

Article

'On the Jewish Question:' A Polemical Précis

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Abstract: The essay is a polemical engagement with Karl Marx's early writing "On the Jewish Question" as it traces its arguably Feuerbachian origin and influence. Althusser in his book *For Marx* allows us to recognize this imprint of Feuerbach in the writings of the young Marx yet also falls short of determining what "On the Jewish Question" conveys in the last instance. As the essay navigates this contested terrain of interpreting Marx's key writing, the importance of revisiting Feuerbach's influence on the young Marx is underscored vis-à-vis Bauer's impoverished Hegelianism in full display in his polemic concerning the emancipation of the Jews. Towards the concluding section, we will connect Marx's concrete-materialist form of critique with which he treated Bauer's polemics to contemporary forms of philosophical materialism in relation to the overlapping logics of late capitalism today.

Keywords: Feuerbachian Hegelianism, epistemological break, *Judenfrage*, philosophical materialism

Preface

This essay is prepared for a polemical engagement with Karl Marx's early writing, considerably pivotal in terms of its connection to so-called late or mature writings culminating in the rather unfinished third volume of *Das Kapital*.¹ Marx's "On the Jewish Question" briefly preceded in writing and composition what is deemed an important collection of texts, unique for their transitional significance or so in the history of Marxist literature.² We are referring to the *Economic and Philosophical*

¹ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. by Bren Brewster (London and New York: Verso Books, 2005), 7.

² See Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Early Writings*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 211-241.

Manuscripts of 1844, simply the *Paris Manuscripts*,³ acknowledged as the precursor of a more mature transition to post-Hegelian musings of Marx.

This sets off "On the Jewish Question" as polemically Hegelian. In his widely influential book *For Marx*, Louis Althusser, for a time a leading intellectual figure of the French left, argued that this crucial text is rather Feuerbachian.⁴ In otherwise much earlier account on the larger aspect of Marx's theoretical influence, or rather, in Frederick Engels' belated text, noting the supposed diacritical proximity of its spirit and content to Marx's positions, in spite of the fact that it was published long after Marx's death,⁵ Feuerbach represents the end of classical German philosophy which Hegel's system, at least towards the latter phase, arguably predominates.⁶ With Engels' and Althusser's diacritical differences on this aspect of the debate alone, the matter of Feuerbach's exact place in Marxist literature is as complicated as the matter of Hegel's relation to Marx. But the label 'Hegelian' (and who says Feuerbach is no Hegelian) sticks consistently regardless of Althusser, and yet the diacritical significance of the Hegelianism of Marx must first be established just as we will try to explain later.

Despite the eclipse of Marxism in recent times (or we can push back the time to the debacle of the '68 revolts in France), we wish to contribute to this ongoing debate by way of navigating, albeit not as thorough as one might expect, Feuerbach's influence on Marx in line with his essay "On the Jewish Question," which we assert is Hegelian yet with a different set of terms in mind. Hopefully this interrogation will put itself on track with the continued relevance of Hegel, especially in contemporary critical theory. The widely caricatured Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, for instance, continues to valorize Hegel along this line,⁷ though certainly not without his trademark Lacanian transposition of the logic of desire that Hegel unlocked in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*,⁸ for instance, in relation to commodity fetishism

³ See Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts and The Communist Manifesto*, trans. by Martin Milligan (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), 13-68. See also Karl Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy," trans. by George Sand, in *Selected writings*, ed. by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 83-121.

⁴ Althusser, *For Marx*, 45.

⁵ Marx died in 1883; Engels' text was published in German three years after.

⁶ See Frederick Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), 584-622.

⁷ See Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2014).

⁸ See Hegel, G. W. F., *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1977). Hegel exposes the master-slave dialectic in relation to desire in the section entitled "Independence and dependence: Lordship and Bondsman" of his book *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.

which forms a crucial part of the historical tenacity of capital that Marx earlier attempted to uncover in his rather more mature works.⁹ In the meantime, the polemical power of Marx's essay "On the Jewish Question" lies in its alleged Hegelianism, a critical theoretical instrument for Marx to launch his later critique of capitalism along with his attempt to divest the intellectual spirit or logic of history of its otherwise profane but compelling articulation of the empirico-historical potential of Hegel's vast speculative system. "On the Jewish Question" represents Marx's early critical exposition of this logic of history, diacritically accentuated by his interrogation of the 'Jew.' Whether he succeeded in overcoming Hegel in his mature writings is another question.¹⁰

Althusser's unique reading of "On the Jewish Question" rests on the supposed predominance of Feuerbachian themes that Marx consistently put into play in the background of his polemic against Bauer, such as "alienation, species being, total being, inversion of subject and predicate, etc."¹¹ In Althusser's words, it is unique for its "ethical [problematization] of understanding human history."¹² But this also provides an unnecessary context for interpreting this early writing of Marx within an uncertain space in relation to the politico-economic orientation of the *1844 Manuscripts* and to the more advanced economic cartography of his later writings. To extend a bit liberally Althusser's contention, vis-à-vis the question of so-called epistemological break,¹³ the *Judenfrage* to which Marx was polemically introduced through a fellow Hegelian, Bruno Bauer, a senior member of the Hegelian school, writing two successive essays on the Jewish question, gave him the precise opportunity in which to work out his lingering Feuerbachian influence, this time to advance a critique of Bauer for his naïve speculations on the issue of political and religious emancipation of the Jews. But supposing these writings attempt to echo Hegel, Bauer's essays are still less clear about

⁹ See Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret," in *Capital: Critique of Political Economy Vol. 1: The Process of Capitalist Production*, trans. by Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 163-177.

¹⁰ In the succeeding discussions, it will become gradually clear that Marx's relation to Hegel can be addressed by way of the question, who's Hegel?

¹¹ Althusser, *For Marx*, 45.

¹² *Ibid.*, 46. Emphasis mine.

¹³ Althusser's theory of the epistemological break, which extends the notion originally coined by Gaston Bachelard meant to designate a leap from pre-scientific to the scientific world of ideas (Althusser, *For Marx*, 249), is a useful cataloguing with respect to our contention on Feuerbach's influence vis-à-vis the "On the Jewish Question." Althusser extended the notion of the break to Marx's own relation to Hegel's idealism. But if, as Althusser asserts, "there are in Hegel utilizable analyses and even a number of naturally-isolated demonstrations of a materialist character (*ibid.*, 192), it follows that the inversion of Hegel is unnecessary. Althusser would later resort to Leninism to settle this inversion thesis (cf. n. 4). What Althusser did not consider is—give and take a number of debatable concerns—this inversion most especially would have applied to Feuerbach.

their Hegelian orientation.

This would suggest that Bauer was not Hegelian enough or radical enough to see through the real issue of Jewish emancipation. Even in Hegel, it is clear that religious emancipation will always falls short of its transcendental aims. In the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel writes:

Religion . . . contains that point which, in spite of all change, failure of actual ends and interests, and loss of possessions, affords a consciousness of immutability and of the highest freedom and satisfaction. If, then, religion constitutes the foundation which embodies the ethical realm in general, and, more specifically, the nature of the state as the divine will, it is at the same time only a foundation; and this is where the two [i.e., the state and religion] diverge. The state is the divine will as present spirit, unfolding as the actual shape and organization of a world.¹⁴

In like manner, religion must give way to philosophy which Hegel identifies with absolute knowing whose dialectical function in the *Phenomenology* is to supersede the previous act of, say, "the [gathering] together of the moments . . . of the life of the Spirit."¹⁵ That act refers to religion, and yet the relation between religion and philosophy dialectically plays out on the level of spiritual history only to ascend further onto a higher plane of political history; there, philosophy, or absolute knowing, becomes represented by the state. Incidentally, both concepts of philosophy and state would be subjected by Marx to further materialist critique, beyond the theoretical terms of the 1844 *Manuscripts* in which he intensified his critique of Hegel, and which, at least for Althusser, would have represented a 'rupture' in his theoretical journey,¹⁶ yet retaining much of the Feuerbachian concepts that informed his earlier works.¹⁷ This is particularly evidenced by

¹⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. by H. B. Nisbet, ed. by Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 292.

¹⁵ Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, 485.

¹⁶ The so-called 'epistemological break.' See Althusser, *For Marx*, 32.

¹⁷ Althusser includes the *Paris Manuscripts* as the point of the early theoretical break with Hegel in the form of concrete-materialist critique of various forms of Hegelianism, among others, at the time (though Althusser was not clear about this point) as opposed to the abstract-speculative critique perfected by Hegel (Althusser, *For Marx*, 37). What Althusser did not entertain is that this new form of critique (concrete-materialist) rather exhibits Marx's Feuerbachian appropriation of Hegelianism that he opposed to the poor Hegelianisms of his contemporaries. Althusser thought that the new form of critique utilized by Marx was a "critique which remains a prisoner of the idealist problematic it hoped to free itself from" (*ibid.*), when in fact, as we are proposing that the seeds of his break with Hegel were already present in as early

texts written after the *Paris Manuscripts*, such as the “Theses on Feuerbach”¹⁸ and *The Poverty of Philosophy*.¹⁹ It would seem that the critique of Hegelianism, including its naïve articulation in Bauer’s two writings on *Judenfrage*, has something to do with its diacritical relation to Feuerbach’s legacy.

Marx’s concept of the Jew in his critique of Bauer may then be interpreted as a critical figure in which Marx would 1) celebrate Feuerbach as an antidote to the speculative front of the Hegelian school, and 2) dismiss all other Hegelianisms for their failure to articulate the ultimate authoritative interpretation of the most radical directions of Hegel’s thought, namely, Feuerbach’s philosophical materialism. This would technically place Feuerbach’s legacy as post-Hegelian. To expand Engels’ declaration of Feuerbach’s materialism as the end of classical German philosophy, Feuerbach arguably represents the beginning of Western speculative philosophy beyond the naivety and the theoretical inadequacies of Hegelianism. And yet, as Marx strongly suggests in “Theses on Feuerbach,” this authoritative Hegelian remained loyal to Hegel. Theoretical life beyond Hegel is unimaginable.

The allure of Feuerbach’s materialism is unquestionable for Marx at the same time that it represents a danger in the eyes of the most leftist of all left Hegelians—Marx himself. If Hegel’s speculative system is already complete in the order of ideas to which even Marx would concede, what necessarily comes next is its supposed *dialectical* materialization (we underscore the term ‘dialectical’ in contrast to the term *diacritical* in relation to the importance of Hegel’s texts), its concrete material form in the sphere of culture, political life, society and history. The inversion of Hegel is at least theoretically sufficient in Feuerbach, so to speak. But all the more, in the eyes of Marx, Feuerbach came up short in terms of identifying morality as the ultimate context of the ideological conflict with pre-bourgeois forms of consciousness, conservative history, in short, which continues to shape the modern mind, and yet not the only institution that anathematizes human emancipatory ideals.²⁰ Hence, Feuerbach essentially lacks an understanding

as the so-called *Early Writings*. There, Marx is certainly Marxist, as we argue against Althusser’s negative correlation between the ‘Marxist’ and the ‘Feuerbachian.’ The ‘concrete-materialist’ critique of the early writings was already “Marxist” in the sense that “it is Feuerbachian through and through” (*ibid.*). This new form of critique was in full display in “On the Jewish Question” and all the way through to “Capital.” The critique of lingering Hegelian themes, for instance, in “Capital” is essentially Feuerbachian, thoroughly Marxist. Here, for polemical purposes, we may want to describe the Marxism of Marx as that which is instilled by his Feuerbachian critique of the poverty of the Hegelians.

¹⁸ Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” in *Selected Writings*, 216-233.

¹⁹ Marx, “Poverty of Philosophy,” in *Selected Writings*, 171-174.

²⁰ Feuerbach proposed Christian faith and love as sources of salvation and happiness. In a lengthy sermon, Feuerbach exhorts his fellow Christians: “[By] what means does man deliver himself from this state of disunion between himself and the perfect being, from the painful

of political economy.

It may also be argued, in light of Althusser's lead, that Marx was also trying to engage Feuerbach's theory of human nature diacritically through the figure of the Jew. But more than the inadequacy of his Hegelianism, Marx attacked Bauer's frivolous idealism, which—if we are right about our next contention with Althusser—ignored Feuerbach's radical Hegelian intervention. But with the figure of the Jew, even Feuerbach's Hegelian limitation is exposed. Marx radicalized this figure to reveal what was at stake in the Jewish Question. More than a critique of the absence of emphasis on political economy in historical transformation, Marx exposed the real danger to metabolize, like an unpardonable attempt to infuse life to the dead, a concept without content.²¹ We refer here to an idea of human nature relieved of its historical actuality.

Any analysis of human nature has the tendency to ontologize what ought to be a shared problematic which cannot be addressed solely by philosophy, or by religion, art and science, each in its isolated interpretive frame. But even with these disciplines collaborating to formulate a unified concept of human nature, the ever-present threat of metaphysics—that which seeks a singular essence underlying things—does not rub away, let us say, magically, under the pretext that collaboration takes the place of the singularity of metaphysical contemplation into the nature of things. Whether it is achieved in collaboration or by pure individual contemplation, such as characterized most of speculative philosophy, any idea of human nature will always remain an ontological question or, ultimately, metaphysical. Nietzsche can be our essential guide—any claim to knowledge is an apology for knowledge.²² Expressed in the Freudo-Lacanianism of Žižek's brand of left Hegelianism, for instance, ontologizing human nature is typical of the

consciousness of sin, from the distressing sense of his own nothingness? How does he blunt the fatal sting of sin? Only by this: that he is conscious of love as the highest, the absolute power and truth, that he regards Divine Being not only as a law, as a moral being, as a being of the understanding; but also as a loving, tender, even subjective human being (that is, as having sympathy with individual man." See Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. by Eliot George (Mt. San Antonio College, Walnut: MSAC Philosophy Group, 2008), 14.

²¹ Feuerbach's materialism, as Althusser also argued, turned out to be pseudo-materialist (Althusser, *For Marx*, 35). In his *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach defines the essence of Man as that which belongs to God, or that external object acting as Man's complete essence (Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 203). This passage points to Feuerbach's proper Hegelianism, the full materialist complement of Hegel's absolute idealism. For his part, Marx's Feuerbachian Hegelianism is an attempt to isolate Feuerbach from the full idealist materiality of Hegel's speculative philosophy. In the end, Marx challenged the theoretical sufficiency of Feuerbach's inversion of Hegel, which he would transpose eventually onto a dialectical materialist inversion of Hegel, the Hegel of Feuerbach.

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too Human*, trans. by Marion Faber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 17.

self-alienation involved in the fantasy one projects onto a self-image, that is, from an imagined absolute outside, which, as Žizek argues, always “conceals a traumatic truth.”²³ This does not have to be a purely psychological phenomenon—traumas extend to the level of population further complicating a historical awareness of the formal location of the individual in the dynamic transition or movement of history largely independent of it.²⁴ This historical complication dawned on Bauer in the form of a poorly masticated Hegelian image of emancipation in the figure of the Jew—a fantasy Bauer practically referred back onto the individual sphere, ignoring its necessary entangled relation to history.

Aside from its polemical attack against the Hegelianism of Bauer, Marx also risked a conception of the Jew based on what he deemed as the outcome of the historical nexus between philosophy and the state, acutely articulated in Hegel’s system that Bauer in his inadequate understanding of Hegelianism, besides his blindness to history, otherwise hugely ignored. This obliviousness is sharply dramatized in his conception of the emancipation of the Jews, which, in our understanding of its poor Hegelianism, is as much oblivious as it is an attempt to ontologize human nature. Hence, the figure of the Jew is the figure of the inadequacy of Hegelianism in the absence of Feuerbachian materialism, and yet, this absence may turn out to be the opportunity for Marx to display, arguably, the correct form of Hegelianism.

‘On the Jewish Question’ and Other Marginal Polemics

It may as yet be significant of a person, such as the figure of the Jew, but taking that into hand, that is, as a figure, implies that the actual entity is negligible. As a figure, the Jew has ceased to be a person of some kind, yet this makes the Jew doubtlessly real. A figure can be a number, a shape, a symbol, a diagram perhaps. But more than any predication we can give of the Jew, the Jew rather exists in the utmost rational sense.

Assuming it to be true and exact, Hegel’s dialectical idealism (the real is rational) here touches upon the figure of the Jew, as yet mediated by the most radical abstractive method, far more advanced than the logic of Aristotle, correctly anticipating the logical perfection of the bourgeois state. There, logic assumes a real concrete potential. The only unique discovery of Marx in this respect is that for him the resolution of history can never be a logical one. But imagine here a situation where there is no logical reality to begin with, a kind of reality that is in Marxist terms ‘essentially

²³ Žizek, *Less Than Nothing*, 239.

²⁴ See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “The German Ideology,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), 42.

impoverished,' such that history in the last instance will have to be summoned either to transform its logical realism into the fullness that it can only assume, or unmask its pretentious (because logical) claim to the concrete, such as the 'Jewish Question' taken apart from the question of real human emancipation, which—as Marx elaborates—does not even approach the level of a real question.

With Hegel on the background, the Jew must first logically exist in the same manner that the bourgeois state must exist and must only logically exist for capitalism to be abstracted from it. Lest we lose the essential point, the bourgeois as the active subject of the dispensation of capital is the real subject behind the abstraction. The bourgeois invents himself as he invents the logical reality wherein he exactly fits. Thus, the bourgeois is the perfect metaphysician. Paradoxically, it is with the view to shattering his illusion of independent logical formality that he unwittingly invents the state in terms of realizing his true historical, nay, self-destructive role. Marx would rely on the progressive section of the bourgeoisie to launch socialism by actually perfecting the dissolution of its class through the creation of its dialectical complement in the figure of the proletariat who will carry out the real radical—because it is the most actual—demolition of the bourgeois class.²⁵

But we are still on the Jewish question: If it is to be found out that the Jew does not exist (that is, in the sense Bauer framed the logical existence of the Jew, rather defectively conceived along Hegelian terms), the most immediate next step, assuming a series of abstraction has exhausted itself in earnest, is to finally invent it (which applies to Marx's Jew, for which he was uncritically branded as anti-Semite,²⁶ at the expense of Bauer's previous, albeit disappointingly Hegelian sorcery). We must emphasize again that Marx was no stranger to the exhaustive dialectic of Hegelian abstraction. And now with Marx on the background, stealing Bauer's moment, the Jewish question is reduced to the question of inventing the Jew, that is to say, of producing a figure that can correlate itself unfortunately to an absent, if not ill-conceived, entity. Here, the goal of inventing the Jew is to expose its concrete limit in Bauer's conception of the Jew, rather thought in abstraction. In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx describes this active kind of misconception, quite fittingly, as abstraction in contrast to the critical function of analysis.²⁷ On further reference to abstraction, Marx describes this opposite complement

²⁵ *The Communist Manifesto*, written with Engels, is the classic text on this aspect of class conflict (Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," 203-243).

²⁶ See, for instance, Michael Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer, eds., *Antisemitism: Myth and Hate from Antiquity to Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 153-155, for a brief but substantial discussion on the radical anti-Semitism of Marx, which does not necessarily mean he was actually anti-Semite.

²⁷ Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy," in *Selected Writings*, 217.

of analysis as “what language means,” which—he goes on to elaborate—“is certainly not Hebrew.”²⁸ What is not Hebrew in terms of the language with which Marx framed its diacritical function in *The Poverty of Philosophy* written much later is treated otherwise as almost, if not as singularly, Hebrew in Bauer’s polemics concerning the Jewish question, namely, as “the language of pure reason, separate from the individual.”²⁹ Apparently, what is not Hebrew is the Greek, which invented the pure language of reason of which Bauer (including M. Proudhon as in the case of Marx’s polemic in *The Poverty of Philosophy*) was exceptionally ignorant, mistaking the ‘Hebrew’ for the Greek, and the pre-modern or pre-bourgeois for the Hegelian, modernist appropriation of the Greek logos.

Curiously though, the language of pure reason generates the logical concept of the Jew. The Jew must be afforded beforehand the logical right to exist for any kind of logical abstraction to be obtained consistently and to the point directly. Apropos of the Jewish Question, Marx’s attack against Bauer is a declaration that the latter was not being Hegelian enough, but in so doing Marx had to extract, tease the political unconscious out of Bauer’s head. As Marx states, “Let us not seek the secret of the Jew in his religion, but let us seek the secret of the religion in the real Jew.”³⁰ Bauer lacked this conception of the real Jew. The real is rational—he forgot his lesson. It is in this sense that he did not have the real question in mind. It belongs to Marx, the avenger of the real question. The real Jew is one who is not (Jew), the religious secretly at odds with the essence of religion. The rational is also the valorization of contradiction so dear to Hegel; thus, the real Jew is one who is deeply irreligious, atheistic to the core which, however, he does not profess. The entire logic of Hegelian negativity was too misty for him such that, as Marx puts it, “Bauer here transforms the question of Jewish emancipation into a purely religious question,”³¹ forgetting all the while that religion is nothing religious. Marx goes on to elaborate: “What was, in itself, the basis of the Jewish religion? Practical need, egoism.”³² Here, Marx is at his most forcefully Hegelian (let us remind ourselves of the diacritical value of the term ‘Hegelian’ when it is tagged onto Marx), which must first detect negativity in reality for that reality to be real. The figure of the Jew is right on target as it complicates the question of economic emancipation, complication being a chief point of access to understanding the dialectical resolution of conflict which proceeds, as Marx writes in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, from

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 219.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 217.

³⁰ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” in *Early Writings*, 236.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 235.

³² *Ibid.*, 238.

"affirmation, negation, and negation of the negation."³³

Having extended itself onto a logical reality, the figure of the Jew becomes the unlikely starting point for radicalizing the project of human emancipation, which must first pass through the resolution of the religious question into a political one, then the political into economic resolution, underscoring its proximity to the full attainment of the species-life of Man.³⁴ The 'Jew' then performs a metonymic operation, a part taken for the whole, the whole being the real Jew. Recall here that the real Jew is negative. The process of transfiguration from metaphor to metonymy has to see to it that at each end of the process, a level of progressive abstraction must be displayed; the more then it assumes the property of the real, rather beautifully expressed in Marx: "[The] real, individual man resumes the abstract citizen into himself."³⁵ By failing to understand its negativity, Bauer was oblivious to the fact that the more politically emancipated the Jew is, the less free he could be under the same conditions in which he finds himself as a Jew.

At this juncture, the question of 'who' the Jew is transforms itself into 'what' the Jew is, which—as Bauer hugely ignored—is dialectically related to the state. Incidentally, in the *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*, Marx faulted Hegel for "identifying what is with the essence of the state" when it is obvious at this point that the essence of the state lies in its negativity: "That the real is rational is contradicted by the irrational reality which at every point shows itself to be the opposite of what it asserts, and to assert the opposite of what it is."³⁶ Like a cunning twist of history, Marx had never been at his most Marxist (yes, Marxist in the sense of Feuerbach's Hegelianism, and not Hegelian as in the Hegelianism of the Hegelians), despite his claim to the contrary that he is not a Marxist,³⁷ by then practically declaring Hegel himself to be unHegelian, forgetting his core lesson on negativity. Marx writes:

Instead of showing how 'universal concern' acquires 'subjective and therefore real universality' and how it acquires the form of the universal concern, Hegel shows only that formlessness is its subjectivity, and a form without content must be formless. The form acquired by matters of universal concern in a state, which is not the state of such universal concerns, can only be a non-form, a self-deceiving, self-contradictory form, a pseudo-form

³³ Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy," in *Selected Writings*, 217.

³⁴ Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Early Writings*, 234.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State," in *Early Writings*, 127.

³⁷ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Engels to Bernstein," in *Collected Works*, Vol. 46 (New York: International Publishers, 1992), 356.

whose illusory nature will show itself for what it is.³⁸

Apropos of the question of the Jew, with Marx apparently standing Hegel on his head,³⁹ the real question lies in the negativity of the Jew. When it appears somewhere as figure, it manifests itself elsewhere as metaphor, then as metonymy, creating a virtual Borromean knot of imponderables.⁴⁰ We obtain here a homology between the bourgeois State and the real Jew—each in its pseudo-form, as state and as a Jew. If the State is thus essentially absent, what would then be the terms of the political emancipation of the Jew? The kind of issues that Bauer raised against the Christian state therefore do not entirely reflect what ought to be the proper Hegelian critique of the state in terms of its connection to ideology, represented by philosophy, or rather, ideology's most expressive spiritual form. In summary, Bauer rejected the political emancipation of the Jews because he mistrusted the Christian state, which would never grant the Jew first his religious emancipation; here, Bauer equates political emancipation with religious emancipation. In response, Marx argued that it is possible for the Jews to be politically emancipated without being religiously emancipated. Yet Marx also acknowledged that the political emancipation of the Jews was not possible in Germany, not because the German state is predominantly Christian in influence, but rather because, as he wrote in a later essay, unlike in France, where "partial emancipation [or political emancipation] is the basis for universal emancipation [theoretically, human emancipation],"⁴¹ in the Germany of Marx's and Bauer's time,

³⁸ Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State," in *Early Writings*, 127. In this passage Marx is essentially repeating what is already formulated by Feuerbach concerning Hegel. Althusser is an excellent aid: "[The] theoretical principles on which this critique of Hegel were based were merely a reprise, a commentary or development and extension of the admirable critique of Hegel repeatedly formulated by Feuerbach" (Althusser, *For Marx*, 37).

³⁹ Engels made the famous remark (in "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy") that Marx stood Hegel on his head. This was made 40 years after the publication of *The German Ideology*, considered as a pivotal collaborative work of Marx and Engels. The diacritical value of this remark cannot be ignored, especially the context of time it brings to our attention vis-à-vis our claim that Marx's Hegel is Feuerbachian. Concerning Marx's break with Hegel, Engels pushed the timeframe back to an earlier point, the "Theses on Feuerbach." Here, we are on the side of Leopold's claim regarding the transitional importance of "On the Jewish Question" compared to the "Theses on Feuerbach" (cf. n. 4). But where Leopold would not wish to muddy the waters with respect to the popular acknowledgement of Hegel's influence on the young Marx, we are more inclined to question the proposition that 'all is water under the bridge.'

⁴⁰ Partial reference to Lacan's concept of *aphanisis* in relation to the problematic of the 'subject' is intended. Lacan writes: "[When] the subject appears somewhere as meaning, he is manifested elsewhere as 'fading,' as disappearance" (See Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 207).

⁴¹ Marx, "A Contribution to Hegel's Critique of the Philosophy of Right," in *Early Writings*, 255; emphases mine.

universal emancipation preconditions “any partial emancipation,”⁴² hence, the very impossibility of any talk of emancipation. It is in this sense that Germany, to extend the place of Hegel in the comparison between the two countries, is a bad Hegelian, diacritically represented by Bauer’s misunderstanding of the essence of the state, which is not to say that real Hegelianism actually thrived in France. Rather in France, there were as many competent rivals of Hegel except they were economists. Marx’s polemical attack against M. Proudhon, whose book *The Philosophy of Poverty* was the exact diacritical target of *The Poverty of Philosophy*, should rather be taken in this light.

But to return to our main concern: The state must logically exist for political emancipation to even acquire its most basic philosophical or ideological form. At least in Hegel, the state exists in a kind of dialectical negativity; it exists as a unity of opposites. Simply put, the state must exist at least in Bauer’s head as a logical reality (there goes the pseudo-form that Bauer forgot to imbibe as a Hegelian). But even this simple condition of dialectical idealism is missing in Bauer as we can deduce from Marx’s criticism of his conflation of political emancipation and human emancipation (including the Jew as a member of humanity): “[Bauer’s] own mistake lies clearly in the fact that he subjects only the ‘Christian state’ to criticism, and not the ‘state’ as such.”⁴³ What is definitively most lacking in Bauer is the next step, that is, to embrace the most radical expression of Hegelianism in Feuerbach’s materialist philosophy, which Marx embraced in full display in his critique of Bauer’s *Judenfrage*.

Pre-critical Hegelianism vs. Critical Hegelianism

Bauer is at least Hegelian in its pre-critical or pre-bourgeois form. His Hegelianism suffered in two ways: 1) he was unfortunately unFeuerbachian, as we argued in the Preface, and for that 2) his ideological mindset belonged to pre-bourgeois consciousness, enough to situate him outside the Hegelian ambit. It is of interest to note that Feuerbach is already hinting at a poor version of Hegelianism in the following observations on the relation of Hegel’s doctrine to religion in *The Essence of Christianity*: “The learned mob was so blind in its hatred towards Hegel as not to perceive that his doctrine, at least in this relation, does not in fact contradict religion — that it contradicts it only in the same way as, in general, a developed, consequent process of thought contradicts an undeveloped, inconsequent, but nevertheless radically identical conception.”⁴⁴ Transposing Feuerbach onto the Jewish

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” in *Early Writings*, 216.

⁴⁴ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 186.

question, it would turn out that either of the two—religious emancipation or political emancipation—from the Christian state is unHegelian. One simply has to wait for the Christian state to fulfill its Hegelian mission to become a universal state. Feuerbach's inversion of Hegel lies in this: while waiting for the Christian state to transform itself into a desirable state, Christianity must perfect itself into a true religion, that is, through love. However, the more perfectly Christian it is, the more unfortunately it is unHegelian—in secular terms—the more it negates the state.⁴⁵ In a lengthy passage, Marx conveys what is also at stake in Feuerbach's (Christian) inversion of Hegel via an exposition of Bauer's (Jewish) Hegelianism:

The perfected Christian state is rather the atheist state, the democratic state, the state which relegates religion to the level of the other elements of civil society. The state which is still theological, which still officially professes the Christian faith, which still does not dare to declare itself a state, has not yet succeeded in expressing in secular, human form, in its reality as state, the human basis of which Christianity is the exaggerated expression. The so-called Christian state is simply the non-state, since it is only the human basis of the Christian religion, and not Christianity as a religion, which can realize itself in real human creations.⁴⁶

In place of Feuerbach's Christian Hegelianism, Marx advanced the so-called concrete-materialist form of critique, as in the above case, the critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state, and also of Feuerbach's and Bauer's conceptions of Christianity and of the Christian state, respectively. But notwithstanding the concrete-materialist form of critique which could represent Marx's successful attempt to invert Feuerbach's Hegelianism, Marx's arguable Marxism (read: Feuerbachian) rather continues to shape his late or mature writings as he probed deep into economic theories, sanding away the rough edges of the concept of economic emancipation, even as he is still there struggling with how to invert this most radical Hegelian.⁴⁷ Even as

⁴⁵ Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Early Writings*, 223.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* See also Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Selected Writings*, 55.

⁴⁷ Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, 383). The controversial passages that refer to this aspect of inversion thesis may be found in Engels' text: "[The] dialectic of Hegel was placed upon its head; or rather, turned off its head, on which it was standing, and placed upon its feet" (*ibid.*). An interesting remark by Engels concerning this concept (dialectical materialism) also directs us to the Feuerbachian Hegelianism of Marx when he refers to a certain German worker, Joseph Dietzgen, who, according to Engels, "rediscovered" the materialist concept "independently of [Marx and

Marx set his eyes on the future, the future beyond capitalism of which he could barely sketch, at least before writing (with Engels) the *Manifesto for the Communist Party*, the concrete-materialist critique would carry on in form the speculative (Hegelian) character of Feuerbach's philosophical materialism, rather usable compared to Hegel's own dialectic. After the *Manifesto*, an initial call for the tactical unity of the working class to challenge the exploitative relation of capital and labor, etc., the beyond of capitalism, which would require a far more advanced theoretical perspective, vis-à-vis the formlessness of the future, nevertheless, would continue to haunt Marx.

Rather crucial in Marx's initial attempt to put the issue of Jewish emancipation on track with the nascent idea of the future beyond capitalism,⁴⁸ Bauer sought to remand Hegel's notion of negativity, for instance, to the custody of time past. That is a time of history in which, among others, but singularly the most significant in terms of Marx's critique of Bauer, a certain notion of subjectivity had yet to release itself from nature, thereof, the proper recognition of nature as a kind of inverse subjectivity, in which Man and Nature dialectically co-determine each other, was entirely absent from social consciousness. Marx writes in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*:

The universality of man is in practice manifested precisely in the universality which makes all nature his inorganic body—both inasmuch as nature is (1) his direct means of life, and (2) the material, the object, and the instrument of his life-activity. Nature is man's inorganic body—nature, that is, insofar as it is not itself the human body. Man lives on nature—means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous intercourse if he is not to die.⁴⁹

Because he was incapable of distinguishing political emancipation from universal human emancipation, Bauer's Hegelianism essentially conflates, in the background of his polemics, nature and subjectivity as positive unity altogether in its pre-bourgeois form. The undialectical positive unity of nature and subjectivity works in Bauer's analysis of Jewish

Engels] and even of Hegel" (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, 383-384), indicating, among others, that Feuerbach is the single theoretical influence behind the formulation as well as the rediscovery of the concept. Needless to say, the concept of dialectical materialism is already implied in Hegel's system, which Feuerbach was the first to explore.

⁴⁸ This, for instance, is the basic position of David Leopold. Cf. n. 4.

⁴⁹ Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in Marx and Engels, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts and The Communist Manifesto*, 75-76. The same citation can be found in Marx, "The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in *Early Writings and Selected Writings*, 328, and 89-90, respectively.

emancipation in two ways: 1) political emancipation lacks an essential logical relation to the state, and 2) human emancipation lacks the initial force of political emancipation which, above all, must demand that the state acts as a state, that is, “a true, a real state.”⁵⁰ As the logical reality of the state is absent in Bauer’s rhetoric of Jewish emancipation so is an intelligent and critical appraisal of the power of consciousness, at this stage, political consciousness, to imagine itself occupying a position external to social reality, logically represented by the state as the focal point of political emancipation (hence, any suggestion of fantastic sorcery as in Zizek’s Lacanian notion of ‘concealed trauma’ is relatively ruled out⁵¹), of course, without severing the dialectical connection between the two to the extent that logical reality becomes ultimately the only reality that matters, or for that matter the state taken apart from economic reality (else, we are back to Zizek—it is nothing but fantasy). In Bauer’s negative analysis of the political emancipation of the Jew, what obtains rather is its empty rhetoric vis-à-vis the absence of a logical reality that it can demand, or rather because it does not demand it, namely, that the state behaves as real or rational. (We are not suggesting with respect to this reluctance vis-à-vis the state that Bauer is closely affirming Feuerbach’s position in relation to the Christian state, that it is enough to wait for the state to recognize religion, including Judaism. Bauer, as we emphasized, lacked a critical understanding of the Hegelian speculative concept of the state; in Feuerbach the state retained its Hegelian negativity and, in fact, attained the purity of the negative, albeit speculatively, which unfortunately also confined his materialism to a defense of both Christianity and the Christian state). Bauer simply cannot demand the state that he does not actually recognize in its true, real (Hegelian) form.

But, in the final analysis, Bauer would be proven essential to the bourgeois confirmation of the state as an instrument of the status quo by a powerful kind of illogical realism, the illogical pre-bourgeois realism of the unity of state and religion, or their imagined political complementarity, imagined because the real Jew demanding political emancipation, sans the needless conflation of the two ‘states’—the Christian state and the state as such—must be an atheist. Bauer’s defective Hegelianism would be upheld by political economy, which thrives under the same conditions that sanction mass ignorance as the ignorance—Feuerbach is right to the point—of the ‘learned mob.’ This rather powerful complementarity inscribed in political economy (even at its most advanced form, apparently transcendent to pre-bourgeois consciousness which conflates state and God) conceals what in fact is running the entire show. What could accomplish a rather difficult fusion of

⁵⁰ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” in *Early Writings*, 216.

⁵¹ Cf. n. 24.

the profane and the sacred in the spirit of the negation of negation is something that is no longer a secret, at least for Marx:

Why are cotton, potatoes and spirits⁵² the pivots of bourgeois society? Because the least amount of labour is needed to produce them, and, consequently, they have the lowest price [In] a society founded on poverty the poorest products have the fatal prerogative of being used by the greatest number.⁵³

There, Marx is quintessentially Hegelian. The key to Jewish emancipation or, for that matter, human emancipation is economic in nature whose present aim, rather, is to produce poverty on a mass scale.

The Real Hegelianism of Marx

In summary, apropos of the Feuerbachian Hegelianism of Marx, we can briefly run through our major contention with Althusser. Althusser, in fact, questioned whether the inversion of Hegel in Marx is well-founded.⁵⁴ He pointed out Engels' own declaration in behalf of Marx that the latter stood Hegel on his head,⁵⁵ thereby inverting his idealism into materialism. We agree with Althusser that this is not the exact inversion of Hegel, if we are looking for its textual indications in Marx, but disagree with him in terms of diacritically enlarging Engels' commentary to expose the implausibility of the inversion thesis.

At least partially, Engels is pointing to the right direction. What again escapes Althusser is that the inversion in its simplest form is already at work in Marx's embrace of Feuerbach's Hegelianism, which dates back to the *Early Writings* (this Althusser also acknowledged but did not stretch much further). Hence, the inversion of Hegel would have most clearly applied to the Hegel of Feuerbach. One may wonder if Marx had approached Hegel independently of Feuerbach. This question is already addressed by Marx himself, noting his professed declaration of his alleged break with Feuerbach in two representative works, "Theses on Feuerbach" (1845) and "Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," which appeared fourteen years later (1859). There is no doubt Marx read Hegel independently but his theoretical intervention in Hegelianism is mediated by Feuerbach's appropriation of Hegel. Thus, his break with Feuerbach is a break with Hegel,

⁵² As in superstition.

⁵³ Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy," in *Selected Writings*, 214.

⁵⁴ Althusser, *For Marx*, 92, n. 5.

⁵⁵ Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach," 383.

though not entirely in the sense of ignoring Hegel's own system independent of his materialist interpreter, Feuerbach. Here, at least, we can agree with Engels that in its "Hegelian form" Hegel's own dialectic is unusable.⁵⁶

Althusser ignored this suggestion of Engels with his own words: "if the inversion of Hegel into Marx is well-founded, it follows that Hegel could only have been already a previously inverted materialism."⁵⁷ This is exactly what our claim is all about because for him, the so-called epistemological break would have to mean a break with Hegel, the philosopher, but unmediated by Feuerbach. Here, Althusser would not accept that the break would have applied first to Feuerbach, then to Hegel.⁵⁸ The break with Feuerbach's Hegel would thus mean, albeit a bit unsuccessful, the break with Feuerbach's sufficient inversion of Hegel. There, Marx became the Marxist that he is, the Feuerbachian through and through but without embracing the full extent of the latter's Hegelian inversion. If anything, Marx died to the being that he became, a Marxist. Despite his rejection of the Marxist label, his failure to actually transcend the philosophical problematics that Feuerbach initiated vis-à-vis Hegel, and this certainly is not a new conception, as Levine,⁵⁹ and somewhat Althusser (a convert of Leninism) before him, would also lump Hegel, Bauer and Marx under the same category, simply, that they considered theory to be antecedent to political organization, made him almost as if, and again, by a cunning twist of history, the true representative of the end of classical German philosophy that his friend Engels, to some extent, hastily attributed to Marx's predecessor, Feuerbach. Marx stretched those philosophical problematics to the point of exhaustion. But his saving grace perhaps, vis-à-vis the changing dynamics of capital, was that he died with an unfinished work that would help revive interest, henceforth, in philosophical problematics, under new forms as well as with new content to sustain thought in its difficult confrontation, as it did to Marx in his time with the material challenges of history.

Conclusion

If the real question of the Jew escapes Bauer, it is rather with the misconception of the problem that his question uncovers, in the final analysis, the state of bourgeois consciousness at the time in relation to the mode of production peculiar to bourgeois-Capital relation. Suffice it to say that this unique relation has drastically changed in the last 300 years. In short, capitalism has historically progressed in terms of its peculiar way with

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Althusser, *For Marx*, 92, n. 5

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁹ Cf. n. 4.

democratizing logical reality, or rather its historical consciousness of the linear necessity to expand and enrich its speculative dimension (arguably, since Hegel), vis-à-vis the historical dynamics of philosophical materialism since Feuerbach, not to mention the continuing resistance of critical masses to capital's role in human alienation.

Arguably, Marx's exposition of the logic of Hegelianism in the transfiguration of the Jew, from religious to political to economic, would somehow prefigure succeeding diacritical expositions of the logics of worlds,⁶⁰ as capitalism sustains its continuity in the realm of ideas, from the metaphysical to the post-metaphysical, albeit in more unrecognizable forms than it was in Marx's time. Today the figure of the Jew that misled Bauer may have already transformed into various post-metaphysical figures, such as nature,⁶¹ cyborg,⁶² machine,⁶³ precariat,⁶⁴ etc, which also continue to complicate contemporary philosophical materialism. This is not to say that there should be a single or correct form of philosophical materialism with the same theoretical force as Marx exhibited in full display against the inadequacy of the Hegelianism of his time, but rather to say that perhaps a similar approach of Marx in terms of exposing the logical reality at work in today's capitalism remains a viable line of inquiry and contestation towards overcoming contemporary forms of alienation.

For one thing, while there are many other similar contemporary attempts, Alain Badiou's concept of materialist dialectic by far offers the most compelling and militant renewal of materialist philosophy since Marx. In the sequel to his *Being and Event*,⁶⁵ Badiou opposes his concept of 'materialist dialectic' to the postmodernist concept of 'democratic materialism' which, he argues, represents capital's latest alibi for incarcerating thought, bodies, modes of appearing, and truths, altogether within the confines of an alienating rhetoric to which human subjects readily adjust their "fettered, quartered and soiled body" to what he then describes, in reference to late capitalism's global commodification of desire, as "fantasy and dream."⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Full reference to Badiou's work is intended. See Alain Badiou, *Logics of World: Being and Event*, 2, trans. by Alberto Toscano (London and New York: Continuum, 2009).

⁶¹ See Paul Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind," in *Nature* 415 (23), 2002.

⁶² See Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); also, Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

⁶³ See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Vol. 2, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

⁶⁴ Guy Standing, *Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London and New York: The Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

⁶⁵ See Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London and New York: Continuum, 2005).

⁶⁶ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 2.

Badiou identifies democratic materialism with “pragmatism of desire and the obviousness of commerce”⁶⁷ to emphasize the fact that there is not a single logic that governs the present but rather multiple logics taken as natural in the sense that “[their] imposition or inculcation is freely sought out.”⁶⁸

This obtains as contemporary capitalism, in light of its huge investments in artificial intelligence, finance algorithms, medical science, etc., not to mention their applications on enhancement and upgrading of global military assets by the world's major economies,⁶⁹ also undergoes its own experiment in exploring ideas of human nature. This is precisely the time when philosophical materialism, or whatever names it can express itself in a radically post-Hegelian world, can expose the logics of today's history while capital itself is in dire need of a new speculative structure to articulate its essence. We are not saying that capitalism is dying; on the contrary, it is precisely its lack of a single unifying speculative structure today that constitutes its most expressive and logical form of historical ascendancy, yet also its most threatening. In the same manner as Bauer tried to lend capitalism its philosophical structure in the guise of the Jewish question, various forms of ideological transfigurations and refigurations of capital today provide its continuity with multiple logical realities. But if capitalism, once defended by all sorts of defective Hegelianisms, such as Bauer's philosophical speculation on the destiny of the Jew, which unwittingly endorsed the kind of obscurantism upon which 19th century ruling ideology for a time became reliant, could with its war-machines liquidate or aid the genocide of six million Jews, there could be no question as to its real capability to wipe out for good its *singular most absolute* form of logical reality—this in spite of the *multiple logics* of democratic materialism that Badiou uncovered not to no avail – namely, the planet that capitalism has plundered for the last 300 years.

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