



MAX STIRNER AND THE JEWISH QUESTION

The “Jewish Question,” as a specific topic, was first taken up after the French Revolution of 1789, and designated as “*la question juive*.” As with every question, it implies a problem, and a problem asks for a solution. Needless to say, in the case of this question, a “final solution” was proposed and acted upon by the Nazis.

It seems agreed among scholars like Lucy Davidowicz¹ that this question first appeared in Germany as the title of an 1843 essay by Bruno Bauer, *Die Judenfrage* [*The Jewish Question*]. As it happened, at that same time, Bruno Bauer had found a close friend in Max Stirner, and they remained friends until Stirner’s death. They both experienced and contributed to the intellectual ferment of the *vormärz*, the period shortly before the German revolution of March 1848. This being the case, it seems that what Stirner had to say about Bauer’s *Judenfrage* would be of interest, as well as what Stirner himself held in regard to the question. Perhaps, because of his friendship with Bauer, there has been a natural tendency to simply dismiss Stirner’s views as being in accord with such *vormärz* radicals and antisemites as Ludwig Feuerbach, Arnold Ruge, Georg F. Daumer, and Mikhail Bakunin.² This is not the case.

Shortly after the death of Hegel in 1831, his philosophy—as if in accord with his own logic—found itself sundered into two antithetical schools, the “Young” and the “Old.” The first school comprised his more politically active young followers who were convinced that in Hegel one could find the rationale for revolution, for a “praxis” that would overthrow the reactionary regimes of both Evangelical Lutheranism and Prussian Monarchy. The March revolutions of 1848 would put their theories to the test. On the other side of Hegelianism were the conservative “Old” Hegelians, who held the opposite view. Most were established academics who seemed secure in their governmental positions and were not about to see in Hegel’s doctrines anything other than a philosophical bulwark for the given order of Church and State.

The “Young Hegelian” school suddenly came into being in 1835 with a brilliant theological study, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*

[*Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet*]. It was written by a young and little-known theologian, David Friedrich Strauss, who, candidly, and to the shocked embarrassment of the “Old Hegelians,” declared that his work was inspired by Hegel’s philosophy. His reduction of the miracles related to the life of Jesus into a collection of mythic tales based upon Old Testament expectations simply destroyed the claim that Hegelianism and orthodox evangelical doctrine were compatible. As the Prussian Monarchy was supportive of, and supported by, the Orthodox Church, Strauss’ work was even more disturbing than might be expected from a biblical study. Strauss’ work had clearly confirmed the dire prediction of Berlin’s leading Pietist, Ernest Hengstenberg:

Hegelian philosophy will in the near future develop into a much more diabolical force than the declining rationalism. It is our holy duty to watch out and to attack immediately³

Alarmed, the Old Hegelians, such as Karl Göschel and Georg Gabler, hurriedly looked about for someone to rebut Strauss’ contentions. They decided to designate a young and talented theology Professor, Bruno Bauer. Their decision proved to be a disaster. Bauer not only failed to create a credible refutation of Strauss, but also soon turned into an atheist himself, with his own theories as to the life of Jesus—it was a fiction. Within a few years, Bauer was finally deprived of his teaching certification, and by 1842 had become the hero and *de facto* leader of Berlin’s Young Hegelians. Max Stirner was a member of the informal group, and soon became a close and life-long friend of Bauer. He also met and became the “*duzbrüder*” of young Frederick Engels.⁴

Although they never met, Karl Marx and Stirner had both known Bruno Bauer. Marx had first been Bauer’s student, and then became his friend. Together they had studied the *Book of Isaiah*, and planned a “*Journal of Atheism*.” In October 1842, Marx left for Cologne, just missing what could have been an interesting personal encounter with Stirner. In the meantime, Marx had read Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity* and became his follower. The work had appeared in 1841, and a half century later Engels still recalled the effect of the work upon his young contemporaries, who had their problems when dealing with Hegelian idealism:

Then came Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity*. With one blow, it pulverized the contradiction, in that without circumlocutions it placed materialism on the throne again. . . . 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. How enthusiastically Marx greeted the new conception and how much—in spite of all critical reservations—he was influenced by it, one may read in the *The Holy Family*.⁵

In the same year that Feuerbach's book appeared, the Prussian government, with the blessing of the new King Frederick Wilhelm IV, embarked upon a clear official attack against Hegel and the Hegelians. The lines were drawn, and the old enemy of Hegel, Frederick Schelling, was loudly promoted as the new professor of philosophy at the University of Berlin. It was hoped that this appointment would drive away the remaining Hegelian ghosts. However, the effort failed as Schelling, aged and unclear, soon found his efforts led to nothing more than empty lecture halls. This was also the same year in which the new King declared that, henceforth, Prussia would be a Christian state. This, added to Feuerbach's denigration of Judaism, was hardly encouraging to the Jewish community. They had, since 1789, with the revolutionary *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, been encouraged to think that their days of being deprived of civil rights and cultural respect were soon to be over. For these "enlightened Jews," the proponents of the *haskala*, the Jewish Enlightenment, a new age would surely follow upon such liberalizing statements. As one of the so-called *maskilim* described it, "No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law."

Upon this declaration, optimism spread among many Jewish thinkers that German culture, political and social, would soon find Judaism as another religion that was hardly intent upon "disturbing the public order." Of course, the Enlightenment took everything into account, except the unenlightened. Soon enough, a cloud appeared on the horizon for, following the 1815 treaty of Vienna, Jews once again were placed within the oppressive framework of the old order. Still, the *maskilim* continued to hope for assimilation, for emancipation, and the hope never quite died out. It might have died out when Theodore Herzl heard the chants of "Kill the Jew" shouted out against Dryfus, realized that these early hopes were a delusion, and thus Zionism took root. Nevertheless, for more than a few Jews and for more than a few years, the *haskala*, the Jewish Enlightenment, held to its hope that there was a better future for Judaism. Perhaps for the more optimistic, the time would come when either prejudice or an unreformed Judaism would pass away and along with it the ancient prejudice against the Jews. For many Jews and non-Jews, the ancient religion seemed to have lost any claim to continue, for if it were to be part of the "Modern Age," then Judaism had to be either abandoned or reformed. The course of history was pressing both Jews and non-Jews to finally decide what to do with the seemingly unmoved and actual presence of the ancient Jewish religion. Among many Hegelian progressives, such as Bauer and Feuerbach, whom Stirner terms "modern

liberals,” the very presence of Judaism stood as an affront to their romantic humanistic hopes. What was to be done? This was the *Judenfrage*.

Feuerbach, who certainly qualified as a “progressive,” devoted only one chapter of the eighteen which comprised *The Essence of Christianity* to the problem: “The Significance of Creation in Judaism.” It is a very short chapter, taking up only seven pages in a work which runs well above 300. The Jews are nowhere else considered in the book. Nevertheless, Feuerbach’s judgment as to the “significance” of the Jewish idea of creation is central to his whole project, for in it the Jewish worldview reveals itself as the most powerful opponent to what Feuerbach would soon term “*The Philosophy of the Future*.”

The fundamental doctrine of Feuerbach’s major work is quite simple: Man, in his generic being, must recognize himself as God. This recognition requires that every man love other men, and in this loving fusion the “I” and the “Thou” cease to exist as isolated beings, and in their juncture become truly human—they become as one within a divine human community. In his words, “Solitude is finiteness and limitation; community is freedom and infinity. Man for himself is man (in the ordinary sense); man with man—the unity of the I and Thou—is God.”⁶ This means that the being of man exists “only in community, it is found only in the unity of man with man . . .” What then could be the worst possible inhuman attitude that one could have? What moral vice would isolate and fragment this divine human, this Man-God? Obviously it is *egoism*—the original sin of the Jews:

The Jews have maintained their peculiarity to this day. Their principle, their God, is the most practical principle in the world,—namely, egoism; and moreover egoism in the form of religion. Egoism is the God who will not let his servants come to shame. Egoism is essentially monotheistic, for it has only one, only self, as its end. Egoism strengthens cohesion, concentrates man on himself, gives him a consistent principle of life; but it makes him theoretically narrow, because indifferent to all which does not relate to the wellbeing of self . . . In the Israelites, monotheistic egoism excluded the free theoretic tendency.⁷

This is a harsh judgment. Judaism is taken as the source of an isolating and unspiritual worldview, a calculating and inhuman practical principle, that is, egoism. Judaism found expression in an egotistical and materialistic worldview that only focused upon objects in respect to their usefulness.

Utilism is the essential theory of Judaism [*Der Utilismus, der Nutzen ist das oberste Prinzip des Judentums*]. . . . Nature is regarded only as an

object of arbitrariness, of egoism, which uses Nature only as an instrument of its own will and pleasure. Water divides or rolls itself together like a firm mass, dust is changed into lice, a staff into a serpent, rivers into blood, a rock into a fountain; in the same place it is both light and dark at once, the sun now stands still, now goes backward. And all these contradictions of Nature happen for the welfare of Israel, purely at the command of Jehovah, who troubles himself about nothing but Israel, who is nothing but the personified selfishness of the Israelitish people, to the exclusion of all other nations,—absolute intolerance, the secret essence of monotheism.⁸

Feuerbach's scorn of Judaism was soon taken up and enhanced by Karl Marx who was, at the time, his devoted follower. Marx's view of the "Jewish Question" was set out in a review of Bauer's studies on the question, which were published in 1843. The review, *Zur Judenfrage*, was published in February 1844, in the short-lived journal which Marx and Arnold Ruge edited, the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. It was a rather lengthy review, about thirty pages, taking up both of Bauer's studies, *Die Judenfrage* (The Jewish Problem),⁹ and the second essay, on "Die Fähigkeit der heutigen Juden und Christen, frei zu werden" [The Capacity of Present-Day Jews and Christians to Become Free].¹⁰

In his study of Feuerbach, Marx Wartofsky correctly observed that:

In a chapter that is strikingly similar in characterization, in language and in metaphor to Karl Marx's later work, "On the Jewish Question," Feuerbach ascribes the origins of creation theories to the Jews...he sees in Judaism the original form of the creation idea, in its "egoistic" or "practical," "utilitarian." All that is missing, in the language, is the addition of Marx's more explicitly anti-Semitic epithet: "in its dirty-Jewish form."¹¹

However, there is a bit more that "is missing" in Marx's echo of Feuerbach, and that is his taking Jewish "egoism" as the basis of the evils of Capitalism. That Marx's "economic" turn linking Judaism with Capitalistic evils might expand the circumference of antisemitic thought would be expected—as it did in the case of Werner Sombart.¹² Some Jewish scholars, such as Hyam Maccoby, have well understood the extent and depth of Marx's dangerous equations.¹³ But there were Jewish scholars who seemed unaware of the danger—such as Eric Fromm.

In the 1960s "flower power" period of "hippie" subculture, a loving "Young" Marx was suddenly discovered, one quite unlike the dour old Marx of *Das Kapital*. The antisemitism of this young Marx was, if not totally ignored, mollified. Reflecting the times, Eric Fromm, in 1961, gathered up a collection of Marx's early writings under the title of *Marx's Concept of Man*.¹⁴ Marx's 1844 essay on the *Judenfrage* was noticeable by its absence.¹⁵ However, Fromm was intent upon demonstrating that Marx was indeed not only a materialist but

almost as pacifistic as a Zen Buddhist. He comments upon Marx's statement that when:

Need and enjoyment have thus lost their *egoistic* character, and nature has lost its mere *utility* [Feuerbach's critique is evident], the fact that its utilization has become *human* utilization (In effect, I can only relate myself in a human way to a thing when this thing is related in a human way to man).¹⁶

Fromm proceeds to note that, "This last statement is one which is almost literally the same as has been made in Zen Buddhist thinking, as well as by Goethe." However, it would have been even easier for Fromm to situate the Young Marx into the "Make Love not War" counterculture with this:

Let us assume *man* to be *man*, and his relation to the world to be a *human* one. Then love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust, etc. If you wish to enjoy art you must be an artistically cultivated person; if you wish to influence other people you must be a person who really has a stimulating and encouraging effect upon others. Every one of your relations to man and to nature must be a *specific expression*, corresponding to the object of your will, of your *real individual life*. If you love without evoking love in return, i.e., if you are not able, by the *manifestation* of yourself as a loving person, to make yourself a *beloved person*, then your love is impotent and a misfortune.¹⁷

But Fromm, who viewed Marx's effusions through a sympathetic screed, must have found it quite difficult to even mention Marx's views on the nature of Judaism—and so he did not. For when it came to the Jews, Marx was hardly concerned with making himself a *beloved person*:

Money is the jealous god of Israel, in face of which no other god may exist. Money degrades all the gods of man—and turns them into commodities. Money is the universal self-established *value* of all things. It has, therefore, robbed the whole world—both the world of men and nature—of its specific value. Money is the estranged essence of man's work and man's existence, and this alien essence dominates him, and he worships it.

The god of the Jews has become secularized and has become the god of the world. The bill of exchange is the real god of the Jew. His god is only an illusory bill of exchange.¹⁸

Marx's solution to the *Judenfrage* is cast in the form of a simple sentence that concludes his essay: "The *social* emancipation of the Jew is the *emancipation of society from Judaism*."¹⁹

Marx's solution is, if in a less decisive manner, similar to that of Bruno Bauer. For Bauer, the problem of Judaism, as well as of Christianity, would simply fade away as the result of "free, human

critique”—by which he meant programmatic atheism. The final paragraphs of his work, *Die Judenfrage*, encapsulates Bauer’s general theory:

Both religions could torture each other, scoff at each other, embitter each other’s life, but none could overcome the other. The crude religious criticism voiced by Judaism, and Judaism itself, is at last made superfluous by the free, human critique which has demonstrated that Christianity and revealed Judaism were a medieval luxury. Judaism was a mere appendix to the history of Christianity, and its critique of Christianity was unjustified because it needed Christian scholarship to make the critique possible.

Theory has now completed its task, it has dissolved the old contradiction between Judaism and Christianity and can look confidently to History, which pronounces the final judgment on principles which have lost their validity.²⁰ [author’s translation].

Bauer here presents himself as the voice of “free human critique,” and he confidently follows Hegel’s principle that “World history is a tribunal that judges the world [*Weltgeschichte ist Weltgericht*].” With this, the principles underlying Judaism, which came into historical fruition in Christianity, have simply lost their *raison d’être*. Indeed, both might still claim actuality, but, just as was the French Monarchy before the Revolution, they are no longer real. And so Bauer claims to have resolved the “old contradiction,” the antithesis between Jews and Christians, by means of his humanistic “critique.” His solution, which he once described as the “terrorism of pure theory,” was simply a call for total and uncompromising atheism which, when Judeo-Christianity was finally dethroned from its restrictive control of the human mind, a new God would come into being—a fully self-conscious and free mankind. Judaism, whose historical meaning was earlier exhausted in the birth of Christianity, had no role to play in the advance of history. It was denied a meaningful participation in history, whose control and meaning were now passed along to Christianity, which then dialectically generated its own antithesis in the Enlightenment. Judaism could only mimic the real advance of human self-consciousness, as it was unable to grasp the concept of “real self-consciousness.”²¹ It was doomed to endure not only the contempt of radical humanists but also its own sense of inadequacy.

Bauer, who held that “Hegel was the only German of the modern age who knew how to find men, and to learn something from them,”²² accepted Hegel’s doctrine that human freedom was the final goal of history—a goal that neither Jew or Christian could envision. As Hegel wrote,

The substance of the spirit is freedom. From this, we can infer that its end in the historical process is the freedom of the subject to follow its [sein] own conscience and morality, and to pursue and implement

its own universal ends; it also implies that the subject has infinite value and that it must become conscious of its supremacy. The end of the world spirit is realized in substance through the freedom of each individual.²³

For Bauer, the only way to reach this goal of the *Weltgeist*, was to fearlessly, through unrestrained criticism, rid the world of both Judaism and Christianity. He understood both as rooted in what Hegel, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, termed the “unhappy consciousness.” This *unglückliche Bewußtsein* was a stage of spirit in its self-alienation. It found historical expression in the age of “Medieval luxury,” a time when consciousness suffered under its own self-induced contradiction between being in the world and yet not of the world. The given “secular” reality was a corrupted place of isolation, egoism, and sensuous lust, the opposite of a perfect world, a spiritual and heavenly world of divine community and love somewhere “beyond.” In this context of this “torn” reality, the Christian longed for the higher, the spiritual; the Jew could look no higher than the lower world.

Judaism has never understood the complete human being as a developed self-consciousness, i.e., as Spirit, but only as one conscious of being imprisoned within and struggling against natural and sensual limits. It is this understanding which makes up the content of its religion. Christianity says: Man is universal, is God, is the all-encompassing and all-powerful. But it expresses this truth only in its religious form, when it states that there is only one Man, Christ, who is all-encompassing. Judaism is content with a human being who only deals with the external world of nature, and who in his religion takes the external world as satisfying his needs, and as a world which he consciously accepts as a given, i.e., God created the World. Christianity takes the human being as a being present in the general essence of all things, and religiously expressed, to see him again in God – but Judaism only sees Man as linked to nature.²⁴ [author’s translation]

Jews, in rejecting the Christian claim that Jesus Christ was both God and Man, the incarnate God, have in principle rejected the idea that any human being could be divine. For Bauer, the conception of man as a spiritual being, as God, is simply beyond Jewish comprehension, and in its rejection of Christianity, Judaism remained a religion fixed at the level of the individual natural man, without a “spiritual” dimension. It has remained myopically focused upon “the things of this world.”

Bauer was an atheistic missionary who did indeed, as Marx perceived, consider the Jewish question as a “theological problem” and whose antisemitism was only one aspect of his major project, which was to eliminate all religion as impeding the course of history toward obtaining full human freedom through full self-consciousness. That the

Christians stood closer to political and social emancipation than the Jews was only by reason that history had driven them to the penultimate level of unhappy consciousness. They now stood ready to be precipitated into full freedom, finding God in man. And so, as Bauer had it, we “can look confidently to history, which pronounces the final judgment on principles which have lost their validity.” Judaism, as well as Christianity, had lost their “validity,” and now only remained as irritating and lingering obstacles to the progress of mankind. Indeed, Bauer had little but contempt for Judaism, but it was balanced by an equal contempt for Christianity—and a greater contempt for religion in general. If he did not treat the Jews as badly as Marx, it was not because he was more sensitive to their suppression, simply that they were but a minor part of a larger problem—which was the slavish endurance of the slavish religious mind. If the Jews were “unspiritual” and the Christians were “spiritual,” this made no great difference, as both subordinated man to God.

As a doctrinaire atheist, he naturally revered Voltaire as a “Propheten” of the new age and enthusiastically adopted his demand to *Écrasez l'infâme*. As Arnold Ruge had it, Bauer was “des Messiah des Atheismus” and took upon himself the mission of saving Germany, and all mankind, from the curse of Christianity. His friend, Max Stirner, had no messianic inclinations.

Max Stirner has received more than a few pejorative labels, such as “Anarchist,” “Nihilist,” or “Egoist”—but never the label of “anti-semitic.” In his treatment of the *Judenfrage*, he treats the issue in a quite unexpected manner insofar as he considers the Jewish worldview as being not unreasonable and clearly preferable to that propounded by Christianity. He did not in the least indulge in the cruel and judgmental treatment of Judaism as found in both Bauer and Feuerbach. In general, his whole doctrine reflects a detached, yet sympathetic personality, who, like Montaigne, did not know whether to laugh or to cry at what he observed. As he bluntly wrote, “One must read the journals of this period, and must hear the philistines talk, to get the horrible conviction that one is shut up in a house with fools.”²⁵ Among these fools were those who proposed answers to the “Jewish question.” His discussion of the issue is found in his singular work, *The Ego and Its Own* [*Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum*].

It appeared in November 1844 and had the intention of presenting the atheistic and liberal humanism of his contemporaries as being nothing less than a deceptive restoration of the very religious faith which they claimed to reject. For Stirner, their “*humane Liberalismus*,” was in fact nothing more than a word-game in which the term “God” was concealed under the names of “Man [*Mensch*]” or “Mankind [*Menschlichkeit*].” In short, these “pious atheists” had not

transcended the religious consciousness but had simply, if covertly, restored it. Stirner devoted a full opening page of his work to setting out his intention:

“Man is to man the supreme being,” says Feuerbach.

“Man has been discovered,” says Bruno Bauer.

Then let us take a more careful look at this supreme being and this new discovery. Their response to Stirner’s work was extraordinary.

In 1845, shortly after the first appearance of *Der Einzige*, the usually prolific Feuerbach only wrote one short item—his reply to Stirner. I have earlier argued that this change in Feuerbach’s thought followed shortly after he became aware that he was unable to refute Stirner’s critique.²⁶ Certainly more than one Feuerbachian scholar, such as Eugene Kamenka, has agreed with the judgment of Simon Rawidowitz that “Max Stirner’s critique... appears to have impelled him [Feuerbach] to take a further step, to advance from anthropology to naturalism.”²⁷ In short, he turned from his humanistic program to ultimately agree with the crude naturalism of Jacob Moleschett.

It was not only Feuerbach who suddenly displayed a radical new turn of thought after reading Stirner, but also his young disciple, Marx. Within a year after Marx had read Stirner he ceased being a follower of Feuerbach and became his critic. His reasons appeared in 1845 in his “*Theses on Feuerbach*.” It has been well argued, by Nicholas Lobkowitz, that Marx radically revised his humanistic programs after reading Stirner.²⁸ Indeed, in that same summer of 1845, Marx and his newfound friend, Engels, set about hurriedly writing an exhaustive refutation of Stirner, *The German Ideology* [*Die deutsche Ideologie*]. Stirner had not even been mentioned in their first joint work of the previous year, which contained the usual vitriolic attack on all of the “Young Hegelians” whom Marx had found disagreeable. In this first joint effort, Bruno Bauer was the main target, as the full title of the work indicates: *The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Criticism: Against Bruno Bauer and Company*. However, in contrast, *The German Ideology* devoted more pages to criticizing Stirner’s work than are to be found in that work itself.²⁹ Even Hans Mehring, the usually admiring biographer of Marx, had difficulty in finding any merit in this “super polemic.” He was forced to conclude that *The German Ideology* was characterized by “hair-splitting and quibbling, some of it of a rather puerile character.”

In late 1845, Bauer, in an anonymous article, “Charakteristik Ludwig Feuerbachs”³⁰ briefly discussed Stirner in the course of criticizing Feuerbach. He agreed with Stirner’s evaluation of Feuerbach, but given that Bauer’s article appeared in the same issue in which Stirner’s reply to his critics³¹ appeared, Stirner never responded to it.

Nor would there be any particular reason to do so as Bauer's view was earlier represented by one of his followers, and Stirner had replied to that. In any case, with this critical study of Feuerbach, Bauer's atheistic crusade, his "*Feldzüge der reinen Kritik*" came to an end:

Bruno Bauer's campaign of pure criticism, which had begun in 1838, reached its highpoint...in 1844...the campaign ended shortly thereafter...It had simply faded away. As Ernest Barnikol writes, 'All of its intellectual strength faded into an empty and impotent criticism.'³² [author's translation]

And so, just as Marx and Feuerbach before him, Bauer after reading Stirner had also embarked upon another ideological course, and his earlier dedication to the "good cause" was soon forgotten. Stirner seems to have hit a nerve. As one commentator had it, Stirner's book was "calculated to unnerve,"—and it did.³³

The principle intention of *the ego* was to indicate that the ideals of liberal and radical reformers were nothing other than the projection of their own alienated ideas. Nothing had been gained by the atheistic and humanistic struggles against a transcendent God other than "bringing him down to earth in the guise of 'man.'" The "revolution" was but a rotation of divinity, merely a formal revolution in which a new earthly God was set up to take the place of the failing old Christian God. The modern socialists were merely pressing along the same path that moralizing Christian pietists had laid out for them—the only difference being that for these "moderns [*Neuen*]" God was no longer to be revered and served, but rather "mankind." The actual world was still set in opposition to an ideal world, one of total freedom and perfected humanity. The old oppressive order was merely restated:

The human *religion* is only the last metamorphosis of the Christian religion. For liberalism is a religion because it separates my essence from me and sets it above me, because it exalts "man" to the same extent as any other religion does its God or idol, because it makes what is mine into something otherworldly, because in general it makes some of what is mine, out of my qualities and my property, something alien—namely, an "essence" in short, because it sets me beneath man, and thereby creates for me a "vocation."³⁴

Although not a central issue in his work, Stirner did find opportunity to directly address the "Jewish question." He did not join in the attack upon either the "everyday Jew" or the "Sabbath Jew" as Marx had it, nor did he describe the Jews as being the egoistic cause of their own "problem," instead, he reflected upon Judaism in a quite different and not unfavorable light. He was not offended, as the "humane Liberals" and the Christians, that the Jews had rejected their "salvation"—be it

divine or human. They simply had no need for the “spirituality” that came at the cost of rejecting the given world. They remained, as they always had, in the same frame of mind as the ancients, which was that of the natural mind which, just as Stirner, could neither grasp nor have reverence for the “spiritual.”

The Jews, those precocious children of antiquity... cannot discover spirit, which takes no account whatever of things.

The Christian has spiritual interests, because he allows himself to be a spiritual man; the Jew does not even understand these interests in their purity, because he does not allow himself to assign no value to things. He does not arrive at pure spirituality, a spirituality such as is religiously expressed, for instance, in the faith of Christians, which alone (without works) justifies. Their unspirituality sets Jews forever apart from Christians; for the spiritual man is incomprehensible to the unspiritual, as the unspiritual is contemptible to the spiritual. But the Jews have only “the spirit of this world.”³⁵

For Stirner, the Jews, “those precocious children of antiquity” had managed not to have been overcome by the spiritual invasion that came out of the east. Just as ancients,

... they want to be of good cheer, desire good living (the Jews especially a long life, blessed with children and goods), *eudaemonia*, well-being in the most various forms. Democritus, for example, praises as such the “calm of the soul” in which one “lives smoothly, without fear and without excitement.”³⁶

But “fear” and “excitement” did arrive in the form of the Christian “spirit.”³⁷ Christianity, the dominant religious “Geist,” whose birth Hegel had recorded in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, was their conduit. This “unhappy consciousness,” was born in a time of despair, in an age that welcomed the entry of a worldview which looked to, and so believed in, a “beyond” in which its temporal misery would be redeemed with an eternal heavenly happiness. For Stirner, this religious spirit was ultimately a mental aberration, an insanity, which Stirner termed “*Mongoloidity (Chineseness)*.” Coming out of Asia into the West, this mind generated, out of its own misery and self-contradiction, a belief in a world of spirits. It was a deranged mind,³⁸ one which deluded itself into believing that spirits—“Ghosts” or “Spooks”—actually existed. The idea of the “Highest Ghost” was worshipped. Those who worshipped and served this “Spirit” were esteemed as “spiritual,” and those who did not, such as the heathens and the Jews, were scorned. In the wake of the Mongoloid victory of the spirit, “materialists,” such as the Jews, were condemned for living only for the “things of this world.” But yet, if the ancient unspiritual world came to an end through the Mongolian invasion of “Spirit,” its

old enemy remained unconquered—Egoism, and Stirner is its champion:

Man has not really vanquished Shamanism [Mongoleonism] and its spooks until he possesses the strength to lay aside not only the belief in ghosts or in spirits, but also the belief in the spirit . . . in short, they produce and believe another world, and this other world, the product of their mind, is a spiritual world; for their senses grasp and know nothing of another, a non-sensual world, only their spirit lives in it. Going on from this Mongolian belief in the existence of spiritual beings to the point that the proper being of man too is his spirit, and that all care must be directed to this alone, to the “welfare of his soul,” is not hard. Influence on the spirit, so-called “moral influence,” is hereby assured.

Hence it is manifest that Mongolism represents utter absence of any rights of the sensuous, represents non-sensuousness and unnatural, and that sin and the consciousness of sin was our Mongolian torment that lasted thousands of years.

But who, then, will dissolve the spirit into its nothing? . . . I can; each one among you can, who does his will as an absolute I; in a word, the egoist can.

If, as both Bauer and Feuerbach would have it, the Jews were unspiritual and egoistical, then they could count upon Stirner to be their ally.

As to the matter of Jewish “emancipation” and “equality,” the seemingly well-intentioned proposal of the liberal humanists that Jews be treated as “men,” is rejected in principle by Stirner.

The attempt to have Jews (and everyone else) understood as “men” is a logical reduction of individuals to a universal. To treat all as “men” runs totally counter to Stirner’s principle thesis that he is “more than a man,” to his exclusive individuality, to his “Einzigkeit,” his “Uniqueness.” Even were this liberal reduction of a specific class into an indefinite universal “man” is possible, it would not “emancipate” the Jews, it would merely place them within the same oppressive Mongolian order now in place for all men. Stirner’s principle is again displayed, as the misplaced accent upon the empty collective is discarded, in favor of personal self-identity, egoism, individualism. In sum, being merely cast as a generic “man” rather than a specific “Jew” makes matters worse for the Jew. Let the Jewish people at least remain Jewish:

Bruno Bauer . . . thinks Jews and Christians cannot regard and treat each other as “men” until they give up the separate essence which parts them and obligates them to eternal separation, recognize the general essence of “Man,” and regard this as their “true essence.”

According to his representation the defect of the Jews and the Christians alike lies in their wanting to be and have something “particular” instead of only being men and endeavoring after what is human—namely, the “general rights of man.” He thinks their

fundamental error consists in the belief that they are “privileged,” possess “prerogatives”; in general, in the belief in prerogative [*Vorrecht*]. In opposition to this he holds up to them the general rights of man [*Menschenrecht*]. The rights of man!—

Man is man in general, and in so far everyone who is a man. Now every one is to have the eternal rights of man, and, according to the opinion of Communism, enjoy them in the complete “democracy,” or, as it ought more correctly to be called—*anthropocracy*. But it is I alone who have everything that I—procure for myself; as man I have nothing. People would like to give every man an affluence of all good, merely because he has the title “man.” But I put the accent on me, not on my being man.

But, asks the critic, how can one be a Jew and a man at once? In the first place, I answer, one cannot be either a Jew or a man at all, if “one” and Jew or man are to mean the same; “one” always reaches beyond those specifications, and—let Isaacs be ever so Jewish—a Jew, nothing but a Jew, he cannot be, just because he is this Jew. In the second place, as a Jew one assuredly cannot be a man, if being a man means being nothing special. But in the third place—and this is the point—I can, as a Jew, be entirely what I—can be. From Samuel or Moses, and others, you hardly expect that they should have raised themselves above Judaism, although you must say that they were not yet “men.” They simply were what they could be. Is it otherwise with the Jews of today? Because you have discovered the idea of humanity, does it follow from this that every Jew can become a convert to it? If he can, he does not fail to, and, if he fails to, he—cannot. What does your demand concern him? What the call to be a man, which you address to him?

On the matter of Jewish intransigence, Feuerbach as well as Bauer was insistent that the Jewish mind was fixed upon a corruptive idea, that it set value only upon the “useful,” and so it was that “Utilism is the essential theory of Judaism.” This unspiritual practicality was the expression of Jewish egoism. But Stirner, unconvinced by liberal romanticism, took an entirely different tack when it came to “usefulness.” In this matter, he identifies with Hegel who maintained that:

As everything is useful for man, man is useful too, and his vocation is to make himself a member of the group, of use for the common good, and serviceable to all. The extent to which he looks after his own interests must also be matched by the extent to which he serves others, and so far as he serves others, so far is he taking care of himself.³⁹

On this mutual interdependence of self-interest and the common good, both Hegel and Stirner reflected the economic theory of Adam Smith,⁴⁰ a name that remains anathema to Marxists. Stirner, just as Hegel, sees virtue in making “use of others:”

Yes, I utilize the world and men! With this I can keep myself open to every impression without being torn away from myself by one of

them. I can love, love with a full heart, and let the most consuming glow of passion burn in my heart, without taking the beloved one for anything else than the nourishment of my passion, on which it ever refreshes itself anew. All my care for him applies only to the object of my love, only to him whom my love requires, only to him, the “warmly loved.” How indifferent would he be to me without this—my love! I feed only my love with him, I utilize him for this only: I enjoy him.⁴¹

The Jewish mind, at least as pictured by its liberal critics, was not at all repellent to Stirner. His whole teaching stood as a statement that defended the very values that Feuerbach and Bauer found so wretched. However, that Stirner saw virtue in the ascribed and unspiritual vices of egoism and practicality does not mean that Stirner admired Judaism as such. He was also an atheist. Jew and Christian share the same slavery to a God, and neither is fully free:

The Jew is not the purely egoistic, because the Jew still devotes himself to Jehovah; the Christian is not, because the Christian lives on the grace of God and subjects himself to him. As Jew and as Christian alike a man satisfies only certain of his wants, only a certain need, not himself: a half-egoism, because the egoism of a half-man, who is half he, half Jew, or half his own proprietor, half a slave. Therefore, too, Jew and Christian always half-way exclude each other; as men they recognize each other, as slaves they exclude each other, because they are servants of two different masters.⁴²

He, alone among his contemporaries, recognized that both Feuerbach and Bauer had simply replaced the Christian “God-Man,” the individual Christ, with the universal “Man-God” of radical humanism. What these liberals understood to be an answer to the “Jewish question” was nothing but a covert restatement of the question, which always had one answer: the obliteration of Judaism. Unlike his contemporaries, Stirner issued no manifestoes, no theses, no declarations, no programs, but merely proposed that answers to such questions as “The Jewish Question” would be unimportant if those who sought answers to questions of their own creation would return to their own practical interests—to become conscious egoists. The very beginning of his work suggests his answer to the “question”:

What is not supposed to be my concern [*Sache*]! First and foremost, the Good cause [*Sache*], then God’s cause, the cause of Mankind, of Truth, of Freedom, of Humanity, of Justice; further, the cause of my People, my Prince, my Fatherland; finally, even the cause of Mind [*Geist*], and a thousand other causes. Only MY cause is never to be my concern. “Shame on the egoist who thinks only of himself!”

Looking to Hegel, as Stirner did, he might well have thought that human history would have been better without so many causes for which we are expected to abandon our own cause. Evil people, as

well as good, also have their “concerns,” and all take their cause as “the good cause.”

In his *Philosophy of History*, Hegel places egoism, “selfishness,” as standing:

... on the quiet shore, and thence enjoy in safety the distant spectacle of “wrecks confusedly hurled.” But even regarding History as the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized—the question involuntarily arises—to what principle, to what final aim these enormous sacrifices have been offered?

Stirner’s answer to “The Jewish Question” would be that there is no answer—other than standing on the “quiet shore.” It is an answer that an egoist would accept.

VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY

NOTES

1. Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945* (New York, 1975), pp. xxi-xxiii.

2. For example, Robert S. Wistrich, “Radical Antisemitism in France and Germany (1840–1880),” *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1995), p. 109.

3. Cited in Harold Mah, *The End of Philosophy, The Origin of “Ideology”* (Berkeley, 1987), p. 48.

4. *Letter of Engels to Max Hildebrandt*, October 22, 1889.

5. Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy* (New York, 1941), p. 18.

6. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (New York, 1966), p. 71.

7. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York, 1957), p. 113.

8. *Ibid*, p. 114.

9. (Braunschweig, 1843); trans. Helen Lederer, *Bruno Bauer: The Jewish Problem* (Cincinnati, 1958).

10. *Einundzwanzig Bogen aus der Schweiz*, (ed.) Georg Herwegh (Zürich, 1843), pp. 56–71.

11. Marx W. Wartofsky, *Feuerbach* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 319.

12. Werner Sombart, *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (Leipzig, 1911) English translation: *The Jews and Modern Capitalism* (Kitchener, 2001).

13. “Karl Marx... was as credulous as any medieval Jew-hater, and himself the uncritical believer in a malicious myth. His antisemitism bore fruit in the Soviet Union, where Marx’s disciple Stalin was a Jew-hater second only to Hitler.” Hyam Maccoby, *Antisemitism and Modernity: Innovation and Continuity* (London, 2006), p. 66.

14. Eric Fromm, *Marx’s Concept of Man* (New York, 1961).

15. A few other works of the time either ignored or marginalized Marx's antisemitism, such as Robert Tucker's *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge, 1961), p. 111. In this popular work, just about one page is set aside on the issue, and even with that Marx is excused since he "Capitalized upon the fact that the German term 'Judaism' (*Judentum*) had the secondary connotation of 'commerce.'"

16. E. Fromm, *Marx's Concept*, p. 33.

17. *Ibid*, p. 168.

18. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, (ed.) Robert C. Tucker (New York, 1972), p. 48.

19. *Ibid*, p. 51.

20. *The Jewish Problem*, pp. 123-4.

21. Bruno Bauer, "Die Fähigkeit der heutigen Juden und Christen, frei zu werden" in *Feldzüge der Reinen Kritik*, (ed.) Hans Martin Sass (Frankfurt, 1968), p. 191.

22. *Feldzüge der Reinen Kritik*, p. 155.

23. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge, 1975), p. 55.

24. *Feldzüge der Reinen Kritik*, p. 179.

25. Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, (ed.) David Leopold (Cambridge, 1993), p. 43.

26. See Lawrence S. Stepelevich, "Max Stirner and Ludwig Feuerbach," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (1978), pp. 451-63.

27. Eugene Kamenka, *The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach* (New York, 1970), p. 156; Simon Rawidowitz, *Ludwig Feuerbachs Philosophie: Ursprung und Schicksal* (Berlin, 1964), p. 163.

28. Nicholas Lobkowitz, "Karl Marx and Max Stirner," in *Demythologizing Marxism*, (ed.) Frederick J. Adelman (Hague, 1969), pp. 64-95.

29. Noted by Engels in his October 22, 1889 letter to Max Hildebrand.

30. *Wigand's Vierteljahresschrift*, Vol. 3 (1845), pp. 86-146.

31. *Max Stirners kleinere Schriften und seine Entgegnungen auf die Kritik seines Werkes "Der Einzige und sein Eigentum" aus den Jahren 1842-1848*, (ed.) John Henry Mackay, 2nd ed. (Trepow bei Berlin, 1914); and *Stirner's Critics*, (trans.) Wolfi Landstreicher (Berkeley, 2012).

32. *Feldzüge der Reinen Kritik*, p. 263. "Bruno Bauers Feldzüge der reinen Kritik, die 1838 begonnen hatten, erreichten ihren Höhepunkt... im Jahre 1844;—bald danach is der Feldzüge beendet. 'Alle geistige Kraft verpufft in leerer wirkungsloser Kritik' schreibt Ernst Barnikol."

33. David Leopold, ed., "Introduction," in Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own* (Cambridge, 1995), p. xiii.

34. *The Ego*, p. 158.

35. *Ibid*, p. 23.

36. *Ibid*, p. 25. This repeats, almost verbatim, Bauer's observation in the *Feldzüge der Reinen Kritik*, p. 183, which he intended as pejorative, p. 183.

37. “Geist” can be translated, among other its many other meanings, as “Spirit,” “Mind,” or “Ghost,” or, as with Stirner, “Spook [*Spuk*].”

38. *The Ego*, p. 43: “Do not think that I am jesting or speaking figuratively when I regard those persons who cling to the Higher, and (because the vast majority belongs under this head) almost the whole world of men, as veritable fools, fools in a madhouse.”

39. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford, 1977), pp. 342–3.

40. Max Stirner translated into German, for the first time, Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, and Jean-Baptiste Say’s *Traité d’Economie Politique*. His translations remained definitive for some years.

41. *The Ego*, p. 393.

42. *Ibid*, p. 162.