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From orthodoxy to atheism: the intellectual development of Bruno Bauer

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FROM ORTHODOXY TO ATHEISM: THE INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF
BRUNO BAUER

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of History

by
Stan Michael Landry
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For William J. Sommers,
Sine qua non
My success at university, and in life

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Baton Rouge, Louisiana
April 2003

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Abstract

In this paper I argue that the Young Hegelian Protestant theologian Bruno Bauer was 'radicalized' by the events of 1840s Prussia, and that the personal experiences he endured during this period explain his transition from the orthodox Hegelian Christianity that he espoused during his student days at the University of Berlin, to the vitriolic atheism and criticism of the Prussian state which he spouted from 1842 until the dissolution of his radical band of Young Hegelian friends known as *Die Freien*.

The events that had such profound effects on Bruno Bauer's thought include his frustration with the reactionary policies of Frederick William IV, the new Prussian king who reigned from 1840 to 1861; his removal from and marginal position outside of official Prussian academic life; the availability of radical journals, newspapers, and publishers; and Bauer's patronage of radical political clubs and salons as outlets for the expression of that radicalism.

Bauer's career is historically significant for a number of reasons. First, it reveals the attitudes of intellectuals disaffected with the reactionary regime of Frederick William IV. It also demonstrates the political choices that early nineteenth-century German academics were

forced to make – whether to support or to criticize the existing regime – and the consequences of those (in Bauer's case, negative) choices on their careers and their lives. Bauer's life and career is also significant in that it illuminates the relationship between theology and politics in early nineteenth-century Prussia.

1. Introduction

In traditional representations of the Young Hegelians, scholars have consistently portrayed this cadre of intellectuals as either reacting to Hegel and/or anticipating Marx. Precious little scholarship has been done to examine the Young Hegelians outside of this Hegel-Marx context. To be sure, viewing the Young Hegelians in such a way is not inaccurate. But perhaps Jean Francois Lyotard's assessment of our postmodern condition as one of a decline of the popularity of Marxism and the announcement of 'incredulity toward metanarratives', we may profitably turn our attention back to the Young Hegelians and explore the group in its own right. In doing so, we might consider the impact of Prussian events of the 1840s on the Young Hegelians' ideas, providing new historical, social, and intellectual contexts for understanding their lives and careers, rather than viewing them as mere epigones of Hegel or flawed approximations of Marx.

In this thesis, I argue that the Young Hegelian Protestant theologian Bruno Bauer was 'radicalized' by the events of 1840s Prussia, and that the personal experiences he endured during this period explain his transition from the orthodox Hegelian Christianity that he espoused during his student days at the University of Berlin to the

vitriolic atheism and criticism of the Prussian state which he spouted from 1842 until the dissolution of his radical band of Young Hegelian friends known as *Die Freien*.

The events which had such profound effects on Bauer's thought included his frustration with the reactionary policies of Frederick William IV – from whom Bauer had hoped for enlightened rule and leadership of a Prussian state that could overcome the regressive religious consciousness of orthodox Christianity – the new Prussian king who reigned from 1840 to 1861; Bauer's removal from and marginal position outside of official Prussian academic life; the availability of radical journals, newspapers, and publishers; and Bauer's patronage of radical political clubs and salons as outlets for the expression of that radicalism.

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illuminates the relationship between theology and politics in early nineteenth-century Prussia.

Survey of Literature

Secondary literature on the Young Hegelians is extensive. Secondary sources on Bruno Bauer in particular are less so. Most scholarship on the Young Hegelians shares a common motif – that of the Young Hegelians' influence on the intellectual development of Marx. In conventional scholarship, the ideas of the Young Hegelians are considered significant only insofar as they assist in explaining Marx's thought. Viewing the Young Hegelians in such a way also fails to take the historical context of those ideas into serious consideration. Their ideas are often considered philosophically – disembodied from the political, social, and theological events of the times.

An example of such a disembodied view of Young Hegelian ideas is Sidney Hook's 1936 *From Hegel to Marx: Studies in the Intellectual Development of Karl Marx*. Here, Hook surveys the ideas of the Young Hegelians (Bauer included) but only as a function of the intellectual development of Marx, as the title implies. Additionally, in Hook's study, the ideas of the Young Hegelians are disembodied from contemporary political and social events,

and are given little historical context. They are thus represented as flawed approximations of Marx's mature thought.

William J. Brazill's *The Young Hegelians* (1970), is one of the few texts to consider the Young Hegelians in their own right (outside the context of Marx). Brazill surveys the thought of the Young Hegelians, from David F. Strauss to Max Stirner, arguing that the defining characteristic of Young Hegelian philosophy is the reduction of God to man, the overcoming of Christianity for humanism.

In his 1971 article in *The Review of Politics*, "The Radicalism of a Young Hegelian: Bruno Bauer", Zvi Rosen argues that Bauer's subjectivist turn may first be detected in his *Die Religion des alten Testaments* (1838). Rosen then traces the radicalization of Bauer's subjectivism from 1838 through his subsequent works. Zvi Rosen's 1977 monograph *Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx: The Influence of Bruno Bauer on Marx's Thought* is another study where Bauer is portrayed as a function of Marx's intellectual development, though in Rosen's text, Bauer's influence on Marx is considered exclusively. Rosen argues that Bauer influenced Marx's dissertation, his criticism of religion, and his concept of alienation.

David McLellan's *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (1978), is a renewed study of the relationship between Young Hegelian ideas and Marx, in the spirit of Sidney Hook, written to reveal Marx's intellectual debts to the Young Hegelians. McLellan's study is Hook historicized, and this historicization of the Young Hegelians' ideas is where the merit of *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* lies, though McLellan's work study still represents the Young Hegelians as flawed approximations of Marx's mature thought.

Hans-Martin Sass evaluates Bauer's critical theory in his 1978 "Bruno Bauer's Critical Theory" in *The Philosophical Forum*. Sass argues that Bauer's criticism was directed not only at religion, but after 1841, to politics as well. Thus Sass locates the politicization of Bauer's radicalism in 1841. According to Bauer, criticism could serve as the means of overcoming alienation, and criticism was necessary for the liberation of the individual subject from religion and the regressive state.

John Edward Toews' 1980 *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805-1841*, is by far the finest study yet written of the legacy of Hegel. It is a rich intellectual history of the evolution of Hegelian thought, from the Young Hegel's speculative idealism to the Left Hegelians' dialectical humanism, and the disintegration of

that school. It considers the Hegelians in their historical environment, and includes a fine chapter on Bauer's 'reduction of absolute spirit to human self-consciousness.'

Harold Mah's *The End of Philosophy, the Origin of "Ideology": Karl Marx and the Crisis of the Young Hegelians* (1987), is an echo of Marx and Engels' *German Ideology*, in that it argues that Marx's predecessors (such as Bauer and the jurist Arnold Ruge) maintained a belief in the 'sovereignty' and autonomy of philosophy, (that is, its independence from worldly concerns), whereas Marx recognized that philosophy must be the servant of worldly concerns and social reality. According to Mah, Marx's originality, as well as the origin of the theory of ideology, may be located in Marx's recognition that Bauer and Ruge's insistence that social problems could be solved by a change in consciousness rather than a change in social reality was impossible.

Robert J. Hellman's *Berlin - The Red Room and White Beer: The "Free" Hegelian Radicals in the 1840s* (1990), is the only work to concentrate solely on the Berlin Young Hegelians - *Die Freien*. It does so with an eye to how the group's membership in radical clubs and their contributions to radical journals and newspapers facilitated their extremism.

In his 1996 "Bruno Bauer's Political Critique, 1840-1841", in *The Owl of Minerva*, Douglas Moggach argues that Bauer's political criticism was inspired by his negative reaction to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Moggach locates the origins of Bauer's contention that the individual, rather than the state, must serve as the vehicle for the development of self-consciousness, in the years 1840-1841.

The most recent study of the Young Hegelians, Warren Breckman's *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory: Dethroning the Self* (1999), is a study of how political, social, and economic questions were related to theology in early nineteenth-century Prussia. Breckman argues that Marx's critiques of liberalism and individualism might be better understood if this relationship is recognized. There is very little consideration of Bauer, but it does convincingly illuminate the connection between politics and theology in *Vormärz* Prussia, though with Marx as a model. Breckman argues that this relationship undermines the distinction scholars have traditionally drawn between the theological criticism of the Young Hegelians in the 1830s and the political criticism of the 1840s.

As my study will reveal, whereas Breckman is correct in recognizing the relationship between politics and

theology in *Vormärz* Prussia, this does not necessarily entail a rejection of the traditional distinction between the 'theological' 1830s and 'political' 1840s. Against Breckman, I also argue that radicalism was politicized in the 1840s, as theological criticism became a function of political criticism (rather than vice versa, as it had been in the 1830s), thus underscoring the continuing relationship between theology and politics – but not undermining the distinction in Young Hegelian thought in the 1830s and 1840s.

The original contribution to scholarship that this thesis makes is that it concentrates on Bauer's radicalization and recognizes 1840 as the turning point in Bauer's intellectual development, but sets this turning point within the context of other events in Bauer's life, such as his reading of Strauss's 1835 *Das Leben Jesu*, his lack of stable and sustainable income, his removal from the University of Bonn in 1842, and his patronage of radical clubs and contributions to radical journals. Such a comprehensive synthesis of the intellectual and social factors affecting Bauer's development has been lacking in scholarship dealing with Bruno Bauer in particular and the Young Hegelians in general; I hope thereby to throw new light onto Bauer's ideas in their historical context, and

most importantly, outside of the context of Marx's intellectual development. Accordingly, Bauer is at the center of this narrative, and insofar as Marx makes an appearance, he is at the periphery. My hope is that German Intellectual History will distance itself from the belief that all pre-Marxian radical German philosophy and theology must be seen as a flawed approximation of, and inevitably culminating in, the thought of Karl Marx.

2. The Weak Tradition of Prussian Political Radicalism up to the 1840s

Before going further in the essay, a few technical matters should be addressed. Whereas the precise meanings of political terms such as radical, liberal, and conservative can be ambiguous today, they were especially so in nineteenth-century Prussia. An essay that plans to employ concepts such as these must precisely define such terms. In this essay, I shall consistently be using the terms aristocracy, bureaucracy, 'official' Prussian political and academic culture, and radicalism.

'Conservative' refers primarily to the landed gentry, or nobility, who sought to preserve their feudal privileges against reformers and constitutionalists. The Prussian nobility usually supported the king, both during the Napoleonic Wars (1806-1813/1814) to defend against the French threat, and during the restoration period (1814/1815) in defense of the king's (and their own) power against that of popular nationalists agitating for national assemblies and constitutions – though the king and the nobility's interests were not always identical.

I do make a distinction, though, between Prussian aristocratic conservatism, and 'official' Prussian political culture, i.e., the *bureaucracy*. A cleavage

existed between the interests and agendas of the Prussian aristocracy and bureaucracy from the 1780s until at least 1840. The two groups were not only politically distinct, but the bureaucracy or 'aristocracy of service' usually held the landed gentry in contempt. One even detects the practice of bureaucratic exclusivism in official Prussian society, not only sharing ideas and interests in common, but frequently intermarrying and segregating themselves from other classes – including the nobility.¹ The bureaucracy was generally (though not always) drawn from the ranks of the Prussian *Mittelstand* and was based on merit rather than birth. To be sure, some aristocrats had agitated for a constitution and representative assembly, but they had hoped for one that would preserve their noble privileges. That is, their interest in a constitution was purely self-serving. After regaining some of their privileges during the Prussian Restoration, little was heard from the aristocracy in the way of agitation for a constitution or representative bodies.²

None of these groups – the nobility, bureaucracy, or liberals – were monolithic in their ideas or their

¹ John R. Gillis, "Aristocracy and Bureaucracy in Nineteenth-Century Prussia" *Past and Present* 41 (1968): 110.

² Matthew Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism: The Transformation of Prussian Political Culture, 1806-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 130-131.

interests. Indeed, internal divisions existed within each of these groups.³ Conservatives were not always nobles, and not all nobles were conservative in their ideology. One may find nobles who espoused progressive ideas (e.g., Freiherr vom Stein), liberals within the bureaucracy and universities (e.g. Karl von Altenstein), and even within the army (e.g., Neithardt von Gneisenau). Indeed, there was a duality to the Prussian bureaucracy prior to the 1840s. It included those bureaucrats who were fiercely loyal to the king, and those liberals left over from the reform era.⁴ While one cannot naively claim that all pre-1848 Prussian bureaucrats were unwavering supporters of the state, liberalism, while it enjoyed some successes, remained for the most part subdued and marginalized.⁵

The bureaucracy as a group, on the other hand, tended to defend the state and the monarchy in order to stabilize the authority of the state. It is this 'official' bureaucratic Prussian culture that reinforced, and was usually an expression of, the king's power. By 1848, the landed aristocracy had lost much of its wealth and

³ Eric Dorn Brose, *The Politics of Technological Change in Prussia: Out of the Shadow of Antiquity, 1809-1848* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 253.

⁴ Jonathan Knudsen, "The Limits of Liberal Politics in Berlin, 1815-1848," in *In Search of a Liberal Germany: Studies in the History of German Liberalism from 1789 to the Present*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch and Larry Eugene Jones (New York: Berg Publishers, 1990), 116.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

practical power. Instead of the landed aristocracy, the bureaucracy became the class which gave its support to the king, maintaining the status quo. As defenders of the existing order, the bureaucracy was the group which came into most frequent contact with political dissidents. Even those bureaucrats who espoused progressive ideas, such as Freiherr vom Stein (1757-1831), accepted the state's role as an "instrument for social change and moral progress",⁶ though by 1840 the bureaucracy was beginning to be viewed less as a body dedicated to the progressive development of the state, but rather as an "intrusive, high-handed, and paternalistic"⁷ instrument of repression. This explains, in part, the direction of Prussian political radicalism after 1840, which will be elaborated in chapter five.

To be sure, the nobility generally continued to defend the Prussian status quo (and their own feudal privileges), but as they regained power during the Restoration, and as their liberal opposition was driven underground by Frederick William III's consolidation of power following the 1820 revolts, they tended to withdraw from the

⁶ James J. Sheehan, *German History: 1780-1866* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 297.

⁷ David F. Lindenfeld, *The Practical Imagination: The German Sciences of State in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 143.

political sphere.⁸ The Revolutions of 1820 began as a Spanish mutiny and spread to Portugal and Italy. As a result of the revolts, King Ferdinand of Spain was forced to accept a constitution substantially limiting his power, and Frederick William III consolidated his power at home in response to an enthusiastic public reaction to the revolts. As a result, Prussia, Austria, and Russia (Great Britain and France declined) agreed to come to the aid of any European state threatened by a revolutionary change of government.

The dissidents whom the Prussian bureaucracy was enjoined to rein in in order to prevent threats to the social order included rowdy student fraternities, or *Burschenschaften*, and revolutionary intellectuals (often embittered over their institutional marginalization) who advocated the destruction of the state. Whereas the bureaucracy (from approximately the Restoration to the late 1840s) may have viewed even the most politically innocuous groups as dangerous political dissidents, and attempted to suppress their activity, this does not imply that they were in fact radicals. Indeed, few agitators could be counted as bona fide radicals; even the most progressive reformers usually went no further than the espousing of

⁸ Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism*, 238.

constitutional monarchy. Most reformers, like Kant, were less concerned with who ruled than how they ruled.⁹ These political commitments may be explained in a number of ways – especially by Prussian fear of Jacobinism, which had revealed itself in the republican Terror of the French Revolution.

In addition, according to Matthew Levinger, the Prussian concept of 'enlightened nationalism' served as a conceptual barrier to demanding the dissolution of the monarchy and the establishment of a popular republic. Enlightened nationalism was a hybrid political program (a combination of enlightened ideas and nationalism) espoused primarily by civil servants (i.e., bureaucrats) to create a rational (enlightened) society and political order and an internally harmonious civil society (nation) in order "to overcome the contradiction between popular and monarchical sovereignty."¹⁰ This could be achieved by rationally demonstrating that the interests of the king/state and the interests of the populace were identical and harmonious. Society would then harmoniously progress along these lines, free of any destabilizing domestic strife. Therefore, genuine freedom could still be enjoyed by the subjects within a monarchy. This sentiment echoes the rejoinder of

⁹ Ibid., 35.

¹⁰ Ibid., viii and 5.

Kant (forever an obedient subject) to "Argue as much as you will, and about what you will, only obey."¹¹ In *Vormärz* Prussia, there was room for political debate, but not outright disobedience.

One example of Prussian liberal reform within the confines of the monarchy is the Freiherr vom Stein and Karl August von Hardenberg (1750-1822) era of Prussian history. Stein served as Prussia's minister of commerce from 1804 to January 1807, then chief minister from September 1807 to 1808. Hardenberg served as foreign minister of Prussia from 1804 to 1806 and as chancellor from 1810 to 1817.

During the first decade of the nineteenth century, in order to modernize Prussia and unite the Prussian people together against the French threat, Stein and Hardenberg agitated for greater popular liberties and meritocratic reform of the military.¹² Serfdom was abolished, restrictions on the sale of land to non-nobles were lifted, taxes were made uniform, and some political liberties were extended to Jews. After Napoleon was defeated and Prussia was liberated in 1813, the reformers hoped to increase popular participation in the government and use the people as an ally against the nobility, who opposed these reform

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment?*, translated by Lewis White Beck (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1997), 89.

¹² Brose, *The Politics of Technological Change*, 252.

efforts¹³, but such hopes never came to fruition. Very few liberals held any sympathies for revolution or democracy.¹⁴

Indeed, Prussian liberal reformers of every stripe usually supported the preservation of the monarchy in some form. Though only an "umbrella movement" united by their oppositional tendencies, liberals generally hoped to abolish remaining feudal privileges, and establish a constitution and representative bodies, though they were not democrats.¹⁵ These progressives (of the pre-1848 era) usually did not advocate the abolition of the monarchy, but rather a reconciliation of democratic and monarchical principles.¹⁶

Following the Wars of Liberation, the liberals had hoped to increase popular participation in the government. To this end, Stein helped establish representative bodies in Prussian cities, but these did not extend to the national level.¹⁷ The passage of the repressive Six and Ten Articles in 1832 pushed liberals (not to mention outright radicals) a step back in their reform efforts, and the fact that the Articles roughly coincide with the 1834 *Zollverein*

¹³ Robert M. Berdahl, *The Politics of the Prussian Nobility: The Development of a Conservative Ideology, 1770-1848* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 108-109.

¹⁴ Sheehan, *German History*, 596.

¹⁵ Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 130-131.

¹⁶ Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism*, 192.

¹⁷ James J. Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 9.

reveals that while political liberalism was being restricted by the monarchy, economic liberalization was moving forward.¹⁸

Radicalism, on the other hand, went far beyond the reformers' calls for a constitution while still retaining the monarchy. (Most reformers were members of the bureaucracy anyway.) Radicals, though their numbers were few, included republicans, extreme critics of the state, anarchists, and those radical few who advocated the outright abolition of the monarchy, or complete destruction of the state. Those political radicals caught in the spirit of the French Revolution, such as J.G. Fichte, who earned an early reputation for radicalism for his *Contribution to the Rectification of the Public's Judgment of the French Revolution* (1793), usually drew cautiously back from radical politics as they witnessed Napoleon's march into the Holy Roman Empire and subjugation of the German people.¹⁹ Even after the Revolution of 1848, few factions demanding the outright abolition of the Prussian monarchy existed.²⁰ In the dearth of radicalism during the *Vormärz*, groups such as *Die Freien* filled this radical void.

¹⁸ Lindenfeld, *The Practical Imagination*, 89.

¹⁹ Theodore Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 241.

²⁰ Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism*, 192.

In addition to political radicals, theological radicals – atheists and other extreme critics of religion – were persecuted by the bureaucracy – often with greater zeal than political dissidents. Such persecution was common in a state such as Prussia where theology and politics were so enmeshed, and which rejected liberal institutions such as church-state separation. Indeed, Enlightenment luminaries such as Voltaire who were considered extremely dangerous by the authorities, were critics of Christianity rather than the state – Voltaire even composed a poem lauding the virtues of Louis XIV! Rousseau found himself in exile in 1762 not for his republican *Social Contract*, but rather *Emile*, in his famous section on the Savoyard Preist, which criticized conventional religion. Fichte was driven from the University of Jena in 1799 on charges of atheism, not republicanism.

Atheism, criticism of Christianity or the Christian state, and theological radicalism were all taken seriously by the Prussian authorities. Indeed, it may be said that Germany's radical tradition was theological rather than political. That tradition of theological radicalism did not become politicized until the 1840s, unlike in France, where the tradition of Enlightenment criticism of religious authority spilled over into criticism of the French

monarchy in 1789. The tradition of German theological radicalism included the religious criticism of Kant's *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793), Lessing's *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (1779), and de Wette's *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (1806-1807). While German political radicalism was cut off in 1789 as a result of the French Revolution, and continued to be suppressed throughout the *Vormärz* period, theological radicalism continued into the 1840s.

In the case of Bruno Bauer, theology and politics are inextricably linked. Like many members of *Die Freien*, Bauer was first and foremost a theological radical, a political radical only second. This is not to suggest that Bauer was a defender of the Prussian status quo, but he believed that the greatest threat to the development of individual self-consciousness was traditional Christianity. Bauer was a critic of the Prussian state to the extent that it abrogated its power to – and allowed itself to become an instrument of – the church. For Bauer, the state was not intrinsically corrupt, and could in fact serve as a vehicle for the development of self-consciousness (specters of Hegel), but when in practice it became an instrument of the church (such as during the reign of Frederick William IV) it no longer served such a progressive function. This

illustrates the importance of the relationship between the state, religion, and philosophy, in Bauer's thought. Had Frederick William IV gone in a secularizing direction, instead of embracing Pietism, Bauer's philosophy may not have been so radicalized.

This weak tradition of political radicalism and propensity for theological radicalism may be explained in part by the fact that there was no group in Germany disposed to carry the political argument forward. The German Enlightenment continues to hold a reputation for political inaction, and this tradition of inaction may have carried into the early nineteenth century. During the Enlightenment, those frustrated with Prussian politics had no one to appeal to. The intellectuals were the only educated class in Germany, but the state dominated employment possibilities for academics. Since so many German liberals were employed by the state, this restricted their inclination or ability to speak out and criticize state policies.²¹ German academics were not used to a world in which one could step outside of his civil service tradition to criticize the state. There was no middle class, and dissidents could not count on the Junkers to sympathize with them. As a result, there was a tendency to

²¹ Sheehan, *German Liberalism*, 47.

trust in the enlightened despot Frederick the Great to do the right thing. Who but the state could help reform society anyway? Few social institutions existed that academics could appeal to besides the state. Opportunities for sustained German political radicalism simply did not exist.

Additionally, Leonard Krieger's cliché of the 'German Conception of Freedom' serves to explain the weak tradition of political radicalism in Prussia. If freedom was indeed a function of the mind rather than social action for Germans, then this may help explain why radical criticism of the state did not appear in Germany before the 1840s. To the limited extent that it did, or to the extent that it expressed itself as moderate liberal reformism, it was usually quickly suppressed by the authorities. Prussia did however possess a strong tradition of theological radicalism, a legacy of the anti-clerical tradition of the Enlightenment. For reasons to be explained below, the conditions of possibility for German political radicalism largely were not satisfied until the 1840s. The effects of the government's repression of who it perceived as political dissidents will also be considered below.

Neither liberalism nor radicalism then, were strong or sustainable political movements until the 1840s, but while

the conservative nobility, progressive reformers, and a handful of radicals, were all included in the composition of *Vormärz* Prussian political debate, until the 1840s, the official bureaucracy, as an appendage of the monarch, dominated Prussian political life.

3. The Effects of Political Repression Following the Wars of Liberation and in the 1830s – The Repressed Were Not Radicalized

In *Vormärz* Prussia, theological radicalism, and to the extent that it asserted itself, political radicalism, was met with the official repression of the government. The first wave of repression came in 1819 with the passage of the Karlsbad Decrees, passed when a young *Burschenschaftler* assassinated a conservative playwright. Following the Revolutions of 1820 and those of 1830, a new wave of oppressive laws were passed, most notably in the form of the Six and Ten Articles of 1832. These laws silenced liberal and radical opposition to the regime of Frederick William III, but those affected by these waves of repression were not usually radicalized – or at least kept their radicalism to themselves.

In order to better understand how the exclusion of Bauer from 'official' Prussian academic society served as a catalyst for his further radicalization, it is necessary to contrast the radical ideas of *Die Freien* to those of their bureaucratic and conservative adversaries in 'official' Prussian academics and politics. Accordingly, I shall now examine the ideological composition of the German universities from the Restoration to 1848, which roughly

corresponds to the activity of Bauer and the Berlin Young Hegelians.

For the most part, the faculties and especially administrative bodies of German universities during this era were of a bureaucratic bent. As I have explained elsewhere in this essay, I believe 'bureaucratic' to be a more accurate description of 'official' Prussian society at this time than 'conservative', which immediately conjures images of the nobility and landed aristocracy. Again, bureaucratic here is meant to imply an ideological bent that includes loyalty to the state and its preservation, trust in appointed officials to make necessary reforms (e.g., Stein and Hardenberg's 'reform from above'), defense of the status quo, and a slightly liberal, but never radical worldview, rather than a defense of the landed, noble estate.

It is this 'bureaucratic' sentiment that animated much of the German, and especially Prussian universities during the early to mid nineteenth century. To be sure, exceptions to this rule existed, but for the most part, German faculties and administrations displayed these bureaucratic, and never radical, proclivities. Dissident, opposition faculty members, to the limited extent that they held positions within the German universities, were for the most

part politically impotent, and their critiques had the effect of wounding merely "the vanity of kings and ministers, not their power."²²

As James J. Sheehan states in his *German History 1770-1866*,

The nineteenth-century university was a state-run institution, staffed by civil servants, and ultimately controlled by a government ministry [where] bureaucratic influence was substantial.²³

In other words, the German university of this time was in large part simply an instrument of the state (bureaucracy). The Prussian monarchy relied upon the university and its bureaucratic administrators (and faculty) to lend prestige to the monarchy and state, maintain the status quo, train students for careers in civil service, and 'police' the university faculties for dissidents. Many of these administrators and faculty members actually espoused these bureaucratic sentiments, and were not simply lackeys of the monarchy – indeed, they were scholars. Especially after the revolutions of 1830, professors tended to proclaim their loyalty to the Prussian monarchy and their opposition to radical change. If they did agitate for reform, it was reform of a moderate or token variety only.²⁴ Like so many

²² Charles E. McClelland, *State, Society, and University in Germany, 1700-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 227.

²³ Sheehan, *German History*, 518.

²⁴ McClelland, *State, Society, and University in Germany*, 224.

other Prussian citizens, even the most extreme members of the German universities remained loyal monarchists, hardly ever agitating for republicanism.

The reasons for such bureaucratic proclivities of the university faculties and administrators are as follows: With the Terror of the French Revolution obviously still lingering in their minds, educators and other civil servants were sincerely troubled by the threat of revolution and the violent overthrow of the state.²⁵ This fear of a possible revolution animated the ideas of many bureaucrats, but other more practical explanations also exist for their ideological tendencies. For instance, the German university served as a preparatory institution for civil servants. In order to become a Prussian civil servant, an applicant was required to pass a civil service exam which the university prepared its students to take. It is only natural that the state would take an interest in the university as it served this capacity, and that a training institution for future bureaucrats would be dominated by those sympathetic to a bureaucratic ideology. As John Edward Toews points out,

²⁵ Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism*, 180.

The universities were state-controlled institutions, staffed by civil servants, whose main function was the recruitment and training of the state-service class.²⁶

The German university operated according to bureaucratic interests and also prepared students enrolled for a life of bureaucratic service. As this cycle continued, the professorate began to identify itself more and more with the state administration and bureaucracy, and undertook the defense and lionization of the state.

Finally, during the 1830s and 1840s the job market for civil servants become saturated as more students graduated from university and sought positions in the bureaucracy that were already filled. During the first half of the nineteenth century in Prussia, there were approximately 120-150 clerical vacancies a year, and approximately 30 tenured positions in theology faculties at the six Prussian universities. Even with this dearth of secure employment prospects for theology students, approximately 1600 theology students per year were enrolled in Prussian universities.²⁷ This explains in part why so many civil servants (university professors included) were so eager to defend the state and the status quo. In defending the

²⁶ John Edward Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805-1841* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 15.

²⁷ Harold Mah, *The End of Philosophy, the Origin of "Ideology": Karl Marx and the Crisis of the Young Hegelians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 53.

state, they were by extension defending their own occupations. This fervent competition for available positions in the civil service and universities was coupled with the imposition of ideological criteria in hiring.²⁸ These imposed ideological criteria served to insure that the existing and future members of the university faculties and bureaucracy would toe the bureaucratic line.

The overflow of the job market had another significant, albeit surely unintended effect on the students who were turned away from bureaucratic positions. Having no prospects for work in the professions that their university education had trained them for, some graduates became alienated from the state and 'official' Prussian society. As we shall see, some of these alienated and disgruntled graduates with few job prospects would vent their frustration in ways that had significant results for the intellectual history of Germany. The unemployment crisis and lack of jobs in the official sector contributed to a climate of discontent. It is likely that the bureaucracy became more diligent in its work of policing dissident behavior in order to protect their jobs, and those graduates who were turned away from civic employment were embittered and no doubt more receptive to ideas which

²⁸ Toews, *Hegelianism*, 214.

were critical of the government. This climate of discontent and unease – a climate perfectly suited for the emergence of radical groups – was the one in which *Die Freien* formed. Lenore O'Boyle has noted that this 'intellectual proletariat' of unemployed, disaffected, intellectuals played an important role in the revolutions of 1830 and 1848.²⁹

The Karlsbad Decrees of 1819 serve as an example of state intervention in higher education and an attempt to rein in dissidents (within academia and the German states as a whole), and preserve the Metternichian social order. The decrees were measures passed in 1819 by a diet of the German Confederation (on the advice of Metternich) which established stricter standards of censorship and instituted surveillance of and control over the universities – both faculty 'renegades' and student agitators. They applied to the German Confederation as a whole, and dictated, in part, that:

The governments of the federal states are bound to each other, to remove from the universities and other institutions of learning, those university and other public educators, who by demonstrable deviation from their duties, or by overstepping the boundaries of their profession, abuse their rightful influences on the disposition of the youth, through the dissemination of pernicious teachings which are

²⁹ Lenore O'Boyle, "The Problem of an Excess of Educated Men in Europe, 1800-1850" *The Journal of Modern History* Vol. 42, Issue 4 (Dec., 1970): 494.

hostile to the public order and peace, and undermine the foundation of existing state mechanisms . . . A teacher thus banned may not again be employed in an institution of public learning or any other federal state.³⁰

The decrees were passed with the memory of the Terror of the French Revolution still burning in the minds of German bureaucrats. The main catalyst for their promulgation was the assassination of the reactionary playwright August von Kotzebue by a young *burschenschafter* (member of a liberal student organization) and theology student, Karl Ludwig Sand. The assassination was considered proof of a growing revolutionary threat, and the German monarchies took what they considered to be appropriate measures to suppress it. This perceived threat of revolution was one of the primary reasons that even the most progressive German reformers remained constitutional monarchists, wary of venturing into republican politics.

The assassination of Kotzebue was the direct cause of the removal of two distinguished Prussian academics from

³⁰ Die Bundesregierungen verpflichten sich gegeneinander, Universitäts- und andere öffentliche Lehrer, die durch erweisliche Abweichung von ihrer Pflicht oder Ueberschreitung der Grenzen ihres Berufes, durch Mißbrauch ihres rechtmäßigen Einflusses auf die Gemüther der Jugend, durch Verbreitung verderblicher, der öffentlichen Ordnung und Ruhe feindseliger oder die Grundlagen der bestehenden Staatseinrichtungen untergrabender Lehren...von den Universitäten und sonstigen Lehranstalten zu entfernen...Ein auf solche Weise ausgeschlossener Lehrer darf in keinem andern Bundesstaate bei irgend einem öffentlichen Lehr-Institute wieder angestellt werden. Ernst Rudolf Huber, Hrsg., *Dokumente zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte, Band 1: deutsche Verfassungsdokumente 1803-1850* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1961), 91.

their positions. Wilhelm de Wette, a theology professor at Berlin, sent a consoling letter to the mother of the assassin, Karl Ludwig Sand. In it de Wette consoled Sand's mother, lauding her son, and glorifying his actions. After a copy of de Wette's letter fell into the hands of the Prussian police ministry, and was reviewed by the authorities, Frederick William III had de Wette summarily removed from his position at Berlin.³¹

A similar fate befell Friedrich Wilhelm Carove, a philosopher, and at the time of Kotzebue's assassination, Hegel's assistant at Berlin. After the assassination, Carove produced a highly ambiguous pamphlet that seemingly defended the actions of Sand. He argued that his pamphlet was not a defense of Sand, and that that interpretation arose only from the tract's ambiguity. Eventually, the authorities accepted his explanation, but nevertheless, he was prohibited from holding any academic positions in Germany.³² In addition to de Wette and Carove, one of the founders of the University of Berlin, Wilhelm von Humboldt, left his office in the Prussian government as Minister of Education in 1819, because of his opposition to the Karlsbad Decrees.

³¹ Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism*, 142-143.

³² *Ibid.*, 143-144.

The Karlsbad Decrees remained in effect, with occasional periods of relaxation in the early 1840s with the ascension of Frederick William IV to the Prussian throne, until 1848. The bureaucrats within the university system (both faculty and administration) often served as 'enforcers' of these decrees, monitoring and reporting on their heretical colleagues.³³ After the passage of the Karlsbad Decrees, state intervention in the universities

took not only the form of censorship and policing of 'subversion', but also that of stricter regulations concerning entrance, curriculum, examinations, and other matters previously left largely to the universities.³⁴

The state and its bureaucracy now had control over the universities and what could be said or published there. The universities thus became manifestations and agents of the growing bureaucratizing tendency in official Prussian politics. The bureaucracy, now more than ever, had the power to remove dissidents from academic positions, and did so.

Yet another threat the Prussian bureaucracy moved swiftly to mitigate was that of German nationalism. During the Wars of Liberation, popular nationalism was tapped by the state as a source of defense and German unity against the French occupiers. However, in the aftermath of the Wars

³³ Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century*, 123.

³⁴ McClelland, *State, Society, and University in Germany*, 219.

of Liberation, nationalist organizations (such as the *Burschenschaften*) turned against the state, claiming that the *Volk* owed its allegiance not to the king, but rather to the German nation. The Prussian bureaucracy felt threatened by the remnants of German nationalism left over from the Wars of Liberation, and during the restoration acted accordingly to eliminate that threat.

The generation after 1819 witnessed a renewed crackdown and a reinforcement of censorship following the Revolutions of 1830, which fed "reactionary fears and liberal hopes"³⁵, as well as the 1832 Hambach Festival in Germany, where progressives agitated for freedoms of expression, the press, and assembly. Again, fear of radicalism compelled the Frankfurt Diet (again orchestrated by Metternich) to issue the 'Six Articles' and 'Ten Articles' in 1832. These documents reintroduced strict censorship and surveillance of Prussian academic and political life.³⁶ In June 1833 additional measures were taken to quash subversive activity, as the German Confederation established the Central Bureau of Political Investigation to police dissident groups, though state attempts at suppression were only partially successful.³⁷ As

³⁵ Sheehan, *German History*, 604.

³⁶ Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century*, 127.

³⁷ Sheehan, *German History*, 620.

will be described below, during both periods of heightened censorship and surveillance, professors and statesmen were removed from their positions on the basis of the Karlsbad Decrees of 1819 and the Six and Ten Articles of 1832.

Following the renewed crackdown on political agitators after the passage of the Six and Ten Articles, a new wave of exclusion occurred, the most famous being the case of the 'Göttingen Seven'. Seven professors from the University of Göttingen refused to take an oath to the new king of Hanover, Ernst August, because the king had dissolved the constitution of 1833. These seven included, among others, the historians Gervinus and Dahlmann, and the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. In 1837 these seven men were summarily removed from their positions, and three were forced into exile.³⁸

In yet another example of government repression, in 1835 the literary school *Junges Deutschland* (Young Germany), a literary-political group dedicated to liberal reforms, found the books of its members banned outright in Prussia by Frederick William III for perceived threats Young Germany posed to the social order.

Despite their exclusions from political life, figures such as Wilhelm von Humboldt were usually not radicalized

³⁸ Ibid., 616

by their experiences. During the 1830s political opposition in Germany may have been growing, but it was not yet radicalized, and it was still compelled to express itself indirectly.³⁹ Indeed, Dahlmann was recalled into public service in 1842 at the University of Bonn by Frederick William IV's culture minister J.A.F. Eichhorn (1779-1856). This coincides with the early period of the king's reign where he attempted to make amends with and liberal concessions to discontented Prussian academics. Yet this conciliatory period lasted no longer than two years.

These intellectuals' experience of repression did not push them to the fringe of German political discourse, nor did it embitter them. Humboldt's criticism of the Karlsbad Decrees, and the Göttingen Seven's refusal to take the oath to Ernest August may have been irreverent, but certainly not revolutionary. After leaving government, Humboldt devoted the rest of his life to his scholarship, not to radical politics. Bruno Bauer however, would chart a different course.

³⁹ Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century*, 128.

4. Bruno Bauer's Experience of Repression, or, The Radicalization of Bruno Bauer

Bruno Bauer was born on September 9, 1809 to Friedrich Wilhelm Bauer, a porcelain painter. Bruno was born in Eisleben in Saxony, the oldest of four brothers. The family moved to Berlin in 1815, where Bruno and his brother Edgar (both of whom would later become associated with *Die Freien*) matriculated into Friedrich Wilhelm Gymnasium in Berlin. Here Bruno began his study of theology. In 1828 he entered the University of Berlin to pursue his theological studies further, attending lectures by Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the Hegelian theologian Philip K. Marheineke (1780-1846) – whom he esteemed second only to Hegel – the Pietist theologian and biblical scholar August Neander (1789-1850), and Hegel himself. In 1829 he won an essay contest on the subject of Kant's conception of aesthetic beauty. The topic was proposed by Hegel himself, and Bauer won praise from the philosopher for his winning essay. In 1834 Bauer passed his exams without difficulty and received his unconditional certificate to teach (*Licentia Docendi*).⁴⁰

⁴⁰Bruno Bauer, *The Trumpet of the Last Judgment Against Hegel the Atheist and Antichrist: An Ultimatum*, translated by Lawrence Stepelevich. Volume 5, *Studies in German Thought and History* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 17-18. (Stepelevich's introduction, which spans pages 1-56 is the most comprehensive biography of Bauer yet written.)

Bauer was an exceptional student at Berlin, collaborating with Marheineke in editing Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* for publication. His early status as a staunch supporter of orthodox Hegelianism was widely known, so much so that Schleiermacher felt personally slighted and prevented Bauer from becoming a *Dozent* until the former's death in 1834.⁴¹ From 1834 to 1839 Bauer taught at the University of Berlin, and contributed reviews to the *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, a major organ of orthodox Hegelianism. In 1836 Bauer met Karl Marx, at that time a student attending Bauer's lectures. In the same year, Bauer established a journal, the *Zeitschrift für spekulative Theology*, to which he contributed articles which revealed his early position as an orthodox Hegelian and Christian.⁴²

The world into which Bruno Bauer came of age was one in which, following Hegel's death in 1831, the most dominant faction of Hegelian supporters were the so-called Right Hegelians. The Right Hegelians were theologically orthodox, and wished to reconcile Hegel's Absolute Idealism

⁴¹ Ibid., 19.

⁴² Ibid., 20.

with Christianity. Politically, they supported the authority of the Prussian state and served it loyally.⁴³

Soon, a group of vocal young philosophers would come to challenge the conservative interpretations of Hegel. The distinction between Young (Left) Hegelianism and Old (Right) Hegelianism was not made until 1837, but the movement was inaugurated in 1835 in debates over David F. Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu*.

In time, a Young Hegelian school began to emerge, whose primary interest was the theological implications of Hegel's philosophy. Centered in Berlin, the Young Hegelians wished to purge Hegelian philosophy of what they considered its idealism and supernaturalism, and sought to replace the Hegelian Absolute Spirit, or God, with man. In this way the Young Hegelians made man the object of history rather than God. The Young Hegelians were more humanists than Christians, representing the secularization or humanization of Hegelianism. The intellectual environment of the mid to late 1830s, with its competing factions of Hegelian sympathizers, along with their opponents, including the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher and his devotees, was the one in which Bauer began his career.

⁴³ R.W.K. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 26.

In 1835 David F. Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* appeared and set the world of theology on its ear by suggesting that the gospels were nothing more than the expressions of myths collectively held by early Christian and messianic Jewish communities. Strauss's suggestion that Christianity was mythical in character especially troubled orthodox Hegelian theologians, who followed Hegel in believing that Christianity was a less refined or less developed form of philosophy. It was Strauss's contention that Christianity was mythical rather than rational, which challenged the orthodox Hegelian position that Christianity shared the same form (albeit less 'advanced'), if not content, of philosophy. Upon the publication of *Das Leben Jesu* and the ensuing controversy, Strauss was removed by authorities from his position as professor of theology at Tübingen. In 1839 he was offered a chair of theology at the University of Zürich, but the offer was withdrawn following the public outcry which the offer caused in the city.⁴⁴

Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* had more than intellectual implications; it had social and political consequences as well. The controversy resulting from the reception of Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* led Frederick William III to conclude that criticism of religion could lead to criticism

⁴⁴ William J. Brazill, *The Young Hegelians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 115.

of other forms of authority – such as state authority. Accordingly, the king took action against potentially subversive political organizations, such as the reform group Young Germany. Young Germany was condemned by the Prussian government and banned in 1835 for their alleged assaults on the Christian religion and the threat to authority which such assaults presumably implied.⁴⁵

Impressed by his intellectual precociousness and orthodox Hegelian bona fides, the editorial board of the *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik* chose Bruno Bauer to represent the orthodox Hegelian position and to refute Strauss's argument.⁴⁶ The young Bauer's critique of *Das Leben Jesu* won him immediate acclaim throughout Germany, and increased his status even more among the conservative Hegelians.⁴⁷ But as Bauer developed his answer to Strauss, the germ of what would become the basis of his later, more radical theology was revealed. In a series of source-critical works from 1838 to 1840, which addressed the religious experience of the Old Testament Jews and the authorship of the gospels, Bauer articulated the idea that the gospels were but expressions of *individual* self-consciousness. Whereas Strauss had argued that the gospels

⁴⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁶ Bauer, *The Trumpet*, 23.

⁴⁷ Zvi Rosen, *Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx: The Influence of Bruno Bauer on Marx's Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 42.

were expressions of the (communally held) myths and messianic expectations of the early Christian communities, Bauer argued that the gospels were strictly products of the self-consciousnesses of their respective authors, thus underscoring the individual, subjective character of the gospels. Bauer's position concerning the authorship of the Gospels not only contradicted Strauss's mythical interpretation, but was also in stark contrast to the orthodox Hegelian position that the gospels were expressions of the Absolute revealed to individual consciousness.⁴⁸ This theme of the primacy of the *individual* consciousness would become a leitmotif throughout the later work of Bauer, and would animate his later extreme individualism.

Among Bauer's works in this era was the two-volume *Die Religion des alten Testaments in der geschichtlichen Entwicklung ihrer Prinzipien dargestellt* (1838), in which Bauer applied his subjectivist ideas to Judaism. Here, he argued that the Jewish religion stressed the 'otherness' of God and man, implying that God was distinct and apart from man. According to Bauer, Christianity repudiated this otherness of God in the person of Jesus, whose dual nature revealed that man and the divine were in fact one. Thus,

⁴⁸ Bauer, *The Trumpet*, 23-24.

Christianity represented a higher level of consciousness than Judaism because it rejected the externality of the deity. *Die Religion des alten Testaments* also stressed the subjective element of religious experience, and in it we may detect the subjectivist direction that Bauer's writings had taken since his reading of Strauss – that religious experience was merely a product of self-consciousness.

If Bauer's apostasy began with his reading of Strauss, his experience in the university system of the later 1830s and early 1840s shaped his later career as a theological radical. In 1839, Bauer was offered a position on the theology faculty at Bonn. The pro-Hegelian Minister of Culture Karl von Altenstein (1770-1840) was instrumental in securing the position for Bauer, whose appointment to the post was opposed by Schleiermacher's supporters on the faculty. Altenstein was the highest ranking ally of Hegelians (Old and Young) in 'official' Prussian political culture. Bonn was a more conservative institution than Berlin, but free of the climate of orthodox Hegeliansim which permeated the University of Berlin, Bauer was able to develop his increasingly unorthodox ideas further, and here his literary output reached its zenith.⁴⁹ Only a *privatdozent* during his time at Bonn, Bauer was forced to

⁴⁹ Ibid., 24-25.

survive on only student fees and a small fellowship (*privatdozents* were not salaried). He unceasingly complained to his colleagues about his dire financial straits.

In 1839 Bauer began to drift away from the orthodox Hegelianism of his youth. These included a pamphlet bitterly critical of the orthodox Hegelian theologian E.W. Hengstenberg which appeared in 1839 while Bauer was still at Berlin. It was one of Bauer's earliest displays of unorthodox opinion, facilitating his transfer to Bonn. It represented to one scholar of Bauer's life "the beginning of the end of Bauer's academic career."⁵⁰ While still in Berlin, Bauer began to frequent the *Doktorclub*, a group dedicated to the discussion of Young Hegelian ideas. The *Doktorclub* would eventually form the basis for the more radical *Die Freien*. In just three years Bauer would assume the informal leadership of the radical Free, and earn the epithet 'Robespierre of Theology', but in 1839, Bauer was not yet fully converted to Left Hegelianism.⁵¹ Indeed, Arnold Ruge (1802-1880), radical agitator and editor of a series of Young Hegelian journals, wrote him off as an Old Hegelian reactionary as late as October 1839. Ironically, Bauer, the 'Old Hegelian reactionary' of whom Ruge spoke,

⁵⁰ Bauer, *The Trumpet*, 24.

⁵¹ Mah, *The End of Philosophy*, 53.

would cost Ruge's *Hallische Jahrbücher* the patronage of D.F. Strauss, and later, its very existence.⁵² During this time Bauer remained in limbo between Old and Young Hegelianism, though his increasing emphasis on the place of the subject in his theology, and political and social events to come, would help to 'push' him into the radical camp.

In 1840 Bauer completed the books *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte des Johannes* and *Die evangelische Landeskirche Preussens und die Wissenschaft*. The first suggested that "the gospel of John was a work of artistic creation. . . whose author used Jesus to express his particular point of view" and which lacked historical veracity.⁵³ Bauer would soon arrive at a similar conclusion concerning the veracity of the synoptic gospels. A copy of this text arrived at the ministry of education, and by it new culture minister Eichhorn became convinced that Bauer and his ideas were a threat to Christian beliefs.⁵⁴

The second was an essay in which Bauer expressed his hope for bureaucratic reforms from the new king. This hope reflected the liberal expectations shared by many

⁵² Robert J. Hellman, *Berlin – The Red Room and White Beer: The "Free" Hegelian Radicals in the 1840s* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1990), 80.

⁵³ Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 184.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

intellectuals in 1840. In the text, Bauer argued that the Prussian state should not subordinate itself to the church – a church which Bauer saw in resurgence. In his *Die evangelische Landeskirche Preussens und die Wissenschaft*, Bauer expressed his belief that Prussia was in grave danger as a result of a renewed religious consciousness spreading across the nation.⁵⁵ Although Bauer evidently continued for some time to hope that Frederick's liberalism would trump his commitment to Pietism and orthodox religious practices, already by early 1840, he was beginning to feel marginalized. In a March 1840 letter to his brother Edgar, Bruno prophesizes his eventual exclusion from academic life:

The day will come, when I will stand resolutely against the entire theological world. Only then, so I believe, will I be in my right place, to which I have been persistently impelled by pressures and struggles during the past six years.⁵⁶

Perceiving his own radicalization as an inexorable process, Bauer could by now see the handwriting on the wall. Bauer was in fact officially notified of the revocation of his license to teach in March 1842, but was probably aware that as early as 1840 that his days at Bonn were numbered.

⁵⁵ Bauer, *The Trumpet*, 26.

⁵⁶ Letter from Bruno Bauer to Edgar Bauer dated 31 March 1840. Bruno and Edgar Bauer, *Briefwechsel zwischen Bruno Bauer und Edgar Bauer während der Jahre 1839-1842 aus Bonn und Berlin* (Neudruck der Ausgabe: Charlottenburg, 1844), 60. (Reprinted by Scientia Verlag, Aalen, 1969)

Indeed, it may be said that Bauer's awareness of his impending exclusion, rather than the official act itself, further provoked him, and that his further radicalization dates from the earlier (1840), rather than later (March 1842) date.⁵⁷

Already disliked by many of his colleagues at Bonn, Bauer's situation became even more precarious when Altenstein died in May 1840 and Frederick William IV, who would become a constant foil to Bauer, took the Prussian throne in June of the same year. Frederick was a Romantic, and a Pietistic, sincere Christian who took his role as 'leader' of the unified Prussian church (1817) seriously. He was also a monarch for whom aesthetic, ideological, and especially religious concerns took precedence over the practice of *realpolitik*.⁵⁸ With the ascendance of Frederick William IV came a resurgence of Pietism. Pietists emphasized the role of feeling in religious practice, believed in a literal interpretation of the Bible, and

⁵⁷ Hans Martin Sass supports this interpretation of Bauer's literary output prior to his 'official' removal from Bonn: "From 1841 onward, Bauer's behavior was divided. *Outwardly* he remained a Privatdozent of theology. *Inwardly* he prepared for and then initiated the 'critical critique's battle' against the traditional academic world, against religion, and against the Prussian state. All his actions in 1841/1842 have this double-edged aspect." Sass, "Bruno Bauer's Critical Theory", 96. See also Warren Breckman, *Marx, The Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory: Dethroning the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 246.

⁵⁸ David E. Barclay, *Frederick William IV and the Prussian Monarchy: 1840-1861* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), vii.

rejected the speculative theological interpretations of rationalists and Hegelians.

Frederick appointed J.A.F. Eichhorn his Minister of Culture. Eichhorn was a lifetime civil servant who had enjoyed career success with the passage of the *Zollverein* and was a redoubtable anti-Hegelian, but unlike his predecessor Altenstein, a man without liberal sympathies.⁵⁹ But at least initially, Bauer was able to consider working with him.

Bauer appealed to Eichhorn in October 1840 for a promotion to associate professor – a position which would have provided a steady income and security. In exchange for this promotion, Bauer went so far as to promise to restrain his provocative Young Hegelian ideas. Eichhorn refused Bauer's request, which no doubt left him desperate, and ended his willingness to meet the government halfway⁶⁰ Proof of the bitterness Bauer felt over this rejection is that in a short time after the episode, we find Bauer resolute in his decision to provoke the government to a confrontation – a confrontation that would eventually lead to Bauer's removal from Bonn, and embitter him further.

⁵⁹ Hans Martin Sass, "Bruno Bauer's Critical Theory" *The Philosophical Forum* Vol. 8, No. 8 (1978): 95.

⁶⁰ Mah, *The End of Philosophy*, 63-65.

As we have seen, Bauer was already anxious about the resurgence of Pietism even before the ascendance of Frederick to the throne in June 1840. Frederick's policies upon taking the throne, which lent themselves to the resurgence of Pietism, confirmed Bauer's anxieties as expressed in *Die evangelische Landeskirche* and further alienated him from the state and its policies. In 1841 Friedrich Schelling was called to Berlin by the king himself to exterminate "the dragon-seed of Hegelianism,"⁶¹ and it was clear that subversive thinkers like Bauer would not enjoy the relative academic freedom afforded them by the only sporadic enforcement of censorship laws under Frederick William III and his Hegelian-friendly minister Altenstein. The new king also rejected demands for an even moderately liberal constitution. In addition to calling Schelling to Berlin, the conservative historian Friedrich Julius Stahl (as well as other Romantic, Pietist intellectuals) was appointed to a chair in History. Stahl dutifully took up Frederick William IV and Eichhorn's program of religious restoration in the service of the Prussian state.⁶²

⁶¹ David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1968), 27.

⁶² Douglas Moggach, "Bruno Bauer's Political Critique, 1840-1841" *The Owl of Minerva*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Spring 1996): 143.

One such text in which Stahl expressed his support for the new king's policies was his 1840 *Die Kirchenverfassung nach Lehre und Recht der Protestanten*. Stahl had argued that "in relation to the Church, [the state's] power [was] only a means for upholding the orthodox order."⁶³ Stahl's conception of the state as a defender of the official religious order was manifest in the policies of Frederick William IV.

The period from 1840, when Frederick William IV took the throne, to the suppression of the radical press in 1842-1843, was the time when the Young Hegelians were at their greatest strength.⁶⁴ These years also coincide with the most radical period of Bauer's career. 1841 could have held little more appeal to Bauer than the previous year, for in May of 1841 his only friend and supporter on the Bonn theology faculty, Johann Augusti, died.⁶⁵ This combination of factors of 1840 and 1841 must certainly have provoked Bauer to further desperation. This desperation is reflected in his post-1840/1841 works. In these studies, one may detect a consistent theme to Bauer's theology: that instead of the Bible being a record of God's coming to self-consciousness, it represented nothing more than a

⁶³ Ibid., 150.

⁶⁴ McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, 17.

⁶⁵ Mah, *The End of Philosophy*, 70.

record of the development of human consciousness. God was nothing more than a creation of the human imagination.⁶⁶ The reduction of God to man, from theology to anthropology, is a characteristic Young Hegelian idea.

Another event which certainly influenced Bauer's intellectual development was the 1841 publication of Ludwig Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums*. Feuerbach had been removed from his position at the University of Erlangen earlier in his career (1838) for denying personal immortality. Feuerbach's dismissal was a fate that would befall nearly all theological radicals in Germany.⁶⁷ Like Bruno Bauer, Feuerbach argued that religion alienated humanity from itself, for the religious consciousness attributed to God what it lacked itself.⁶⁸ Bauer's reaction to Feuerbach's argument that God was simply a projection of man's highest values onto the transcendent was negative, as was his first reaction to Strauss. Whereas Feuerbach suggested that God represented an outward projection of human values, and thus alienated man from himself and those values, Bauer bitterly argued that the idea of God was an act of pure invention, a projection of *in-human* values. Presaging Nietzsche's more acerbic later work, Bauer

⁶⁶ Ibid., 61.

⁶⁷ Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 140.

⁶⁸ Zvi Rosen, "The Radicalism of a Young Hegelian: Bruno Bauer" *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (July 1971): 392.

claimed that God and Christian values were an un-natural reflection of the subject's inherently free nature and a denial of this world for the transcendental. Bauer writes:

Religion . . . is a loathing for the world itself, a despair over history, a denial of the world itself and nothing other than that.⁶⁹

Additionally, whereas Feuerbach argued that traditional religion should be replaced with a universalist humanism, Bauer maintained his subjectivist bent and continued to emphasize the importance of individual self-consciousness rather than universal humanity. The origins of religion and Christianity were a socio-cultural phenomenon, but the overcoming of the alienation caused by religion was to be a subjective enterprise.

In his June 1841 article "Der christliche Staat und unsere Zeit", in Arnold Ruge's Young Hegelian journal *Hallische Jahrbücher*, Bauer rebuked Friedrich Julius Stahl's characterization of the state as an instrument of the church. In this article, Bauer reacted as much to Stahl's text as to the new royal policies which it supported. Bauer's rebuke to Strauss's conception of the Gospels as communally held myths was to suggest instead

⁶⁹ Bruno Bauer, *An English Edition of Bruno Bauer's 1843 Christianity Exposed: A Recollection of the Eighteenth Century and a Contribution to the Crisis of the Nineteenth Century* edited by Paul Trejo and translated by Esther Ziegler and Jutta Hamm. Volume 23, *Studies in German Thought and History* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 79.

that they were products of individual self-consciousness. Such a rebuke was Bauer's estimation of the role of subjectivity in the production of the Gospels. In Bauer's rebuke to Stahl, his *Die evangelische Landeskirche*, he highlighted the connection between his theological and political views, applying his ideas of the paramount importance of self-consciousness to politics. Increasingly, Bauer viewed the policies of Frederick William IV as an historical regression, an impediment to an already transcended stage in the dialectic of history. Increasingly, Bauer found it necessary to use radical weapons to do battle with these regressive policies.

In October 1841 Bauer produced *Die Posaune des jungsten Gerichts uber Hegel den Atheisten und Antichristen: Ein Ultimatum*, which, in assuming the guise of an orthodox Pietist, ironically argued – against the Right and Center Hegelians' interpretations of Hegel which had wrongly claimed that Hegel's philosophy was compatible with orthodox Christianity and political conservatism – that Hegel's philosophy had atheistic and revolutionary implications, including the overthrow of the church and state, which had been concealed by Hegel's conservative epigones. In writing *Die Posaune*, Bauer hoped to clearly

define the lines of contention between Old and Young Hegelians.⁷⁰

As a result of Frederick's accession to the throne, Bauer began to drift even further from official Prussian state policy. An example of Bauer's distaste for Frederick's regime was his participation in the December 1841 tribute to the liberal jurist Karl Welcker. This tribute vexed the king enough for him to demand an investigation of Bauer, and thus began the inevitable process which would finally lead to Bauer's removal from Bonn in March 1842. Bauer's subjectivism animated both his biblical criticism and his politics. He went from postulating that the gospels were the product of individual self-consciousness to individualist criticism of the Prussian state and its religious policies. The state and orthodox Protestantism were obstacles to the progressive development of self-consciousness. Thus Bauer's subjectivist biblical criticism spilled over into his politics; he unleashed his most virulent critiques when he feared a return of orthodox Protestant dominance.

Bauer's disappointment with the new king's policies, the death of the pro-Hegelian Altenstein, and the contentious theology faculty at Bonn may have made Bauer

⁷⁰ Bauer, *The Trumpet*, 32.

desperate, compelling him to provocatively challenge the new regime, and it was his next study, the three volume *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker*, published between February 1841 and January 1842, that would ensure that Bauer would lose his position on the Bonn theological faculty. Bauer personally sent a manuscript to Eichhorn, defiantly and provocatively demonstrating his awareness of the implications of the publication of this study, and his awareness that he would soon be removed from the faculty at Bonn. Here, and in numerous letters to his brother Edgar and to Arnold Ruge between December 1840 and December 1842, Bauer indicated his desire to force the government to make a 'final decision' as to his position.⁷¹ He wrote to Ruge in December 1841, suggesting to his friend that:

Since the Government does not seem to dare do anything against me, it would be very good if you could find ways and means to publicly accuse me [of subversion] in the Leipzig general newspaper and in the *Augsburger*.⁷²

Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker, an attack on the historical veracity of the synoptic gospels, (Mark, Matthew, Luke) was the quintessential Young Hegelian expression of theology and religion. (In the 1838 *Kritik*

⁷¹ Hellman, *Berlin*, 81.

⁷² Letter from Bruno Bauer to Arnold Ruge dated 6 December, 1841. Cited from Bauer, *Christianity Exposed*, xii.

der evangelischen Geschichte des Johannes, Bauer had, following Strauss, already concluded that independent of the synoptic gospels, John was a literary production with no historical veracity.) Bauer's *Critique* may be viewed within the context of a series of texts which appeared in the 19th century in search of the historical Jesus (cf. Strauss' *Das Leben Jesu*, as well as Ludwig Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums*, and Ernst Renan's *Jésus*). It was in this multi-volume work that Bauer finally articulated the idea that the gospels were *human* creations, creative literary works rather than inspired by God. In this series of works, Bauer claimed (against Strauss) that the Jewish and Gentile Christian communities of the first centuries A.D. had no messianic expectations – that these expectations were retrospective; that is they were projected onto the early Christian community and merely attributed to the Jews and early Christian communities by the later church. As the gospels were reflective works, products of their individual authors' self-consciousnesses, written after Jesus's death, they would reflect the interests and objectives of the early Christian sects to which their authors belonged.

Bauer's conclusion, which denied the continuity between Jewish messianic expectations and the Christian

fulfillment of those expectations in the person of Christ, further severed the continuity between the faiths – a campaign of severance which Bauer had begun in his 1838 *Die Religion des alten Testaments*. Bauer's assessment of the production of the gospels introduced an element of subjectivity into the gospels, and equated God with man (an equation made by so many other Young Hegelians.) In this case, the 'word of God' encapsulated in the gospels was nothing more than the word of man.⁷³ The Gospel of Mark (the 'proto-gospel' upon which the others had relied – the existence of a *Q* gospel had not yet been postulated) was nothing but an artistic creation which expressed its author's philosophical point of view, upon which the others were based.⁷⁴ Bauer compared the evangelists to Homer and Hesiod, whom Herodotus had claimed invented the Greek gods; similarly, the evangelists had invented the Jesus narrative and consequently, the Christian religion.⁷⁵ In the third volume of the *Kritik*, Bauer claimed:

Everything that constitutes the historical Christ, what is said of him, what we know of him, belongs to the world of representation, more particularly of Christian representation. But this information has

⁷³ Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 187.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁷⁵ Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx: Studies in the Intellectual Development of Karl Marx* (New York: John Day, 1936), 91.

absolutely nothing to do with a person who belongs to the real world.⁷⁶

Thus the Christ legend had been 'invented' by the evangelists, rather than stemming from the Jewish or early Christian expectations of a Messiah. Thus the gospels were reflective works, intended by their authors to buttress the already existing Christian traditions of the authors' sects. The gospel narratives included characteristics of the personalities of their respective authors, not any revealed truths.

Another challenge to orthodox Hegelianism which Bauer's biblical criticism offered concerned the meaning of the person of Jesus. For Hegel and his orthodox followers, the essence of God and man (or universal and particular) found unity, and was identical, in the person of Jesus. According to Bauer (as well as Strauss and Feuerbach), the joining of God and man, universal and particular, did not occur in just one person (Jesus), but rather occurred universally, and this union of divine and corporeal was an object to be realized by all humanity (though experienced individually) as the dialectic of history unfolded. This interpretation represents a humanistic understating of the person and life of Jesus. According to Bauer, the state and

⁷⁶ Bruno Bauer, *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker*, Volume III, (Leipzig: O. Wigand, 1841-42), 308.

its citizens could participate in the realization of this end, this goal of the union of universal and particular, but for Bauer, Frederick William IV and his policies represented an historical regression and presented an obstacle to the dialectical development of self-consciousness towards its union with God and its freedom. According to Bauer, the state (read: the reactionary Prussian state of Frederick William IV), "[I]s not the work of freedom, its lack of freedom and its imperfection is its dependence upon the Church . . . "77

In this way, Bauer denied both the historicity and divinity of Jesus. Strauss, a political conservative despite his theologically subversive ideas, did not believe his criticism threatened the Christian faith, nor did he wish to upset it (at least in the 1830s). Bauer, in the final volume of his *Kritik*, sought precisely this – to destroy the historical basis of Christianity and in turn the whole Christian religion with it. For the Bauer of the first two *Kritiken*, the Christian religion was an essential component in the dialectical development of self-consciousness, but one that now caused alienation, and was to be transcended. Revealed religion, or traditional Christianity, was nothing more than self-alienated Spirit.

⁷⁷ Bauer, *Christianity Exposed*, 82.

The religious mind could only liberate itself from the fetters of its own religious beliefs by coming to consciousness of the fact that God was nothing more than a product of itself, and not immanent in the world. The Bauer of the third *Kritik* (Jan. 1842) however, frustrated and fully aware that his academic tenure was in jeopardy, took a more hostile tone. It was here where Bauer denied the historical existence of Jesus.

Bauer's *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker* established his Young Hegelian bona fides, but also enraged the Bonn theological faculty and convinced Eichhorn that something had to be done with Bauer. In August 1841, after the publication of the first two volumes of Bauer's *Kritik*, Eichhorn appealed to the theology faculties at the six Prussian universities to help decide whether Bauer was a Christian and whether he should be allowed to teach. Their answers were not uniform, but Bonn argued the most forcefully for Bauer's removal.⁷⁸ By the time of Eichhorn's appeal to the theology faculties of Prussia, Bauer was unquestionably aware that his position at Bonn was not secure, even before his official removal in March 1842. Bauer's participation in a tribute to the liberal jurist and publicist Karl Welcker (1790-1869) in

⁷⁸ Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 192.

December 1841 did not help his cause, for this too caused consternation with Eichhorn and Frederick William IV. The king, outraged that an academic employed by the state in one of its universities would participate in a tribute to Welcker, instructed Eichhorn to see to it that "Doctor Bauer never again return to Bonn in his role as *privat docent*."⁷⁹ The king's instructions were executed in March 1842, as Bauer was formally notified of his removal from Bonn. Almost immediately prior to Bauer's dismissal, he had written Arnold Ruge and affirmed: "I will not be satisfied until I have blown all the theological faculties sky high."⁸⁰

Though ostensibly resigned to his removal from Bonn, Bauer was outraged, and many intellectuals across Germany shared his outrage. A contemporary, Ludwig Pietsch proclaimed that Bauer's dismissal "had the whole of cultivated Germany in the most violent excitement."⁸¹ Other German intellectuals could no doubt identify with Bauer's situation and felt threatened by the reactionary measures

⁷⁹ " . . . dass der Dr. Bauer nicht weider in sein Verhältnis als Privatdozent nach Bonn zurückkehrt." Ernst Barnikol, *Bruno Bauer: Studien und Materialien*, edited by Peter Reimer and Hans-Martin Sass. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972), 154.

⁸⁰ Letter from Bruno Bauer to Arnold Ruge, 1 March 1842. Cited from Toews, *Hegelianism*, 318.

⁸¹ Ludwig Pietsch, *Wie ich Schriftsteller geworden bin* (Berlin: 1893), 251. Cited from Hellman, *Berlin*, 83.

the new king was taking, and by the strength of the Pietist faction in the new Prussian court.⁸²

Bauer's official removal from Bonn in 1842 was not the only act of political repression that year. Ruge's *Deutsche Jahrbücher* and Marx's *Rheinische Zeitung*, both journals to which Bauer contributed articles, were shut down by the Prussian government.⁸³ The same year saw the government of Frederick William IV remove nearly all Hegelians from their academic and civic posts, contributing to the unrest already caused by Bauer's removal and the suppression of Ruge and Marx's journals.⁸⁴

From his new position outside of official Prussian university life Bauer had radical license, and he wasted no time in exploiting it. In 1842, in immediate response to his dismissal from Bonn, Bauer wrote *Die gute Sache der Freiheit und meine eigene Angelegenheit*, where he publicly admitted to being an atheist, and argued that atheism was the only philosophical position that could free man from the yoke of religion. In it, Bauer suggested (as Feuerbach had in the 1841 *Das Wesen des Christentums*) that religion was a form of alienation, and an obstacle to human

⁸² Robert M. Bigler, *The Politics of German Protestantism: The Rise of the Protestant Church Elite in Prussia, 1815-1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 179.

⁸³ Mah, *The End of Philosophy*, 76.

⁸⁴ Bauer, *Christianity Exposed*, xi.

freedom.⁸⁵ *Die gute Sache* was published in Zürich, beyond the reach of the Prussian censors. By the time of its publication, Bauer's attack on Christianity had grown so provocative that he found it difficult to convince his publishers (including Otto Wigand and Ruge) to print his radical work, for fear of government recrimination.⁸⁶

Radical agitators such as Bauer knew the consequences of their theological and political subversion. If removed from their academic positions there was little chance of finding reemployment, at once because the Karlsbad Decrees forbade a professor dismissed from his position to teach again in any Prussian university, and because of the surplus of professional (theological and legal) men in mid nineteenth-century German universities. Some of the bitterness Bauer felt over his removal was no doubt a result of his realization that he would now find little prospect of secure, consistent employment.

Additionally, upon his removal Bauer was from now on denied the prestige of state service. Academic appointments carried with them a certain status, and personal ties and friendships were often cemented by membership in academic society. Being removed from one's academic position might be compared to being excommunicated by the medieval church

⁸⁵ Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 197.

⁸⁶ Hellman, *Berlin*, 84.

– one was not only excluded from one sphere of life (the university or the church), but rather socially ostracized from nearly all of society as well.

The problem of a surplus of educated men and the consequences of such a surplus would have been particularly acute in Bauer's case, for the largest percentage of students during Bauer's time at university were enrolled in theology, 38.5 percent.⁸⁷ The result was more theologians than the job market could absorb. This was true of the legal profession as well, and Bauer's friend Arnold Ruge was similarly affected by this trend.⁸⁸

Along with the embitterment felt as a result of their removal, the generation of The Free saw little prospect for (re)employment in official academic life due to the lack of openings in official academic and bureaucratic positions during this period. By the early 1830s, more graduates in theology (and law) were entering the job market than could be absorbed by the bureaucracy (including the universities) and the churches.⁸⁹ Many of those excluded in previous periods found reemployment. Humboldt devoted the rest of his life to private study and scholarship, with great success, as did a number of the Göttingen Seven. Some even

⁸⁷ Toews, *Hegelianism*, 213.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 213.

entered politics as representatives of assemblies. This would have been clearly impossible for a figure such as Stirner, who advocated the annihilation of the state.

The unemployment crisis and subsequent downturn in the economy, as well as the lack of jobs in the 'official' sector contributed to a climate of discontent among intellectuals who could not find a 'place' in Prussian academic, religious, or civic society. The bureaucracy became more diligent in their work of policing dissident activity, and those turned away from civic employment were disaffected and no doubt more receptive to ideas critical of the government. This climate of intellectual discontent and uneasiness was perfectly suited for the creation of radical groups, and was the one in which *The Free* formed, and which Bauer was radicalized.

Bauer left for Berlin shortly after his dismissal from Bonn, bitter and vengeful that the government had actually carried out his removal.⁹⁰ It was during this time that Bauer began attending meetings of *Die Freien* at Hippel's Weinstube. This group of beer-hall literati promulgated their radical theology and politics in such journals as the *Norddeutsche Blätter für Kritik, Literatur und Unterhaltung*, and the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, edited

⁹⁰ Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 193.

by Bruno and Edgar Bauer. To be sure, Bauer was familiar with some of the figures who would later make up, or be associated with, The Free, but 1842, after his dismissal from Bonn, represents the period when he first attended meetings of the group. The Free announced their formal existence in 1842 as an act of radical solidarity in reaction to Bauer's removal from Bonn.⁹¹ But the group's origins may be traced back even further, to the *Doktorklub*, the group founded in 1837 at the University of Berlin for the discussion of Young Hegelian ideas. In addition to The Free's meetings at Hippel's Weinstube, the salon of Bettina von Arnim, which he began to frequent at the same time, provided Bauer with another radical outlet of expression.⁹²

The roster of *Die Freien* was not fixed, but regular attendees of the group's meetings included Marx, Engels, Bauer's brothers Edgar and Egbert, Ludwig Buhl, Eduard Meyen, and Max Stirner. Edgar wrote defenses of Bruno against his brother's critics, attacking the tepid political commitments of liberals not willing to join The Free. Buhl, a bohemian scribbler, along with the literary critic Meyen, popularized the ideas of The Free in mainstream journalism.⁹³ Stirner, a close friend of Bauer's

⁹¹ Hellman, *Berlin*, 83.

⁹² Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 195.

⁹³ Hellman, *Berlin*, 92-111.

and later a critic, was a nihilist philosopher who rejected all philosophical abstraction and advocated the destruction of the state and all forms of authority. It was in this group of rowdy intellectuals that strong personalities clashed, radical contacts could be made, publishers could be found for subversive texts, and editors could be found for radical journals.

Yet another figure who frequented the meetings of The Free – and whose career and intellectual development was similar to Bauer’s – was the lawyer and publisher Arnold Ruge. Ruge, a close friend of Bauer’s – began his career as a Hegelian, but as the minister Altenstein’s promises to support critical Hegelianism fell short of Ruge’s expectations, and as Pietists, reactionary figures such as Stahl, and anti-Hegelians such as Schelling gained power in Prussian universities, and as Ruge’s petitions for tenure at Halle University were consistently denied, he turned to the far Left and became a fervent critic of the existing state.⁹⁴ The careers of Ruge, as well as so many of The Free, were similarly affected by the accession of Frederick William IV to the throne in 1840, their dismissals from academic posts for subversive ideas and the resulting

⁹⁴ Toews, *Hegelianism*, 234.

bitterness and inability to secure stable reemployment, and their patronage of radical political journals and clubs.

Bruno Bauer and *The Free's* acerbic attacks on morals and orthodox religion and politics would have been unthinkable outside of the context of the rowdy environment of the radical Berlin clubs and saloons.⁹⁵ The Berlin cafes such as Hippel's where *The Free* met served as "a kind of compensatory political forum" supplying radical journals and news not available from local mainstream media.⁹⁶ The goal of the Young Hegelians was to demonstrate that theology was merely a human endeavor – to replace transcendental theology with humanist philosophy. In the case of Bruno Bauer, this was carried out through source criticism of the gospels. *The Free* did not take their radical endeavor lightly. In time, they would develop a reputation for being the wildest atheists in Germany, iconoclasts devoid of any semblance of humanity.⁹⁷

A figure upon whom *The Free* relied heavily for assisting them in the dissemination of their radical ideas was the Leipzig publisher Otto Wigand. Wigand was a radical publisher who was associated with *The Free*, and attended several of their meetings. In addition to publishing Ruge's

⁹⁵ Hellman, *Berlin*, 79.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

Hallische Jahrbücher für deutsche Wissenschaft und Kunst, Wigand also published Feuerbach's *Das Wesen Des Christentums* in 1841. Furthermore, Wigand published the first edition (which consisted of one thousand copies) of Stirner's *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, losing only 250 to the censors.⁹⁸ While there is no evidence that Wigand contributed to The Free intellectually, his function as publisher of their texts and journals was indispensable to the group. Few publishers were willing to risk themselves as consistently as Wigand did to publish The Free's radical material. As publisher of their journals and books, Wigand provided The Free with outlets of radical expression.

Wigand's journals served as outlets for the radical publications of The Free, but other journals also disseminated their work. The importance of the journal for the dissemination of a party's views in early nineteenth-century Germany cannot be overstated. Groups or parties sharing common social and political views established their identity through the establishment of a journal.⁹⁹ These journals aided the Young Hegelians in the formation of a common identity.¹⁰⁰ They served as a Young Hegelian vehicle

⁹⁸ Paterson *The Nihilistic Egoist*, 11.

⁹⁹ Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 74.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Nola, "The Young Hegelians, Feuerbach, and Marx," in *Routledge History of Philosophy, Volume V: The Age of German Idealism*, ed. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (London: Routledge, 1993), 297.

for expression. Bauer's contributions to these Young Hegelian organs served as "major theoretical articulations of [a] Left Hegelian ideology . . . "¹⁰¹ The radical journals that Bauer contributed to not only gave license to his radicalism, but also served a practical purpose – they provided him with a source (albeit not steady or secure) of income outside of Prussian academic culture – just enough for subsistence and to finance his vitriolic attacks on the Prussian state.

One such journal was the *Hallische Jahrbücher*. Arnold Ruge founded the *Hallische Jahrbücher* in 1837 as a counterweight to the *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, the main journal of the Old Hegelians, but was compelled to move the operation to Dresden in 1841 because of pressures from the censors and from conservative Prussian scholars such as Heinrich Leo.¹⁰² Strauss, Feuerbach, and even the young anarchist Mikhail Bakunin contributed to the *Hallische Jahrbücher*. The *Hallische Jahrbücher* gained immediate popularity, especially among Young Hegelian sympathizers in universities (both faculty and students) and among the so-called intellectual proletariat – those unemployed intellectuals who frequented

¹⁰¹ Toews, *Hegelianism*, 319.

¹⁰² Wilhelm Klutentreter, *Dortmunder Beiträge zur Zeitungsforschung: Die Rheinische Zeitung von 1842/43 in der Politischen und Geistigen Bewegung des Vormärz* Volume 10, No. 1. (Dortmund: Ruhfus, 1966), 30-31.

cafes and salons from which The Free would draw their ranks. With the move to Dresden in 1841, the former *Hallische Jahrbücher* became the *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, and grew even more radical in tone. Both journals were dedicated to proselytizing the revolutionary implications of Hegel's philosophy to their readers, but the *Deutsche Jahrbücher* was openly republican and advocated atheism and revolution, "expressing acid criticisms of the oppressive bureaucracies that dominated Germany."¹⁰³

The *Rheinische Zeitung*, a journal founded in Cologne by Georg Jung and Robert Oppenheim, two "radical followers of Hegel", as a liberal outlet of expression, was founded in 1842.¹⁰⁴ Its tone grew more provocative as time progressed, as such Young Hegelians as Bauer, Stirner, Moses Hess, Feuerbach, and Marx contributed articles. The suppression of the moderate journal *Athenaum* in 1841 provoked the ire of its contributors (the usual suspects of *Die Freien*), who like Bauer, expressed their angst as well as their distaste with the surrounding political and social events of 1840-1842 in Ruge's *Hallische Jahrbücher*, and then the *Deutsche Jahrbücher*. In 1843 Prussia convinced Saxony to suppress the *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, and Ruge and Marx moved to Paris to begin publication of a new journal,

¹⁰³ Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 89.

¹⁰⁴ McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, 17.

the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher*. In the same year, Bruno and Edgar Bauer founded a journal, the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, for the expression of their radical opinions and disgust with the masses for failing to rally behind them as the government suppressed the radical press and grew increasingly reactionary. Bruno and Edgar's journal served as a sort of radical counterpart/complement to Ruge and Marx's *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher*.

The radicalism of journals such as the *Hallische Jahrbücher* and the *Deutsche Jahrbücher* was a result of the government's suppression of even moderate journals, and had the effect of enraging its contributors, like Bauer, even further. The regime's suppression of radical outlets of expression only increased the resolve of the wild spirits of The Free, and united them in their radicalism more tightly. It also had the effect of isolating them from any outside moderating influences.¹⁰⁵

One example of Bauer's contributions to these radical journals is his *Die Judenfrage*. Bauer remained true to his atheism and his religious criticism in this 1842-1843 article on the Jewish question by arguing that the Jews should not be granted political emancipation on the basis of their membership in a religious group – this suggested a

¹⁰⁵ Hellman, *Berlin*, 201.

privileging of religious identification, which Bauer opposed. If the Jews wanted true emancipation, they would emancipate themselves from the fetters of their alienating, oppressive, religious consciousnesses, their true yoke, rather than agitating for political freedom.

Bauer's most radically hostile expression of atheism, *Das Entdeckte Christentum* appeared in 1843. *Das Entdeckte Christentum* was Bauer's most radically hostile expression of atheism and anti-Christian sentiment. It is this work which truly established Bauer as 'The Robespierre of Theology'. In it, Bauer makes his most militant attack on Christianity yet, confessing his hatred of religion, and arguing that religion causes the alienation of man from his nature. In a letter to the book's publisher, Julius Fröbel, Bauer outlines the contents of *Das Entdeckte Christentum*: "I demonstrate that religion is a hell composed of hatred for humanity and that God is the bailiff of this hell . . .

„¹⁰⁶

In 1844 Bauer founded the journal *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* with his brother Edgar. The *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* was founded primarily on political rather

¹⁰⁶ " . . . ich beweise, daß die Religion die Hölle der Menschenfeindlichkeit, Gött der Profoß dieser Hölle ist . . . " Letter from Bruno Bauer to Julius Fröbel, 2 August 1843. Cited from Ernst Barnikol "Bruno Bauers Kampf gegen Religion und Christentum und die Spaltung der vormärzlichen preußischen Opposition" *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* No. 46 (1927), 5.

than theological issues. It included articles dealing with poverty in Berlin, different varieties of socialism, and even debated the merits of the English Corn Laws.¹⁰⁷ It folded after less than a year, and along with it Bauer's involvement with the Berlin Young Hegelians.¹⁰⁸ At the same time The Free began to dissolve, and the 'new' Young Hegelians arrived on the scene (Marx, Engels, Bakunin), uninterested in Bauer's '*Terrorismus der wahren Theorie*', but rather with practical action.

By the late 1840s and 1850s, the volume of Bauer's once prolific literary output diminished. He continued to publish histories and biblical source-criticism, but his later works were less well received and he never enjoyed the reputation as the intellectual luminary he once held. Even in his later works, Bauer indicated his continuing bitterness over the accession of Frederick William IV, and how much the events of the early 1840s affected his intellectual development. One such work was *Vollständige Geschichte der Parteikämpfe in Deutschland während der Jahre 1842-1846* (1842-1846) where Bauer chronicled the disappointment felt by intellectuals who had placed their hopes in Frederick William IV for a more democratic and

¹⁰⁷ Mah, *The End of Philosophy*, 77.

¹⁰⁸ David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, 50.

liberal Prussia. It also lamented the increasing power of the church and state during the early 1840s.

From 1855 to 1856 Bauer visited London, where on occasion he was received by Marx.¹⁰⁹ After the break-up of *The Free and the Revolutions* of 1848 Bauer turned to writing secular history and outrageous biblical criticism where he claimed Philo and Seneca were the true authors of the Gospels. What he did write during this period was largely ignored, and lacked the critical spirit of his previous works. During his later career, Bauer was reduced to doing editorial work for the reactionary editor Hermann Wagener. In 1866 he stopped his work for Wagener and took up farming in a Berlin suburb to provide for his orphaned nieces. He continued on in this way until April 1882 when he died alone, reportedly insane.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Bauer, *The Trumpet*, 50-51.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

5. The Direction of Prussian Radicalism after 1840

It was only after 1840 that true, sustained, political radicalism could arise in Prussia. After the disappointment felt as a result of Frederick William IV's broken promises of reform, a wider audience emerged which was receptive to criticism of the state, and thus began the socio-political basis of radicalization. Frederick William III had effectively played the forces of reform and reaction off of each other, but in 1842, after the short conciliatory period of his reign was over, Frederick William IV "leaned too far in the direction of the reactionary parties"¹¹¹, and the forces of loyal opposition and reform were radicalized. Despite the king's relaxation of censorship and the granting of amnesty for political prisoners in the first two years of his reign, theological dissidents such as Bauer saw his Pietism, Romanticism, and religious policies as a threat from the beginning. Though the king enacted some liberal *political* reforms from June 1840 to 1842, he did not relent in his strong (and according to Bauer, regressive) Pietistic *religious* beliefs.¹¹²

Additionally, the cumulative effects of the liberals' agitation for reform were finally beginning to find resonance. The economic dislocation and resulting social

¹¹¹ Brose, *The Politics of Technological Change*, 265.

¹¹² Berdahl, *The Politics of the Prussian Nobility*, 313.

unrest during the 1840s contributed to creating a wider, more receptive audience for subversive ideas.¹¹³ James J. Sheehan has found that after 1840 the German press "became more politically engaged", and new, increasingly subversive journals and pamphlets appeared with greater regularity.¹¹⁴ David Blackbourn has noted that political opposition was increasingly radicalized after 1840, and that "the pace of political debate picked up and public opinion grew bolder."¹¹⁵ Indeed, by 1842, one found it impossible "not to become identified with a . . . political party."¹¹⁶

Before the accession of Frederick William IV in June 1840, and the implementation of his reactionary and Pietistic policies, Bauer had hoped that the state would contribute to development of self-consciousness. Bauer's disillusionment with Frederick's policies served to radicalize his thought, though failed to foster in him a commitment to practical political action.

Bauer's 1841 contention that the state could no longer serve as a vehicle for the development of self-consciousness illuminates a turning point in Prussian radicalism. Radical intellectuals gave up on their belief

¹¹³ Sheehan, *German Liberalism*, 12.

¹¹⁴ Sheehan, *German History*, 625.

¹¹⁵ Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century*, 131 and 135.

¹¹⁶ Karl Rosenkranz, *Aus einem Tagebuch. Königsberg Herbst 1833 bis Frühjahr 1846* (Leipzig, 1854), 239. Cited from Sheehan, *German Liberalism*, 12.

that the state could contribute to the progress of freedom and recognition (two tried and true Hegelian goals of historical development) and began instead attacking the state itself.

Bauer's political radicalism, to perpetuate a Marxist bromide, was theoretical rather than practical, but so was Marx's early political criticism. Thus, Bauer's political radicalization points to the direction of Prussian radicalism after 1840. Theology was not out of the picture – its influence did persist in Prussia after 1840 – but political criticism became paramount, especially because the state would not reform its religious policies. Before 1840, religion was considered an obstacle to the development and freedom of self-consciousness. After 1840, the state (and to an extent, the market) was recognized as the primary impediment to the subject's realization of freedom. Theology became a function of politics rather than vice versa. This can be seen in Marx's contention that religion would disappear along with the state; that one does not need to eliminate religion to empower the revolution, but rather with revolution, religion will wither away.

The figure of Marx may serve as an indication that that period of disillusionment over the broke promises of

Frederick William IV was coming to an end, as intellectuals began to recognize that they and the revolutionary classes rather than the state could carry the revolution. Marx might represent the turning point from Hegelianism and theory to political radicalism – a practical and economic turn that Bauer and those he identified as prisoners of a religious consciousness never made.

Besides illuminating how the accession of Frederick William IV served as a turning point for so many Prussian intellectuals, and how intellectuals were marginalized by official Prussian society and thus radicalized, the career of Bruno Bauer reveals the political choices German intellectuals were compelled to make in their roles as civic employees of the state. Figures such as Bauer and Ruge chose not to support the regime of Frederick William IV and were thus excluded from Prussian academic society and the benefits and prestige that came with membership in that society.

Not only outspoken critics of the state were marginalized by the Prussian government in the 1840s, but a long roster of Left Hegelians, whom Frederick and Eichhorn hoped to eradicate from Prussian academic life, were denied the privileges afforded to those scholars who actively supported the regime. For example, Feuerbach, Strauss,

Ruge, and Bauer were all Left Hegelians either removed from their academic positions, or while in academia were not offered 'tenure' positions, such as Bauer, who was consigned to be an unsalaried lecturer – a *privatdozent* – and then expelled.

On the other hand, Center and Right (Old) Hegelians, who chose to support the state and argued that reason should conform itself to existing social reality (i.e., whichever Prussian monarch was currently in power), kept their academic appointments, which were all at least on the associate professorial level. Right Hegelians such as K. Rosenkranz, E. Gans, G. Gabler, and Marheineke were all full professors in 1840.¹¹⁷ Their support for the regime was rewarded by maintaining their academic appointments and salaries, to say nothing of their status. Bauer and the members of *Die Freien*, on the other hand, were dismissed from academic life. Thus, one's political and philosophical proclivities within the Hegelian school roughly corresponded to their academic status, which often mirrored the conflicts within German society as whole during this time.¹¹⁸

Prussian intellectuals of the 1840s were forced to make a political choice, a choice that could affect their

¹¹⁷ Toews, *Hegelianism*, 216.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

career positively or negatively. In the case of Bruno Bauer and so many Young Hegelian intellectuals, their decision to stand in opposition to the reactionary, Pietistic policies of Frederick William IV, left them on the margins of Prussian academic life.

6. Conclusion

Bruno Bauer's investigations into the person of Jesus and the composition of Gospels became increasingly radical as time progressed.¹¹⁹ For Bauer, as for so many young intellectuals of the nineteenth century, biblical source criticism, the relentless quest of the truth of the historical Jesus, and the bitter atheism which some such pursuits precipitated, represented, according to Nietzsche,

the awe-inspiring *catastrophe* of a two-thousand-year discipline in truth-telling, which finally forbids itself the *lie involved in belief in God*.¹²⁰

Along with the crisis of faith engendered by those investigations, Bauer's intellectual development from orthodoxy to atheism was shaped by the ascendancy of a reactionary Pietistic king to the throne in June 1840, the climate of intellectual repression in the 1840s, Bauer's removal from his position at the University of Bonn in 1842, and his patronage of radical political journals and clubs. His career and intellectual development may serve as an example of the choices early nineteenth-century German intellectuals were forced to make during their careers – to support or criticize the existing regime – and the consequences those choices held for the remainder of their

¹¹⁹ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* translated by W. Montgomery (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), 144.

¹²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 126.

lives. It also serves to illuminate the inextricable relationship between theology and politics in *Vormärz* Prussia, and how Prussian radicalism, long after French radicalism, was politicized.

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