INTRODUCTION: "THE FRIEND OF FREEDOM"

> To understand Bauer, one must understand our time.
> What is our time? It is revolutionary.[1]
> Edgar Bauer, October 1842

Bruno Bauer has provoked intense controversies since the 1830s, yet his work remains inaccessible, his meaning elusive.[2] He is most familiar as the object of Marx's sharp polemical attacks in *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology*,[3] though Albert Schweitzer, in his widely noted *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, gives him a receptive and sensitive reading.[4] He is far more complex a figure than the caricature that Marx's denunciations make of him. In the decisive political circumstances of the German *Vormärz*, the prelude to the revolutions of March 1848, Bauer's is the voice of an original republicanism, inspired by Hegel. He is a theorist of revolution, of its causes and its failures. Analysing the emergent tendencies of modern society, he criticises both the old order and new ideological currents in the interests of a profound, republican liberation.

The literature on the Hegelian Left has depicted in diverse ways the revolution that Bauer theorises: as abstract-utopian posturing,[5] as a religious crisis,[6] or as a cultural degradation or mutation.[7] Recent commentators stress the political dimensions of the crisis and the interest of the Left Hegelians, Bauer foremost among them, in developing a theory of popular sovereignty and citizenship.[8] Important studies have linked them to the literary and political currents of their time[9] and traced the changing patterns of their relationships with early French socialism.[10] Others have demonstrated the affinity of their thought with Hellenistic theories of self-consciousness,[11] opening comparative perspectives on modern republican appropriations of Roman or neo-Roman themes.[12] These readings broaden the Left-Hegelian attack on religious estrangement to encompass the institutional and ideological expressions of the old regime.

Bauer himself sees the revolution that he theorizes as bearing epochal significance. It is a fundamental political, social, and cultural transformation, the completion of the unfinished tasks of the French Revolution, but also the pursuit of unprecedented challenges posed by the emergence of modern civil society. Its aim is the creation of a republican league of equal right, eliminating irrational privileges, refashioning social relations, and eradicating religious and political alienation. As the culmination of the emancipatory strivings of modernity, it fulfils the promise of the transcendental project, initiated by Kant and perfected, almost, by Hegel. It is this post-Kantian philosophical context that shapes Bauer's understanding of the political struggle.

In conditions of the Restoration and political reaction, Bauer defends the necessity of a political and social revolution based on a new conception of freedom. His republicanism is a theory of positive liberty or self-transcendence that combines ethical and aesthetic motifs derived from Hegel and particularly from the critique of Kant. Though rooted in political action, this transformation is to have consequences far beyond the political sphere. Bauer's work is a campaign waged on three fronts[13]: first, against the old order, the Restoration state, its social and juridical base, and its orthodox religious justification; then against liberalism as a defence of private interest, and as a warrant for subordinating the state to economic power; and, finally, against socialism, as another variant of particularity and heteronomy. The originality of Bauer's republicanism in the *Vormärz* is the Hegelian argumentation he deploys against both Restoration conservatism and liberalism. The longstanding antagonism of republicanism to these adversaries receives an innovative theoretical grounding in Bauer's work. A new opposition also appears, in the rupture between the republican and socialist camps, whose theoretical differences now attain sharpened formulation.

Before we examine these forms of critique, some preliminary problems of sources and interpretation require our attention. These are especially acute in the present case. Bauer was an enormously prolific writer. Approximately eighty published texts, totalling several thousands of pages, have been attributed to him in the decade after 1838 alone. Of these, more than a dozen are lengthy and significant books, covering interpretations and critiques of Hegel, the Old Testament, the gospels, modern theological currents, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the contemporary German and European situation. Unlike the Feuerbachian corpus, for example, no critical edition of these works exists.[14] Marx alleges that Bauer could spin out a weighty tome from the thinnest spindle of a thought, but his writing is always provocative, often profound, and sometimes strikingly witty. One memorable image describes Hegel's berserk rage against all existing statutes[15]; this is Bauer assuming and relishing a pietistic pose, the better to celebrate his own revolutionary

doctrine under the strictures of censorship. The writing is powerful, and vast in its sweep.

Beyond difficulties of range and extent, the interpretation of Bauer's work is fraught with additional problems of textual analysis. A daunting array of these uncertainties is described by Ernst Barnikol, the major contributor to the field.[16] In two cases, the anonymous *Posaune des jüngsten Gerichts* (*Trumpet of the Last Judgement*, 1841) and *Hegels Lehre von der Religion und Kunst* (*Hegel's Doctrine of Religion and Art*, 1842), which figure among Bauer's most important texts, the author adopts the ironic posture of a conservative critic of Hegel in order to defend the progressive character of the Hegelian system, but in doing so he also attributes to Hegel his own revolutionary views. Other sources show that he does not believe that Hegel actually held these positions, but he thinks that they are necessary consequences of Hegel's fundamental doctrines. In two other important books, *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte des Johannes* (*Critique of the Gospel of John*, 1840) and *Die evangelische Landeskirche Preussens und die Wissenschaft* (*The Evangelical State Church of Prussia and Science*, 1840), Bauer expresses in the text central theses that are at odds with his statements in other contemporary communications. In these cases, the published texts are more cautious or more conservative than the private utterances, as recorded in his subsequently published correspondence, or in his unpublished letters to his fellow Left Hegelian Arnold Ruge.[17] A further complication arises from anonymous publications and the use of pseudonyms, largely too under the pressure of censorship.[18] It is not certain that all of Bauer's texts (at least the journalistic articles) are catalogued for the *Vormärz* period, and some attributions are disputed.[19] Because of the anonymity of important pieces published in Bauer's journals, the reconstruction of certain of his views on social and economic problems must remain tentative. Bauer's sometimes sketchy or ambiguous expositions of key topics are responsible for other intractable problems in deciphering his meaning. Even in the central category of mass society, for example, it is not always clear which adversaries specifically fall under this rubric.[20]

The critical literature on Bauer offers additional difficulties. In many instances, no secondary sources could be discovered. We are exploring virgin territory. This is the case for many of Bauer's articles from the period 1842–43, and for his studies of the French Revolution, the social question, and the German oppositional movement in 1843–49.[21] On other issues, such as Bauer's political critique in 1840–41, much of the literature represents views that appear indefensible in light of the evidence presented here. Finally, Bauer's career has frequently been broken into various, often incompatible phases.[22] The perception of radical changes of position during the *Vormärz* has led to widely divergent explanations of his aims and significance.

We can identify two schools of interpretation of Bauer's writings. The first maintains that Bauer's thinking sacrifices the relational polarities, mediations, and dialectical transitions of the Hegelian system, in favour of sharp antithetical oppositions. The Dutch theologian G. A. van den Bergh van Eysinga represents this view. He contends that "Bauer's error is not, as Marx thinks, that he was dependent on Hegel – so too was Marx! – but rather that he substituted self-consciousness for the Idea."[23] By this claim, van den Bergh van Eysinga means that Bauer surrenders the terrain of Hegelian objective and absolute spirit to the arrogation of subjective spirit, as if the latter could be self-grounding in the absence of the higher determinations of the system. From this standpoint, the abstract understanding, with its unmediated oppositions, takes the place of Hegelian reason in Bauer's thinking. He concludes of Bauer that "His rationalism was of Enlightenment, not of Hegelian origin."[24] Hans-Martin Sass, too, maintains that Bauer abandons dialectical transitions in favour of antithetical ruptures; but Sass locates the sources of this attitude in the Christian apocalyptic tradition rather than in the Enlightenment.[25] The antithetical character of Bauer's work has also been stressed by Daniel Brudney, who argues that the invocation of history by Bauer is a merely contingent feature of his thought. Brudney finds that Bauer's texts offer no consistent or satisfactory explanation of how the knowledge of history contributes to attaining the standpoint of universal self-consciousness; nor is it clear whether such knowledge is necessary to the critical perspective.[26] The dominant model of antithetics that Bauer employs in the 1840s implies, in Brudney's reading, that the past is simply to be repudiated and not dialectically assimilated: Devoid of positive content, history cannot orient consciousness or action in the present, which represents a radically new beginning.

As an example of a second line of interpretation, Ingrid Pepperle identifies a complex dialectic of history as self-production in Bauer's work, at least in the early 1840s. She follows an interpretative tradition initiated by Max Stirner and other contemporaries, however, which claims that a fundamental break in continuity occurs in Bauer's writing after 1843, when a vacuous social critique supervenes upon a highly acclaimed and rigorous criticism of religion.[27] Pepperle adopts her periodisation under the influence of Marx's critiques, concluding that Bauer's 1843–49 texts are of diminished theoretical value.[28] A similar judgement is expressed by Mario Rossi, who documents polemics and conceptual oppositions within the Hegelian school, and with various rival currents, and who offers careful analyses of specific Bauerian texts; but he too restricts his attention to the pre-1843 writings. Echoing Marx in the *Holy Family*, he sees Bauer's political position, even in this critical period, as largely theologically conditioned.[29] Pepperle differs in her recognition of the clearly political motivations of Bauer's early work but shares the discontinuity thesis.

Neither of these two types of interpretation is without merit. Each will find a partial vindication in the present account. But each reading, pressed too insistently, is inadequate to grasp the complexity of Bauer's understanding of history and freedom, and each distorts his genuine accomplishments. There are markedly antithetical elements in Bauer's thinking, and these become increasingly evident in his characterisation of the revolutionary situation in Germany after 1843. To this extent the critics are correct. The first approach, however, overlooks a centrally important dimension of Bauer's thinking in the 1840s, a specific model of judgement or of immanent critique that, in its approach to history, differs from the antinomic Enlightenment formulations to which Bauer's have often been compared. It differs, as well, from Kantian morality and equally from the more deterministic variant of critique developed in parallel by the young Marx. The second approach misses the continuity of Bauer's thought, especially his republican commitment, which he continues to defend in important texts long after 1843. It is certain that the focus of Bauer's thinking changes as he confronts different adversaries. We can, however, identify a consistent core in his work throughout the 1840s, in the Hegelian idea of the unity of thought and being. This idea is the basis of his republicanism.

As Bauer already states in his first writing, the prize manuscript of 1829, the unity of concept and objectivity is the central idea of Hegel's idealism.[30] This unity is not static but represents a process of change, development, and progress, as objective reality is remodelled through the experience of rational freedom. Hegel expresses this dynamism through his concept of *Wirklichkeit*, the actuality of reason.[31] This concept translates Aristotle's idea of *energeia*, the presence or activity of form and end in matter.[32] In passages that Bauer draws upon to sustain a revolutionary reading of his meaning, Hegel describes the dynamism of reason as its ability to transform given objectivity into the vehicle of spirit, and to surpass the limits of its previous achievements.

> [S]pirit likewise has the property of dissolving every determinate content it encounters. For it is the universal, unlimited, innermost and infinite form itself, and it overcomes all that is limited. Even if the objective content does not appear finite and limited in content, it does at least appear as something given, immediate and authoritative in nature, so that it is not in a position to impose restrictions on thought or to set itself up as a permanent obstacle to the thinking subject and to infinite internal reflection.[33]

> History has to do with reality, in which the universal must in any case assume a determinate form. And no limited form can establish itself permanently in the face of thought or the concept. If there were something which the concept could not digest or resolve, it would certainly represent the highest degree of fragmentation (*Zerrissenheit*) and unhappiness (*Unseligkeit*). But

> if something of this kind did exist it could be nothing other than thought itself in its function of self-comprehension. For thought alone is inherently unlimited, and all reality is determined within it. In consequence, the fragmentation would cease to exist, and thought would be satisfied with itself. This, then, would be the ultimate purpose of the world. . . . [P]rogress, therefore, is not an indeterminate advance *ad infinitum*, for it has a definite aim, namely that of returning upon itself.[34]

The process of realisation of reason is not for Hegel a movement without closure, or what he calls a spurious infinite,[35] constantly reproducing the rift between concept and objectivity. The history of spirit possesses in comprehending reason a point of repose, or of reflection back into unity. Hegel describes the movement of reason as a system of syllogisms, based on the mutual relations and changing functions of universality, particularity, and singularity.[36] The universal stands in different ways for the rational concept; the particular is the medium in which the concept is to be embodied; the singular is the achieved embodiment of the concept, though subject to revision and reformulation. In the unfolding of the syllogisms, the universal acquires objectivity and concreteness by incorporating the particular as an aspect of itself, while the particular elevates itself to universality, stripping off its contingent nature to become the expression of a higher principle. The conclusion of the syllogism contains these two intersecting movements and also a further movement that crystallises the result as a new determinate principle.[37] Following up this argumentation, Bauer contends that the historic process is doubled, as an open-ended objective striving, and as a subjective completion or return to unity within the rational self. His concept of infinite self-consciousness maintains these two sides. Hegel himself takes the dynamism or *Wirklichkeit* of reason to be a hallmark of freedom. In this respect, too, Bauer's thought follows his lead.

> Spirit endures contradiction because it knows that it contains no determination that it has not posited itself, and consequently that it cannot in turn get rid of. This power over every content present in it forms the basis of the freedom of spirit. . . . [A]ctual freedom does not therefore belong to spirit in its immediacy but has to be brought into being by spirit's own activity. It is thus as the creator of its freedom that we have to consider spirit in philosophy. The entire development of the concept of spirit represents only spirit's freeing of itself from all existential forms which do not accord with its concept; a liberation which is brought about by the transformation of these forms into an actuality perfectly adequate to the concept of spirit.[38]

The realisation of reason can be traced in a sequence of stages, wherein the mediation of universal and particular is achieved in different forms. For Hegel, the philosophy of antiquity depicts a moral substance of which particular members are manifestations, properties, or accidents, not fully

individuated by the possession of an autonomous moral conscience. The classical Greek doctrine of virtue aims to produce what Hegel calls the beautiful individual, an exemplar of a predetermined set of values that integrate the person into the substance of the community.[39] The dissolution of this consciousness, in Stoicism and Epicureanism, represents a withdrawal from the engulfing moral substance of the *polis* into subjective interiority or self-limitation. Despite the seeming radicality of the Epicurean programme, its principal ethical injunction not to exceed limits – to seek to minimise pain and not to maximise pleasure – is consistent with the requirements of classical thought, and antagonistic to unbounded modern self-assertion.

In Hegel's account, to which Bauer remains faithful, the modern emphasis on freedom overthrows the classical fixity of limits and the naturalness or givenness of values and relations. In the modern conception, autonomous subjects, possessing instrumental reason, confront and dominate the objective world, extracting new forms from the operation of discoverable causal patterns but also being subject to these patterns in the shaping of their own teleological projects.[40] The liberalism typical of modernity renders community not as the moral substance of individuals but as the instrumental context for the pursuit of private ends. Its positive achievement is to emancipate the individual from previous collective bonds, but it has simultaneously obscured the creation of new forms of community, distinct from the substantial communities of the past. Liberalism is thus one-sided and does not offer an adequate account of the forms of modern solidarity. The ancients, in contrast, neglected the essential moment of personal independence. Hegel's theory of objective spirit proposes to overcome the defects of both schools, while retaining their positive achievements. Following Fichte,[41] Hegel maintains that other subjects are not to be treated merely as obstacles or instruments to individual purposes but can act as conditions of an enlarged personal freedom.[42] The legitimacy of social institutions can be determined according to this criterion. Though mutual limitation remains a permissible figure, occupying a specific place within a larger continuum (one that Hegel designates as abstract right), it is not the exclusive form of reciprocity[43] but must be completed and transcended in political relations. Community no longer depends on given substantial ends or determinations, as in antiquity, but is engendered and sustained in freedom. Modernity allows particular subjects to emerge from a universe of abstract possibilities through their choice of determinate projects. Their particularity is not merely given but evolves within reciprocal relations, sanctioned by shared normative schemes that are robust enough to accommodate diversity and opposition, and do not demand uniformity, conformism, or thoughtless acquiescence. Unlike classical substantiality, modern particularity requires recognition of the free choice that it exerts

within its range of possible options. Particulars thus crystallise, in distinction from all others, yet connected to them in manifold relations. Logically, Hegel analyses this process in the dialectic of the one and the many[44] and traces out its elaborations through the levels of objective spirit. To anticipate the argument of later chapters, the point of Bauer's critique of the masses can best be appreciated in respect to Hegel's characterisation of modern freedom. Mass society suppresses the emancipatory prospects of modernity in favour of a rigid conformity, and rests on particular, private interests that militate against rational and conscious adherence to a universal end, the promoting of freedom in all aspects of social life. Bauer will propose republicanism as a doctrine of transcendence of restrictive private interest.

Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is the theory of the free and infinite personality as the highest political accomplishment of modernity.[45] Modern subjects live with and integrate a diversity of roles and demands, and they generate a high degree of social differentiation, and yet they can formulate and participate in a general interest and practise autonomy in its most robust sense. The substance of what subjects will is made rational and intersubjectively valid in modernity through participation in ethical institutions, the family, civil society, and the state. For Hegel, the state is an institution of ethical life, charged with realising the fundamental values of the community and concretising its understanding of freedom. The principle of political autonomy complements and perfects the more elementary form of freedom as the capacity of choice – that is, the inability of any cause to determine the will without the will's own compliance. It is that basic form which is worked out in abstract right; but it must be supplemented by the more conscious forms of freedom lying beyond this sphere. Abstract right, the right of property or of giving oneself an objective presence in the world, is the beginning of the intersubjective process through which particularity is elevated to universality. In carrying out their projects, subjects produce a new universal, a complex society that is inwardly differentiated and that is sustained through mutual recognition. The universal becomes concrete by containing and giving voice within itself to the particular, the principle of distinction; likewise, the particular is integrated into a new and more articulated universality that does not suppress its freedom, as classical societies did, nor exist as a mere instrumental context for private purposes, as liberals typically believe. Hegel follows this intersubjective process through the spheres of inner morality, receiving its confession of its own inadequacy: it needs to draw the criteria of its judgements not from an abstract interiority but from the network of existing social ties.[46] Only in *Sittlichkeit* or objective ethical life can the contradictions in social relations be dissolved and the unity of concept and objectivity be secured. The unity of universal and particular attains initial concrete reality through the activity

of appropriation, production, and exchange in civil society. This entails reciprocal social relations, rather than isolated acts of will, as originally appears to be the case in abstract right. Finally, in the state the synthesis of particular and universal acquires conscious expression as a real, rather than merely formal, unity.

After Hegel's death, the increasingly conservative political climate of the Restoration proved inimical to the hopes of his school for further progress in rational freedom. For his republican disciples, important elements of his original project required rethinking. In light of political and social developments, Hegel's defence of constitutional monarchy[47] was unwarranted, and his pessimism about the solution of the social question unfounded.[48] To address these deficiencies in Hegel, their conceptual sources within his theory must be identified. The system of objective spirit was to be thoroughly recast, though, for Bauer at least, this can be done consistently with Hegel's own principles.[49] Elaborating upon a suggestion made in print by Arnold Ruge, though it may not originate with him, Bauer envisages a public morality to complement the private morality that Hegel describes in the *Philosophy of Right*. It is the absence of such a public account, his republican followers claim, that is responsible for Hegel's hypostasis of the universal as a separate sphere, as a state that does not explicitly acknowledge its foundation in popular sovereignty. Hegel has thus not succeeded in synthesising universality and particularity. The former is divorced from its basis in subjective action; the latter is too narrowly conceived to open to genuine self-transcendence or autonomy. The figure of the republican citizen is underdeveloped. Bauer's own republicanism, the basis of his political reflections in the *Vormärz*, emerges on this terrain.

For Bauer, the unity of thought and being, the true and central idea of all philosophy, attains its most adequate expression in Hegel, despite the limits of his institutional descriptions. But Hegel's formulation is not yet perfected; there remain in the synthesis of concept and objectivity other theoretical deficiencies beyond the political and institutional, which also stand in need of revision. From this assessment follows Bauer's conviction that Hegel's account of the present can be rectified by an inner engagement and conceptual development, a correction and not an abandonment of the Hegelian system. In this he differs from the Feuerbach of 1839, or the Marx of 1843.[50] Hegel maintains that we can grasp the rationality of history only retrospectively, but we cannot anticipate it. Bauer transforms this claim into a prospective, ethical idealism, though one that takes its bearings from reflection on the historical process. We determine our maxims by reference to history, analysing its current configuration and its inner contradictions, and thus knowing how to act in accord with its objective requirements. It is a Hegelian theory of history as the becoming of freedom that gives access to universality, that allows subjects

to judge what is demanded by the universal end, concretely promoting emancipation from irrational institutions and practices. The invocation of history provides Bauer with a solution to the abstract subjectivism he finds in Kant, and to the mere negativity he finds in Enlightenment criticism, which breaks with history. A further problem that Bauer identifies in Hegel's account of Absolute Spirit is the retention of apparently transcendent elements, with inadequate reference to their subjective origin; consistently with Hegel's fundamental principles, these must now be purged away.

In addressing these problems, Bauer uses his central concept of infinite self-consciousness, a term taken from Hegel's theory of subjective spirit, to reconfigure the Hegelian absolute. One effect of the change that Bauer effects is to bring art and philosophy into close proximity, and to exclude religion henceforth as a form of alienated reason, while recognising its historical necessity. Bauer's divorce of religion and philosophy within Absolute Spirit has been frequently investigated in the literature, though his political motivations have not been clear, and his republicanism obscured. The defining trait of Bauer's project is his insistence on the immanence of the universal in history. History is the becoming of freedom and self-awareness, the record of our struggles for liberation, but also the saga of failed attempts, of alienation, which are necessary if we are to discover the meaning of our rational autonomy. Bauer's account entails the repudiation of all doctrines of freedom based on the assertion of particularism, whether religious, economic, or political. It is simultaneously the critique of hypostatised or false universals, transcending the power of individuals. These include the absolutist state and the fetishistic objects of religious belief. Bauer contends that all attempts to assert freedom on the basis of particular interest are doomed to failure by virtue of their irrationality; and all abasement of human powers before transcendent forces is to be overcome. These are the objects of his republicanism.

Objectively, the unity of thought and being as a process is never complete; it is an infinite striving to secure the always elusive accord between relations, institutions, and understandings of freedom. Subjectively, however, the movement is perfected in individual self-consciousness, through self-transcendence and internalising of the lessons of history. The process thus contains two dimensions, an objective exertion extending into infinity, and a subjective consummation or conscious return to self from otherness. It is the unity of the sublime struggle for freedom and the beautiful self, a self that differs from the beautiful individuality of the classics because it is achieved through surmounting contradictions, and not because its contradictions are yet undeveloped. Here Bauer's resolute modernism is apparent. The process of history is not chaotic or anarchic, but is governed by reason and its dialectical unfolding. Freedom entails a permanent process of transformation. "All that is solid melts