing a series of articles on their plight in the pages of the *Rheinische Zeitung*.¹¹

Marx and Engels had both become Socialists by this time and together joined the Communist League, a radical secret society. In 1848 the *Communist Manifesto*, a public statement of principles they had written for the league, was published.¹²

Socialism and Communism were synonymous words at the time, although Communism was already beginning to differentiate itself as the more militant version of Socialism.¹³

Following the collapse of the 1848 revolution Marx fled across the channel to London with his family where he was to remain for the rest of his life.¹⁴ The 1850's were a period of relative isolation for Marx, who lived in a two room flat in the poor working class neighborhood of Soho, supported by his relative's financial resources on the continent as well as occasional money from Engels, who had also returned to England and was working for his family's business in Manchester.¹⁵ Marx spent the bulk of his time hanging out in the reading room of the British Library, one of the largest archives in the world. He had conceived and was researching an impossibly ambitious economic survey and critique of capitalism. This project was eventually realized as *Capital*, the first volume of which was published in 1867.¹⁶

Things picked up again for Marx in the 1860's. He and his family moved to a more livable house in London.¹⁷ He played a leadership role in International Working Men's Association, usually referred to today as the "First International."¹⁸ Marx also did extensive journalistic writing for the New York Tribune and other papers.¹⁹ Karl Marx died in 1883.²⁰

Turning now to the texts of the Young Hegelian Marx, his commentary on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* entitled *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* was written in 1843 when Marx was 25 years old.²¹ Marx's reading of Hegel is that the latter has created a conceptual distortion by inverting reality. Rather than situating

complex social forms, such as the state, in their actual relationships as derived and posited by society, by human socio-economic activity, Hegel instead conceives them as instantiations of a transcendental Idea, or Notion, which actual society then relates to as its own end.

In regard to the Hegelian Notion of the State Marx writes,

The family and civil society are conceived as *conceptual spheres* of the state, indeed as the spheres of its *finite phase*. [...] It is the state that is *sundered* into them and *presupposes* them. [...] The logical pantheistic mysticism emerges very clearly at this point. [...] The family and civil society are the preconditions of the state; they are the true agents; but in speculative philosophy it is the reverse.²²

By this conceptual reversal, Marx asserts, the actual historical development of the family and civil society into the state is reduced by Hegel into a mere appearance (*Vorstellung*). The divine Idea, rather than human beings, becomes the subject of history, the actual regarded as a predicate of that subject. As Marx puts it succinctly, “The state is an abstraction. Only the people is a concrete reality.”²³

For Marx human beings are the subject of their history. However, individuals exist not merely in terms of their physical aspect as objects in physics, but in terms of their *social* existence. In this, Marx is a materialist, but not a mechanistic materialist, like Descartes or Hobbes. Rather, Marx is a naturalistic materialist. Human behavior is the basic empirical ontological reality. Specifically, as Marx will develop in his later mature position, human *productive*, or environment making behavior exists as the basic human essence. When I make shelter, I make myself by creating a set of social behaviors around living in that shelter. When I eat, a culture is created around eating, etc. All social and personal forms of human life arise in this manner, as

modifications and elaborations against a background of productive modes of life. This social collection of activities is society, is actual human existence. This social collective Marx calls the “species-form” (*Gattungsgestaltungen*) or “species-existence” (*Gattungsdasein*), terms developed from Feuerbach’s concept of the “species” (*Gattung*).²⁴ Society is where the person is a person, the context where “individuality” has developed as a social mode. Idealism’s concept of a metaphysically abstract free self-consciousness Marx considers a form of mysticism, an imaginary conception.

Marx proposes democracy as the solution of the estrangement of civil society, which is the direct expression of the species-form, and the state which governs civil society as an alienated abstraction of itself. Through universal suffrage, rather than upper class suffrage, and governance through an elected legislature, rather than by decree from the monarch, the alienation of civil society is overcome.²⁵

Hegel’s State is merely another moment in the unhappy consciousness of the *Phenomenology*. Humanity has not yet come to rest as itself within the social sphere, because the state is an abstraction from civil society. Civil society is the actual human reality, what Marx calls “the community, the communistic entity” (*das Kommunistische Wesen*).²⁶

As Marx draws near the end of his commentary in his discussion of Hegel’s views on primogeniture the text suddenly shifts to a new idea, that private property is the essential basis for the alienation of society that generates and sustains the state.²⁷ Marx here is influenced by the philosophy of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, with whom he

had been in association in French radical circles.²⁸

To the system of private property, located in the *Critique of Hegel* primarily in the private ownership of land and natural resources, Marx opposes the concept of social property, or collective wealth for the benefit and use of society as a whole, rather than a class of elect property owners.²⁹

Marx has now come to the root of his critique of Hegel. The movement of the dialectic of “Objective Spirit,” as Hegel names this part of his system, in the *Philosophy of Right* unfolds from the initial moment of the positing of private property, which is therefore the base or ground of the development of the system of human rights.³⁰ For Marx this assumption is the core problem of the entire social network of relations that has estranged itself from humanity. The social use of resources has transformed itself into the abstraction of property, alienating itself from civil society and becoming the basis of an alienated state. Property becomes, “The highest reality of the political state, as the highest ethical reality.”³¹

In the introductory preface to his *Critique of Hegel*, written after completion of the main text, Marx relates the unhappy consciousness of the State to Feuerbach’s concept of religious alienation.

This state and this society produce religion, which is *an inverted consciousness of the world*, because they are an *inverted world*. Religion is [...] the *fantastic realization* of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality.³²

This leads to a consideration of the so-called *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844 which is a key work of the early Marx.³³ This is also the first fully economic analysis by Marx, where he deploys his philosophical methods fully

to the sphere of political economy.

A key philosophical concept explored in these manuscripts is that of alienation.³⁴ He locates the working class, or Proletariat, as the true universal class, as opposed to the Bourgeoisie, which presents itself ideologically from the position of economic and political control as if it were.³⁵ This follows from the young Marx's ontology of human existence: if humanity is essentially productive then those who produce are most essentially human. Those who do not produce, but merely consume or accumulate are the capitalists, the parasites on the workers, the ruling minority rather than the oppressed majority.

However, due to the nature of the division of labor under modern industrial capitalism, which has converted the totality of production into the abstraction of capital and inequitably concentrated this capital as private property in the hands of a privileged few, the worker has become estranged from their own production. This has become abstracted from production and assumed the form of private property. Marx writes,

The worker is related to the *product of his labor* as to an *alien* object. For it is clear that, according to this premise, the more the worker exerts himself in his work, the more powerful the alien, objective world becomes which he brings into being over against himself, the poorer he and his inner world become, and the less they belong to him. [...] The externalization of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien.³⁶

Alienation has three aspects. First, the product of labor is alienated by becoming a commodity – this is nature estranged from humanity. Second, alienation

is internalized by the workers so that their labor becomes a process of self-estrangement – this is humanity estranged from itself. Third, the “species-life” of man becomes alienated, alienating human beings from each other – this is man estranged from society.³⁷ Furthermore, as an expression of the third aspect of general social alienation the non-producer, or class of the Bourgeoisie, becomes a self-and-other alienated hostile master over the class of producers, or Proletariat.

Labor, Marx asserts, has a, “Social meaning, the meaning of genuine community.” In contrast capitalism has created “indifference towards its content,” and has become a *Being-for-itself* in “abstraction from all other being.”³⁸

As presented in the 1844 manuscripts, Marx’s critique of Hegel can be summarized as follows: for Hegel, alienation is a process occurring only abstractly, only in *thought*. He grasps the estrangement of humanity, but only *ideally*, not in *reality*. For Hegel, human essence is mind, thought, self-consciousness. For Marx it is social, practical, producing man. The importance of Hegel for Marxism is his discovery of alienation and what Marx characterizes as “the dialectic of negativity as the moving and producing principle.”³⁹ To Hegel’s idealism the young Marx opposes a “consistent naturalism or humanism.”⁴⁰

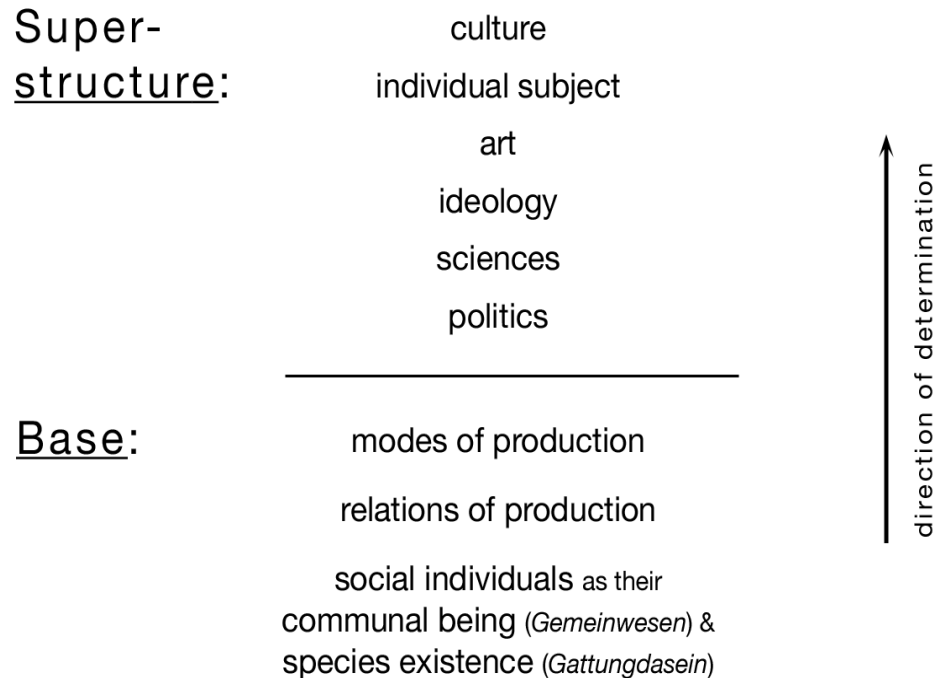
However, in all of this theorizing, the essentially Feuerbachian model of religious alienation is constantly held in the forefront, its pattern unlocking the pattern of economic fetishism and alienation. By applying the method of religious critique in this way Marx is entering new conceptual territory. Marx reads the economy analogously to the way Feuerbach reads religion as an alienated social projection. As

he would later remark in *Capital*, wealth is the “religion of everyday life.”⁴¹ Marx deploys a hermeneutics of suspicion to investigate human socio-economic relations much like David Strauss’ hermeneutics of suspicion directed at the gospels in the *Life of Jesus*. There is an ethical dimension linking each of these critical projects. For Strauss, when Jesus Christ the God-Man of onto-theology is negated by critique by being revealed as myth then humanity, rather than a transcendent Spirit or God, can become the focus of value and concern. Feuerbach extended this strategy into a full scale critique of all religion. Marx extends it even further to look at the totality of human socio-economic relations in the 1844 manuscripts.

In 1845, according to the reading of Louis Althusser, Marx underwent a break with the humanistic tradition, further radicalizing certain core concepts of his philosophy.⁴² Marx now rejects both the Cartesian thinking subject, the self-consciousness of the Idealists, as well as the humanistic practical subject of the 1844 manuscripts as the epistemic and ontological basis of reality. From now on, Marx will not situate any kind of “subject” as the basis of history or reality. Instead he posits all forms of human life as projections of the modes of economic production.

The basic conceptual categories of Historical Materialism and their relationships to each other can be illustrated in the following diagram:

Historical Materialism



$$\frac{\text{superstructure}}{\text{base}} = \frac{\text{conscious}}{\text{unconscious}} = \frac{\text{form}}{\text{essence}} = \frac{\text{appearance}}{\text{reality}}$$

“My analytical method does not start from man but from the economically given social period.” -- Marx

According to this theory the various forms of cultural, social and individual activity are conceived as materially conditioned and determined by the underlying background conditions of the economic modes and relations of production. This background is called the *base*, and the social forms projected by that foundation the *superstructure*. As Marx writes, “My analytical method does not start from man, but from the economically given social period.”⁴³

In *The German Ideology*, written in 1845 and containing one of Marx's clearest summarizations of Historical Materialism he writes,

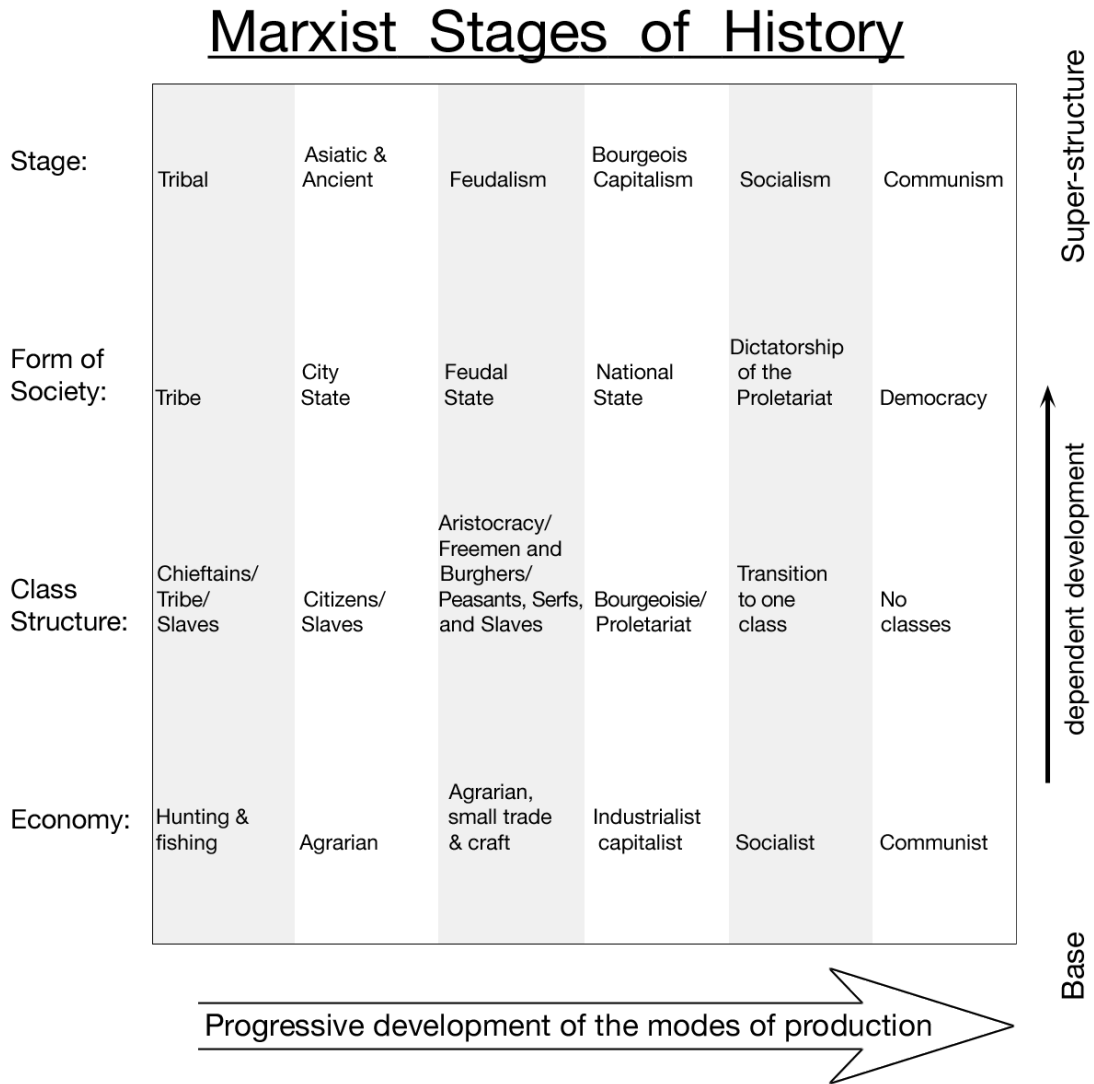
This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the production of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production.⁴⁴

What individuals are, Marx says, *coincides* with their production, but is this thereby an *identity*? Is the individual reducible to production, *nothing but* an epiphenomenon of economic relations, or is there a “chicken and the egg” situation, where individuals both create *and* are created by their circumstances?

Given these questions, it should not come as a surprise that the nature of the relations between the superstructure and the base is one of the major problems in the history of Marxist philosophy. In reductive understandings of this issue the superstructure is viewed as a completely determined epiphenomenon of the base. Some versions of Leninism have had this tendency.⁴⁵ Alternatively, a non-reductive interpretation views the superstructure as an emergent or supervening social reality that has potential autonomy from the Base. The tradition of “Western” or non-Soviet Marxism has tended to follow this interpretive trajectory.⁴⁶

Several implications follow in Marx's theory from the positing of Historical Materialism. Class division, or the division of labor in society is viewed as an expression of the economic relations of production. The social differentiation into classes in turn delineates the structure of civil society, which in turn projects the State

and its legal and political forms. Therefore, if the capacity and the complexity of the mode of production develops over human history then the form of society will develop in parallel, taking on different configurations in advancing stages. These stages as outlined in Marxist theory can be summarized in the following diagram:⁴⁷



There are several important aspects to this progression of stages. The particular social class structure shifts in conformity with the economic mode of each

stage. By the “Ancient” mode of production, Marx has in mind the Hellenic period and the Roman Empire which in Europe transitioned into the feudal societies of the Dark Ages. As for the corresponding “Asiatic” mode of production occurring outside the European frame of reference Slavoj Žižek says it, “... is a kind of negative container: the only true content of this concept is ‘all the modes of production that do not fit Marx’s standard categorization of the modes of production.’”⁴⁸

For Marx, the shift from the feudal mode of production to that of bourgeois capitalism was typified by the French revolution, which expressed *class warfare* between the interests of the nobility and its privilege, and the estates below, and which resulted in the abolishing of the aristocracy as a class. Correspondingly, Marx anticipated a new wave of Socialist revolutions, led by the working class organized against the Bourgeoisie, the new class of privilege. This will lead to a new form of society which he identifies as Communism.⁴⁹

In the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx declares,

All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice. [...] The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it.⁵⁰

For Marx, Communism is a concrete human possibility and the revolution an actual historical occurrence that is already in progress. Theory only recognizes and describes this event, it does not create it. As he writes in *The German Ideology*:

Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call Communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.⁵¹

This movement Marx identifies with labor, with the working class, with the international struggle of the Proletariat for rights in the face of an equally international capitalist market. However, he rejects the option of market reform to adjust disparities in equity. Rather, he believes that Communism provides a more radical option through the elimination of the market of capital altogether.

How is this to come about? Marx repeats his basic argument for the emergence of Communism in a number of contexts, but the essential form of the argument is always very similar. Here it is in *The Communist Manifesto*:

The proletarians cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation. They have nothing of their own to secure and fortify; their mission is to destroy all previous securities for, and assurances of, individual property.⁵²

Or as the same argument appears in *The German Ideology*,

The proletarians, if they are to assert themselves as individuals, will have to abolish the very conditions of their existence hitherto (which has, moreover, been that of all society up to the present), namely, labor. Thus they find themselves directly opposed to the form in which, hitherto, the individuals, of which society consists, have given themselves collective expression.⁵³

The Hegelian structure, the dialectical *grammar* of the argument is immediately apparent. The Proletariat is caught up in a master/slave dialectic with the Bourgeoisie. Through the overthrow of capitalism by the revolutionary Proletariat their negation by capitalist oppression is itself negated. Thereby the existing form of society under capitalism is transcended by a dialectical *aufhebung* towards Socialism.

What point Marx is making through the use of these Hegelian categories? In a

system of hierarchical social privilege, of which capitalism is an example, what attitude individuals have towards that system will tend to depend on their position in that system. Those near the top of its ladder of privilege will support it. Those in the middle will also tend to support it, even if their own circumstances are actually quite difficult, out of hope that they will one day rise further towards the top. Depending on the state of the economy, luck, and other factors beyond individual control many of these people will not succeed. Finally, those in the lowest tier will be against the system and will want to overthrow it entirely. When the system reaches a point where that lowest tier becomes the majority then the system becomes unstable, threatened and revolutionary. Modern capitalism, Marx believes, is such a system of disparity, and therefore the working class the class of revolution.

Looked at this way, the basic revolutionary thesis of Communism becomes phenomenological, descriptive, or sociological, rather than dialectical and philosophical. However, it also loses the quality of *necessity* it assumed from being posed in a philosophical manner. In a situation of mass deprivation there will be political unrest, but will that become radically revolutionary, seeking the fundamental overthrow of existing social relations, or merely rearrange the existing social form until the situation alleviates itself and a new status quo resumes? Isn't Communism, or any theory of a fundamentally improved human society, a radical *possibility* rather than a destined result?

What is supposed to happen when the working class has its revolution? Marx writes,

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible. Of course, in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production; by means of measures [...] as a means of entirely revolutionizing the mode of production.⁵⁴

This phase, known in Marxist theory as the “dictatorship of the proletariat” will collectivize all economic production, removing it from the hands of private interests and manning it through the “establishment of industrial armies.”⁵⁵ Equal rights and opportunity will then be guaranteed to the whole of society.

Initially, the state apparatus seized by the revolution will be used to implement these measures.

When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another.⁵⁶

The State will therefore “wither away” and a new stateless, Communist form of human society take its place.

What is the role of religion in such a society? As religion, for Marx, is reducible to a projection of the alienation of society under the capitalist and other previous modes of production it will also naturally wither away as that alienation is overcome. Religion, which is a human illusion, will cease to exist in the more advanced society of the future.

Another way of expressing Marx’s argument on this point could be put as follows: according to Historical Materialism human society is the superstructure or

projection of the underlying base of the mode and relations of production. It follows from this model that by changing the base, the superstructure also undergoes transformation. Therefore, collectivizing the economy will alter human essence to conform to the new collective relations, thereby bringing about Communist society.

The validity of this argument depends on whether collectivizing the relations of production is necessary and sufficient to result in fundamentally radical social transformation. Or is *more* needed to fundamentally alter society than the political and economic collectivizing of labor? Unfortunately, understanding and defining what this more would be is beyond the parameters of this chapter.

In his formulation of theoretical Communism, Marx is doing something very interesting. He is transposing the eschatological expectation of Christianity from the domain of religion into the domain of politics. By his inversion of idealism Marx transforms, or *unmasks*, the utopian dreams of religion into the revolution.

In an early letter Marx writes:

Just as religion is the table of contents of the theoretical struggles of mankind, so the *political state* enumerates its practical struggles. [...] Like Feuerbach's critique of religion, our whole aim can only be to translate religious and political problems into their self-conscious human form. Our program must be: the reform of consciousness not through dogmas but by analyzing mystical consciousness obscure to itself, whether it appear in religious or political form. It will then become plain that the world has long since dreamed of something of which it needs only to become conscious for it to possess it in reality. It will then become plain that our task is not to draw a sharp mental line between past and future but to *complete* the thought of the past.⁵⁷

But in such a transfer, what assumptions remained unexamined? Religion can prophecy a radical, essential transformation of our reality. Can a political movement

carry out the same program? Marx argues that it must try to do so, because the alternative is a surrender to the present inequities of our actual reality. This is a challenge to ponder deeply. But in accepting this challenge it is necessary to be very critical of the idea of a perfected human society. A millennial, utopian Communism that posits such a possibility is mythological. However, in rejecting such a “Utopian Socialism” we should not reject the radical possibilities of an actual Socialism, of an activist economic politics that can more adequately address our human needs.

Therefore, what I find relevant and vitally important in Marxism is the critique of capitalism and the inequality and oppression that continues to plague human society. It unmask and exposes the need and the possibility of bettering the world. Human society has had different forms in the past. There is therefore no reason to suppose that capitalism is the final economic possibility of human society, or that it is essentially beneficent, fair or free. Perhaps human beings can do much better. Therefore, we must find the next move forward in the global struggle for human rights and dignity.

Chapter 8

Conclusion: Dialectics of Unity and Mediation

In this concluding chapter I will take a step back and make some generalizations regarding the preceding philosophical survey. As I wrote in the introduction there are two aspects of Hegel's logic that are in action among the Young Hegelians, namely what I call the logic of unity and the logic of mediation. The logic of unity focuses on the subject as that which overcomes alienation through self-recognition of itself in the other. The logic of mediation, in contrast, orients itself by exploring the dialectical and relational aspects of phenomenon and resists the idea of a self-sufficient being.¹

I would propose that in both of the two major phases of the Young Hegelian movement, the theological and the political moments, divergences are based around following one or another of these two logical modes. Furthermore, the more philosophically interesting and fruitful choice in each case is based around the rejection of the implications of the logic of unity in favor of the logic of mediation.

In the first, theological moment of Young Hegelianism, the *Life of Jesus* controversy, the logic of unity is found in the Old Hegelian formula of the identity of form and content. Conversely, the Young Hegelians emphasized the logic of mediation, breaking free of the limitations of 19th century conservative pietism and exploring theologically new conceptual terrain which culminated in Feuerbach's critical atheist humanism.

The second, political moment of Young Hegelianism was the split between the Revolutionary Republicans and the Socialists over the political implications of radical Hegelianism. This division of opinion again involved a difference in the use of the two logics. Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner base their political thought on the importance of the free agency of self-consciousness and the ego in accord with the logic of unity. Marx and Engels, in contrast, develop their ideas through use of Feuerbach's concept of the species-being, which follows the logic of mediation. For Feuerbach, Marx and Engels the negation of religion leads to new possibilities of human community, whereas for Bauer and Stirner the negation of religion allows the self-emergence and assertion of absolute self-consciousness.

Bauer and Stirner show that egoism is concealed within the telos of romanticism and humanism. Their triumph of Spirit is ultimately imperial and solipsistic, not relational or egalitarian. Disguised within their humanism is an inability to see and value the other. Who is this free rational subject that is the absolute Spirit and ground of reality except the male, white European, propertied person?

With Stirner we reach the culmination and static dead end of the logic of unity in absolute egoism. Stirner takes its philosophical grammar all the way to its logical conclusion. I would say, following Marx, that the fundamental contradiction of the individual over and against society it leaves unresolved, indeed even exalts in, is an ideological expression of that contradiction as it lies unresolved within the larger bourgeois capitalist society that Stirner was embedded within. His celebration of

egoism is the justification of the egoism within the capitalism of his own society.

The particular religious object aestheticized in thought into the absolute, like Jesus in Christianity, serves to (apparently) disconnect that object from historical mediation with its context. It appears in thought, but not in reality, as the transcendent ground which supports the totality of subordinate particular relations which it alone transcends and legitimates. Challenged, the object of ideology transforms itself to become the mysterious nothingness of negative theology. It then becomes identified with the subject, or human consciousness itself in the humanism of German Idealism. It appears as Fichte's "I," Hegel's Idea, Bauer's self-consciousness and ultimately Stirner's "unique One." But all of this is only ideal, in thought. In reality the human subject is always already in mediation with the totality of nature, not set metaphysically apart as a nothingness transcending the universe. This is the implication of Feuerbach's concept of species-life, and the strength underlying the thrust of his strategy of critique based on the logic of mediation.

It is necessary to go further, however, and critique the limits of Feuerbach's humanism. Of the Left Hegelians only the Socialists develop a critique of humanism itself *and* link this to a critique of liberal free-market capitalism. Why? Because of the socialist emphasis on mediation of individual with the social collective whereby a naïve egoism is dialectically negated. The ego is the immediacy that must pass into mediation with its social community and nature, not stand unique as an absolute negation pulled into a singularity of itself.

The humanism of Feuerbach, Bauer and Stirner contrast's with Marx's

approach of de-centering the subject with his methodology of Historical Materialism, where he resists talking about individuals and instead investigates the social context of productive relations. Marx's anti-humanism is what is both distinctive and important about Marx and his epistemic turn of 1845, especially *vis a vis* its relationship to Marx's reading of the Young Hegelians.

Feuerbach's humanism posits human beings as an end in themselves. However this position, as it plays itself out in Feuerbach's texts involves a lack of ability to see the other. Feuerbach is still in a Hegelian mode of thinking where the species-being of humanity, like Hegel's Spirit, ultimately sees only itself reflected in its relations. Yet Feuerbach's materialism also undermines this view by insisting on the necessary mediation of human species life within context of a human independent nature.

The example of the independence of the animal world will more clearly show the ambiguity and limitations of Feuerbach's liberal humanism. In his *Towards a Critique of Hegelian Philosophy* Feuerbach writes, "It is true that man is the truth of the animal, but would the life of nature, would the life of man itself be perfect if animals did not exist independently?"² The idea that the human is the "truth" of the animal is problematic, because it begs the question of how then animals are independent of the human, something Feuerbach claims in the same sentence. Even more troubling is the example Feuerbach gives: that animal's burden of labor for humans has its chain "broken" by art. A horse pulling a heavy load is redeemed by an artist's beautiful painting of the horse.³ Yet, wouldn't the animal be released from its

burden by actually freeing it from its odious conditions of labor? How does painting the horse ranging free in the meadows actually help the horse? There is a disjunction here of the ideal and the real along the very axis of praxis that Feuerbach's philosophy calls our attention towards. This is the *incomplete* aspect of Feuerbach's humanism that Marxism seizes upon by seeking to radicalize and more concretely manifest its latent critical dimension.

Hegel rejected an "outside" of the totality of rational being as Spirit, emphasizing the category of totality rather than transcendence as with Fichte and Schelling's metaphysical absolute "I." Assuming a rejection of Hegel's pantheism, a position shared by most of the Young Hegelians, there is an easy shift of Hegelianism to naturalism, where nature or material reality, including human social activity and praxis, is the closed complete self-grounded totality. Humanity's species-being becomes the term of relation to that totality, with self-consciousness no longer serving as the transcendent negative that nevertheless positively grounds being on an ideal basis. This leads to philosophical materialism, with an emphasis on the social process of the relationship between the self and nature as an expression of human praxis, which is susceptible to dialectical analysis using the toolkit of Hegelian logic. Feuerbach follows this approach in his analysis of religion in *The Essence of Christianity*, and Marx also adopts this methodology in his theory of Historical Materialism. If the materialist dialectic of history has not (never will?) complete itself, then alienation is ongoing and can also be critiqued in the present. Putting all these factors together gives one the project of philosophy as: (1) naturalism (2)

contextual analysis of society and (3) critique of ideology, which is as good a basic description of the orientation of Marxism as any.

What is missing from the Socialist tendency of the Young Hegelians in terms of the modern Left? I would say they lack a theory of ecology and environmentalism. They have no focus outside Europe. There is no connection of their political activism to a larger critique of European imperialism and colonialism. Also, there is little or no emphasis on issues of gender and race. The early Young Hegelian Socialists have the critique of class down solid, but have yet to apply those insights to the context of gender and race oppression.

Finally, what I like about the Young Hegelians is the way they challenge, critique and build on their inherited traditions. They do not simply endlessly repeat each other or some authority figure after the manner of the Old Hegelians. This is the difference between living philosophy as active enquiry and the dead dogmatism of closed, static, self-referential “Systems.” The Young Hegelian impulse towards creative philosophical critique still has the power to inspire us today in our own thought.

Timeline: the Young Hegelian movement

1830 Period of renewed revolutionary activity in Europe

1831 Death of G.W.F. Hegel

1832 Death of Goethe

Toward a History of Philosophy and Religion in Germany by
Heinrich Heine

1835 *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* by David Strauss

1836 Karl Marx begins studies at the University of Berlin

1837 *In Defense of My Life of Jesus Against the Hegelians* by Strauss

The Holy History of Mankind by Moses Hess

Posthumous publication of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of
History*

Founding of the initially moderate journal *Hallische Jahrbücher für Deutsche Wissenschaft und Kunst*

1838 *Prolegomena to the Wisdom of History* by August von Cieszkowski

1839 *Towards a Critique of Hegelian Philosophy* by Ludwig Feuerbach

1840 Death of King Frederick Wilhelm III and ascension of Frederick Wilhelm IV to throne of Prussia, beginning of shift in political climate against Hegelianism and liberalism

Increasingly radical *Hallische Jahrbücher* becomes vehicle for Young Hegelian writing

Circle of radicals “The Free” (*Die Freien*) are meeting at Hippel’s wine shop in Berlin. Bruno Bauer, Friedrich Engels, Max Stirner, and Arnold Ruge will frequent these gatherings

1841 *Critique of the Synoptic Gospels* by Bruno Bauer

The Trumpet of the Last Judgment Against Hegel the Atheist and Antichrist by Bruno Bauer

Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature by Marx (doctoral dissertation)

The Essence of Christianity by Ludwig Feuerbach

The European Triarchy by Moses Hess

F.W.J. Schelling begins lecturing at Berlin, attended by Engels, Mikhail Bakunin and Soren Kierkegaard

Hallische Jahrbücher suppressed by Prussian government

Founding of *Deutsche Jahrbücher* and *Rheinische Zeitung* as specifically Left Hegelian journals by Arnold Ruge and Moses Hess, respectively

1842 Bruno Bauer denied teaching license by Prussian state

Marx becomes editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*

1843 *Deutsche Jahrbücher* and *Rheinische Zeitung* suppressed by Prussian

government

Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy and Principles of the Philosophy of the Future by Feuerbach

The Jewish Problem and Christianity Exposed by Bruno Bauer

Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right and On the Jewish Question by Marx

Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy by Engels

Either/Or and Fear and Trembling by Kierkegaard

Ruge and Marx relocate to Paris to continue radical publishing

1844 Ruge and Marx's *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, folds after one issue, Marx's arrest for treason ordered by Prussian government

Break between Ruge and Marx, beginning of partnership between Marx and Engels

Germany, A Winter's Tale by Heinrich Heine, published by Marx in the
Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher

Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts by Marx

The Struggle of Critique with Church and State by Edgar Bauer

The Ego and its Own by Max Stirner

Birth of Friedrich Nietzsche

1845 The Free no longer meeting in Berlin, end of the Young Hegelians as a
distinct philosophical and political movement

The Condition of the Working Class in England by Engels

Theses on Feuerbach by Marx

The Holy Family by Marx and Engels

1846 *The German Ideology* by Marx

The Realm of the Understanding and the Individual by Karl Schmidt

Concluding Unscientific Postscript by Kierkegaard

1847 Marx and Engels join the Communist League

1848 *The Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels

Revolution breaks out across continental Europe

Radical journal *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* briefly published by Marx and Engels in support of the revolution

1849 Revolutionary movements of 1848 suppressed throughout Europe
beginning period of renewed political reaction

The Sickness unto Death by Kierkegaard

Marx goes into exile in London, where he begins work on *Capital*

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Chapter 8: Conclusion: Dialectics of Unity and Mediation

¹ Terry Pinkard writes, “Hegel divided his Logic into what he called three ‘books’: Being, Essence, and Concept. The rationale for the division was that there was a different ‘logic’ – the normative structure of our entitlements, commitments, and the paradoxes they generate – depending on the kinds of judgmental relations of which we were speaking.” Pinkard, Terry, *Hegel: A Biography*, Cambridge University Press, New York, New York, 2000, 345.

With regard to the logic of unity Pinkard writes, “Hegel’s major insight in his own *Logic* had to do with the way in which he transformed Hölderlin’s conception of a ‘unity’ that preceded all acts of judgment into his own idiom, while remaining consistent with his views as they were articulated in the *Phenomenology*.” Ibid, 343. “Very generally, Hegel thought that in trying to articulate that primordial unity of thought and being [...] we come to comprehend that the reassurance that we necessarily seek – [...] that thought and being *really are* not irrevocably divorced from each other – *can only* appear at the end of a logical development.” Ibid 344.

The German for “mediation” as used by Hegel is *Vermittlung*. “... any stark opposition between disparate terms is felt, especially by Hegel, to require mediation: not only God and man, but mind and body, state and individual, etc.” “... all determinacy depends on mediation.” Inwood, Michael, “Mediation and Immediacy,” *A Hegel Dictionary*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, UK, 1992, 184-5.

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