When Hegel died in 1831 his philosophy was completely dominant in Germany, but its implications beyond what he had made explicit were soon being contested by his left and right wing followers. This was a time of intense intellectual creativity and ferment, of increasing questioning and criticism, leading up to the revolutions of 1848. In Germany, in particular, the strict censorship of political discussion resulted in a flourishing of abstract philosophical and theological disputes, an extraordinary outpouring of abstruse controversies and polemics — until these, too, were suppressed by the Prussian censorship. Marx and Kierkegaard emerged from this milieu. Some of the other main thinkers to do so — Stirner, Feuerbach, Engels, and Bruno Bauer — are also figures of enduring importance. Hegel and Marx are such giants, however, that their work has cast a shadow over the work of these lesser thinkers and in some cases eclipsed them almost altogether. They are seen only for the way they react to Hegel or lead towards Marx, and have received little scholarly attention in their own right.

This neglect is gradually being made good and these two studies are important contributions in that process. Bruno Bauer has been treated particularly badly in this regard. As Leopold says, he has ‘suffered the ignominious fate of being best known to modern readers as one of the targets of the young Marx’s polemic’ (101). The work of what David McLellan has called Marx ‘before Marxism’ has also suffered in this way. This is particularly the case with the political writings of 1843 that are the main topic of Leopold’s study.

Bauer was one of the most prolific and prominent of the young Hegelians in his time and an important thinker. As Moggach says, he is ‘far more complex a figure than the caricature that Marx’s denunciations make of him’ (1). Moggach has written the first book length study of his philosophy in English. Even so, it is not a full intellectual biography, its aims are more limited. Indeed, the book gives almost no biographical detail and has very little to say about the historical context of Bauer’s ideas or politics. What Moggach provides is a detailed account of Bauer’s philosophical works in the Vormärz period leading up to the German revolutions of March 1848. Thus the main coverage of Bauer’s work extends only to 1850, with only a brief outline of Bauer’s later work (he lived on until 1882).

Bauer studied philosophy in Berlin, he was one of Hegel’s last pupils. In 1829 his essay on Kant’s aesthetics won the Prussian Royal Prize in Philosophy on the recommendation of Hegel himself. This essay has only recently come to light, it was buried among Hegel’s papers in Berlin. It is published here in English for the first time as an Appendix to Moggach’s book (translated by Moggach from the original Latin). In it Bauer amplifies the criticisms of Kant’s Critique of Aesthetic Judgment that Hegel develops in his lectures on aesthetics, where he argues that Kant treats beauty as something merely subjective and external to the object. Following Hegel, Bauer maintains that thought and objective are united.

Moggach shows how Bauer develops this Hegelian theme in his subsequent work, taking it into theological and political areas. He particularly stresses the political aspect of Bauer’s philosophy. There has been a considerable amount of argument about where Bauer should be situated among the divisions that emerged after Hegel’s death. Moggach argues persuasively that he becomes an increasingly radical thinker and should be regarded as a leading figure among the left Hegelians. From the mid 1830s he taught theology in Berlin and then Bonn. However, he was dismissed from his teaching post at the University of Bonn in 1842 for his outspokenly heretical theological views. From then until 1848 he worked as a radical writer and journalist in the increasingly repressive climate of the times. If anything, his writing becomes even more radical at this point.

Left Hegelianism flourished in the years leading up to the revolutions of 1848, but it did not survive their defeat. In many respects Bauer is the archetypal left Hegelian. He presents himself as an orthodox Hegelian. The true implications of Hegel’s philosophy, he maintains, are radical and revolutionary, though Hegel does not explicitly acknowledge this. He distinguishes what he claims is the ‘true’ or ‘esoteric’ meaning of Hegel’s philosophy from the outwardly conservative or ‘exoteric’ way in which Hegel himself presents it. In a couple of cases, in books written anonymously, he writes ironically as a conservative critic attacking Hegel, to whom his own revolutionary views are attributed.

Moggach analyses Bauer’s political philosophy in this period as a form of ‘republicanism’. A great deal of weight is put on this term, more than it can happily bear. The concept is taken from the work of Quentin Skinner who uses it to describe earlier French and Italian thinkers inspired by classical models. Moggach extends it to the German case, but with little explanation or justification. More argument is needed to show that this is an appropriate and illuminating use for it. In a broad and general sense Bauer’s political agenda can be described as ‘republican’ in that it derives from the French Revolution; he opposes the Prussian monarchy and censorship in the name of equality and freedom. However, Moggach clearly wants the concept of ‘republicanism’ to carry meanings beyond this. His argument is that Bauer wishes to distinguish himself both from Restoration attempts to revive the hierarchy and privilege of the ancien régime on the one hand, and from modern liberalism and emerging capitalism on the other. Emancipation cannot proceed from particularly privileges or from individual economic interests but only from a
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'republican' citizenry motivated by universal — i.e., moral — concerns. The Republican notion of 'virtue' hovers in the background here, but is not used by Bauer himself.

In the early 1840s Bauer published a couple of pieces on the topic of Jewish emancipation which brought him into conflict with other left Hegelians including Marx. Marx's position is familiar, he spells it out in one of his best known early works.1 Bauer's side of the argument is less well known. It is presented at length by Moggach. Bauer's case rests on the view that Judaism, indeed all religions, involve particularistic allegiances and commitments that are ultimately incompatible with the universalist requirements of a modern free state. Participation in the state must therefore require the rejection of religious affiliations.

Marx objects that Bauer confuses political and human emancipation. The political emancipation brought about by modern liberal states, such as those instituted by the American and French Revolutions, permit freedom of religion by making religion a purely private matter. They do not require freedom from religion. Only full human emancipation in a society of the future will lead to the transcendence of religious alienation altogether and freedom from religion altogether.

Bauer's argument, however, is that religion involves exclusive and particular commitments that are incompatible with the universality of the modern state. His position has some interesting contemporary resonances, though unfortunately Moggach does not mention this. These are raised by questions about the place of religion in state schools. For example, should pupils be allowed to wear religious clothing or symbols in school? The French authorities have strictly enforced the line taken by Marx, that religion should be treated by the state as a purely private matter and all religious activity strictly excluded from the public sphere. But some with strong religious commitments refuse to accept this. Like Bauer they insist that religious affiliation cannot be treated simply as a private matter. The British have tended to be more sympathetic to this argument than the French.4 As I write, a British Judge has just ruled that a Sikh girl may continue to wear her Kara (a bangle symbolic of Sikh faith) in school against the wishes of the school.5 This goes some way to acknowledging Bauer's point that a person's religion is necessarily of public concern and cannot be treated as entirely private.6 Even so, Bauer would not have endorsed the British compromise: his position is that Jews (and Sikhs too presumably) should renounce their religious affiliations altogether before being admitted to state schools at all.

Religious questions dominated the early period of left Hegelianism. In the later years of the Vormärz ferment leading up to the revolutions of 1848 the political ground began to shift. The 'social question' came on to the agenda and socialist forces began to make themselves felt. Bauer becomes concerned by issues of deprivation and social inequality. He increasingly defines his form of 'republicanism' in opposition not only to traditional elitism and liberalism, but also to socialism which he regards (like Marx) as expressing the interests of a particular class, the proletariat, rather than the universal moral interest. He analyses modern society as mass society, and he is increasingly critical of the 'mass' as an inert and conservative force. According to Moggach, however, it would be wrong to think that he abandons the revolutionary cause before 1848. The mass still constitutes the necessary basis for radical social change. This can come only from a general moral enlightenment which is to be induced by the 'criticism' of 'critics' like himself. Marx is scathing about Bauer's faith in such 'critical criticism'. In the process of attacking it in The Holy Family he clarifies his own commitment to socialism and materialism.

On the one side stands the Mass, that material, passive, dull and unhistorical element of history. On the other stand the Spirit, Criticism, Herr Bruno and Co. as the active element from which arises all historical action. The act of social transformation is reduced to the brain work of Critical Criticism. (Marx and Engels 1956: 116)

Bauer was deeply disillusioned by the failure of the revolutions of 1848. Moggach gives only a brief outline of the subsequent course of his thought in an 'Epilogue'. Bauer retreated to the village outside Berlin where he had grown up, earning himself the title of 'the hermit of Rixdorf'. He became increasingly pessimistic, conservative and stridently anti-Semitic in his views. He was convinced that the political energies of Europe were exhausted, and that the only hope for change lay in a reawakening Russia.

Moggach has done much to rescue Bauer's philosophy from near oblivion. He has provided the only substantial treatment that exists in English of the ideas of this colourful thinker up to 1848. His account is detailed and authoritative, it fills a real gap in the literature. But it is more doubtful whether Moggach succeeds in his larger ambition of 'rehabilitating' (17) Bauer's philosophy. For the most part Moggach confines himself to description. He does not attempt to relate Bauer's thought to contemporary issues or controversies. He does little to set it in its intellectual or political context. Moreover, the concept of 'republicanism' by which he seeks to do this is too underdeveloped to carry such weight.

Leopold's book on The Young Marx is also a work of retrieval and rehabilitation. Its subject is more limited than its title suggests. Leopold acknowledges this in a useful initial survey of controversies about the very idea of the 'young' Marx and the status of Marx's 'early' work. Leopold concentrates exclusively on Marx's writings of 1843, and only on their political ideas at that. The works discussed are Marx's 'Letters from the Franco-German Yearbooks', 'Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State', 'On the Jewish Question' and 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction'. These works are undoubtedly better known than any of Bauer's. However, as Leopold rightly observes, they have received remarkably little attention compared to the deluge of studies that have been devoted to the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, another early work.

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The longest and most valuable part of the book is given over to discussion of Marx’s ‘Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State.’ This is by far the longest of the works by Marx that Leopold considers. It consists of Marx’s paragraph by paragraph comments on sections 261-313 of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, the sections dealing with the nature of the state. Marx did not write these comments for publication; they were for his own self-clarification. They constitute the most sustained record we have of his engagement with Hegel’s philosophy. Nevertheless, they are not easy to interpret. Leopold does an excellent job of clarifying the lines of thought that run through them. He picks out two main themes: Marx’s criticisms of Hegel’s philosophical method and his account of the nature of the modern state.

According to Marx, Hegel’s ‘speculative method’ has the effect of sanctifying current conditions by portraying them as the result of a priori metaphysical categories. It does this in two stages. Hegel claims to derive his categories a priori, ultimately from his Logic. Marx disputes this. ‘Hegel is portrayed as taking concepts which are derived from the finite empirical world and simply (mis)describing them as elements of an a priori categorical framework.’ Thus the empirical is transformed into the ‘speculative’. This categorical framework is then presented as actualising itself in the empirical world. The speculative is transformed back into the empirical. The empirical is portrayed as a result of a priori processes, and the actual sequence is thus inverted.

Attempts have often been made to link Marx’s use of the figure of inversion with that of other writers, such as Bauer, Hegel or Hess (49). In the absence of detailed evidence, Leopold is sceptical of these accounts. The motif of inversion, he argues, was widespread in the philosophical literature of the time.

Leopold then argues that the main focus of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right and of Marx’s discussion of it is the character of the modern state. This is a bold and striking claim. The state that Hegel describes in his Philosophy of Right seems in many respects archaic: it is a monarchy with feudal-style ‘estates’ and ‘corporations’. However, Leopold argues persuasively that Marx interprets Hegel as providing an analysis of the separation of civil society from the ‘political state’ which is characteristic of the modern state. In the ancient and medieval worlds there is a substantive unity between civil and political life. This is broken in the modern world. A purely political state is separated off, ‘abstracted’ from, the sphere of particular ‘atomistic’ individuals. Modernity for Marx thus involves a ‘double separation’ or alienation of individuals from each other, and of individuals from the state (100). Moreover, the civil and political spheres are opposed to each other, creating a ‘characteristically modern antagonism between civil and political life’ (65). Hegel claims to offer ways to overcome these divisions in his philosophy through the operation of the ‘estates’, ‘corporations’ and ‘assembly’. Marx is dismissive of these mechanisms. They cannot heal the divisions of modern society. For Marx, according to Leopold, Hegel’s achievement is to have identified, and not to have overcome, the atomism and abstraction of modern social life.’ (79)

Leopold’s interpretation is not without its problems. Ultimately Leopold’s Marx remains too much in the realm of abstract philosophy and, in this respect, too close to Hegel. What is missing is a sufficient account of the critical and revolutionary social vision which, even in these early writings, imbues Marx’s thought. Nevertheless, Leopold’s account is illuminating and innovative, it adds importantly to our understanding of this difficult and problematic work and to the interpretation of the crucial notions of civil society and state in this literature.

This account of Marx’s ‘Critique’ forms the main core of Leopold’s book. There is also a useful discussion of ‘On the Jewish Question’, in which many of these themes are reiterated. There is an extensive description of Bauer’s work which diverges in some important respects from Moggach’s account. In particular, Leopold takes the view that Bauer’s work from the mid 1840s must be associated with the right Hegelian position. This suspicion is regularly present, partly because of the way Marx attacks him, partly for his opposition to Jewish emancipation. Leopold has a good account of Bauer’s position on the latter, much less forgiving than Moggach’s.8 He then gives a full account of Marx’s critique of Bauer, and robustly defends Marx against charges of anti-Semitism and Jewish self-hatred which have been brought against him.

Other chapters follow. There is one on Marx’s treatment of the theme of human flourishing – a rather routine discussion based almost entirely on analytical sources. This is surprising given the broad historical knowledge evident in the earlier chapters which are impressively erudite and well informed on a whole range of issues. Indeed, even the footnotes often contain asides and little nuggets of interesting information and are a pleasure to read. The book concludes with a brief discussion of Marx’s attitude to utopianism.

Some interesting and important points get made in these chapters, but they do not cohere well with the earlier parts of the book dealing Marx’s critique of Hegel, it feels as if they are tacked on to make a book length whole. However, this does not detract from the value of the earlier chapters which give a valuable and illuminating interpretation of Hegel’s account of modern society and Marx’s response to it. I should also add that Leopold writes very well, the book is a pleasure to read.

In their different ways both these books make important contributions to the literature on Hegelian philosophy by shedding light on neglected parts of this tradition. More ambitiously, both are seeking the ‘rehabilitation’ as Moggach puts it (17) of ideas that have been overlooked. They are less successful in this respect.

For the most part Moggach confines himself to describing Bauer’s philosophy. He does little to set Bauer’s thought in its intellectual or political context or to relate it to contemporary issues and controversies. The concept of ‘Republicanism’ by which he seeks to
vindicate Bauer’s politics is problematic. Moggach deploys it in a way that is foreign to Bauer and to the philosophy of his time.5

Leopold does a good job of explaining the Marx’s early political ideas, but his claims run beyond this. He argues for a fundamental reassessment of the work of the young Marx and, in particular, of the relative importance of the political works of 1843 in comparison with the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844. The latter, he maintains, have been given an ‘exaggerated standing’ (94) in recent work to the detriment of the ‘Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State’. His case here is unpersuasive. He questions whether the Manuscripts are a single work, but so what? In any case, he argues, they have been privileged not primarily for their intrinsic merits or place in Marx’s intellectual development but more because of the manner and timing of their publication (95). Denigrating the Manuscripts does nothing to enhance the reputation of the writings that Leopold is focusing on. Moreover, as an account of the importance of the Manuscripts it is insufficient. Marx wrote them following his first study of political economy (Adam Smith, James Mill, et al). They constitute Marx’s initial attempt at what was to be his life’s work, to develop a systematic understanding of capitalism and a critique of political economy.

Nevertheless, these books each make important contributions to the understanding of classical German philosophy and attest to the healthy state of scholarly work in this area in the English-speaking world. That is sufficient reason to welcome their appearance.

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Notes

4 No doubt because the British state itself has a religious affiliation in the premodern form of an established religion.