MEANING IN HISTORY? HEGEL, SCHOPENHAUER AND THE YOUNG HEGELIAN'S BATTLE FOR HISTORICAL MEANING, 1830-1848

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In February 1848, a coalition of middle and working class members ousted the repressive government of King Louis Philippe in Paris. This coalition then set up a provisional republican government, with a permanent one in the works. Shortly after, similar republican revolutions swept through other European cities, such as Berlin, Frankfurt, Leipzig and Rome.[1] For many, these revolutions were a long time in coming; they were the culmination of years of anticipation and hope for a better world.

Specifically, a small group of thinkers who came to be known as the Young Hegelians saw these revolutions as a sort of secular apocalypse, as the redemption of a degenerative humanity in the face of the growing ills of industrialization and a slumping economy. They seized upon the theories of an earlier thinker, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who argued that all existence was a rational and purposeful movement. For Hegel, all historical events had meaning because all events were ultimately "progress toward perfection."[2] The Young Hegelians refused to admit the events of their age were in vain. They argued that the events of 1848 were not momentary expressions of a hungry and frustrated people, but the heralds of a new age and the final age of peace and prosperity for mankind.

Yet the revolutions failed a short time later, and for thinkers like the Hegelians, this failure marked a definitive end to a historical epoch. In June 1848, the middle class waged war against the working class, their former allies. The middle class did not want a societal regeneration like many of the working class; rather, they simply wanted more economic and political freedoms.[3] The outcome was never really in doubt. The middle classes, who commanded the professional armies, easily triumphed. As the dust settled and the century wore on, Hegelianism with its emphasis on societal regeneration and progress was neglected in favor of the ideas of more pessimistic thinkers, most notable of these was Arthur Schopenhauer. A contemporary of Hegel's, Schopenhauer was widely neglected until the 1850s. Yet his despairing theories became a mouthpiece for the angst experienced by some thinkers after 1848. In one telling excerpt in 1851 Schopenhauer wrote, "You can…look upon our life as an episode unprofitably disturbing the blessed

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[1] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1975), 23.
[2] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, with an foreword by J.N. Findlay (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 357.
[3] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital*, 25.

calm of nothingness."[4] For him, life was not progress as Hegel had argued, but only an aberration to be ended quickly. History and life, as opposed to the Hegelian notions of meaning, were meaningless.

Yet the desire for social regeneration had been ignited long before February of 1848. For many, this yearning for change began in 1789 with the fall of the Bastille. In the years following the fall of the Bastille, the French had abolished the long standing seigniorial privileges of the nobility, executed the absolute monarch Louis XVI, severely restricted the power of the Catholic Church, established a republic and fought a war the likes of which no one had ever experienced with almost all of Europe. In retrospect, the 1790s can be seen as the decade of the emergence of a societal and historical void, where the foundations that had buttressed European society were rejected by an increasing number of people, in the most influential country in Europe. These institutions were by no means completely eradicated from European life; in fact many recoiled from the uncertainty of this time by a pious devotion of faith to the church. However, a substantial number of thinkers increasingly turned away from faith and monarchy altogether. The revolutions of 1848 were the most visible and violent expression of this desire for some sort of guidance in the void. While these institutions were in question for at least two centuries due to the advancements in science and the theories of the Enlightenment it was the French Revolution that dealt them a serious blow from which they would never fully recover.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First it will argue that a battle for the precise meaning of the historical events of the early nineteenth century emerged within this void, represented by the conflicting theories of Hegel's progress and Schopenhauer's meaninglessness (meaning, in this case, is defined as a reason to exist at all). While there is a vast amount of scholarship on both Hegel and Schopenhauer, this paper is the first to argue that their conflicting theories represented a battle for historical meaning at the onset of the modern age. It sees Hegel, Schopenhauer and Hegel's followers not only as individual thinkers, but also as symbols of larger movements and attitudes in post-revolutionary Germany.

[4] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms,* trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 47.

Secondly, this paper will illustrate exactly how this battle for historical meaning ensued by first examining the radicalization of the Hegelian school during the 1830s, and then by examining the debate between two of Hegel's later followers during the 1840s, Ludwig Feuerbach who used Hegelianism to formulate a theory of radical humanism, and Max Stirner who used Hegelianism to create a theory of rampant individualism. Again, while there has been much literature on the Feuerbach and Stirner debate, no other work has ever situated it in the backdrop of the larger debate between the theories of Hegel and Schopenhauer, and specifically as a method to create some type of meaning in a modernity that suddenly seemed suspect. In short, this paper will argue that a battle for historical meaning, and ultimately for modernity emerged in the early nineteenth century, and it will illustrate exactly how this battle was "fought" by later thinkers.

The first part of this paper will examine the debate between Hegel and Schopenhauer, and illustrate exactly how it could constitute a battle between the ideas of historical purpose and meaninglessness, hereafter termed as nihilism. This is a retrospective judgment, or in the words of Stathis Kouvelakis, a "backwards genealogy" in order to uncover the origins of a particular historical phenomenon, rather than a teleological prophecy or justification of events.[5] The second part of the paper will then examine how two later thinkers followed Hegel and tried to realize a meaning in the void of modernity, but in diametrically opposed ways. Yet their ideas were not simple reiterations of Hegel, but rather altered by their changing historical circumstances. Here it is also important to state that the historical events surrounding the thinkers of this paper did not simply form a background for their theories, but rather, became the "stuff" of their thoughts.[6] The historical events are inseparable from their theories. In conclusion, a brief survey of Schopenhauer's rise to popularity will be chronicled, and its disheartening consequences on the Hegelians battle for meaning and modernity in general.

HEGEL AND SCHOPENHAUER

The earliest event which most clearly illustrated the emergence of this void was the Reign of Terror, and that is where this paper will begin its assessment of historical

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[5] Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx* (New York: Verso, 2003), 5.

[6] Darnton, Robert, *The Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 53.

meaning. In many ways, the Reign of Terror set the trajectory for the differing evaluations of the modern age. In September of 1793, in an effort to save the fledgling French Republic, the National Convention under the guidance of Maxiemilien Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety enacted the Law of Suspects, officially beginning the Terror. This decree gave the Committee near limitless powers to imprison and execute any enemies hostile to the republic. By July 1794, some estimates put the total dead at over 40,000.[7] Yet, the purpose of the Terror was not to guillotine enemies of the republic in a senseless bloodbath. The main purpose was to build a modern republic founded on the Enlightenment notions of freedom, equality and ultimately reason. According to Robespierre and the committee, seigniorial privileges, the divine right of kings and Christianity were stubborn relics, obstacles to modern progress because they encouraged tyranny, superstition, and inequality.[8] The Committee and Robespierre felt the Terror a small price to pay for the birth of a new, rational world. Many did not agree with this assessment.

One such dissenter was the German thinker F.H. Jacobi. Jacobi, a contemporary of Robespierre, was one of the first thinkers who recognized the presence of this void, and he first framed the question of meaning which both Hegel and Schopenhauer were to answer. Jacobi supported many of the changes of the initial phase of the revolution, but as it wore on and the Terror ensued, he felt that it had degenerated into a free for all of crude egoism, which threatened property, religion and traditional morality. For Jacobi, it was also evidence that man needed to believe in God, because without this belief, chaos ensued.[9]

On a more philosophical level, in Robespierre and the French Republic, Jacobi saw the Enlightenment notion of reason paradoxically threaten the very foundations of stability and order, which it was supposed to establish. He argued that if reason were applied to questions such as the existence of God, as Robespierre tried to do, it would

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[7] R.R. Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled: The Year of the Terror in the French Revolution,* 2d ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 153.

[8] Palmer, 178.

[9] Frederick Besier, *Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought 1790-1800* (Massachusetts: Harvard Press, 1992), 129.

never uncover a provable answer, thus leaving absolutely nothing for man to believe in. Jacobi described this deplorable condition as nihilism; it was the eradication of all traditions, beliefs and foundations; the only stable thing was the belief in absolutely nothing.

In 1799, the Terror and the political instability in France had convinced Jacobi that the notion of Enlightenment reason, which he had been suspicious of since the 1760s, had been taken to its limit. Jacobi believed the modern world faced an "ultimatum." As he saw it, there were only two options for Europe after the Reign of Terror, that of faith or nihilism.[10] Either modern man accepted that there were limits to his reason and ascribed the rest to God, or he must follow reason to its inevitable end, which was the complete negation of meaning and purpose for man's existence. He knew that reason had a limit, and the limit was God. He wrote, "Thus, my reason teaches me instinctively: God."[11] Jacobi opted for faith to preserve any meaning for man in this glaring void.

Jacobi's fear of nihilism can be used to illustrate certain reservations of post-revolutionary society. If the price of the modern state could only be paid for with the guillotine and blood, many did not want to pay. The price of modernity was too high. For some, the historical void was ominous and threatening. Jacobi's ultimatum and his opting for faith represented a longing for the past in the face of an uncertain future and a violent present. It also set the stage for Hegel and Schopenhauer's conflict, who, unlike Jacobi, did not resign themselves to the notion of faith. Each disagreed with Jacobi, and their theories each answered Jacobi in a different way. In doing so each formulated an interpretation of the events of the modern age which later thinkers molded to their own historical circumstances.

On the afternoon of October 14, 1806, seven years after Jacobi's rumination on nihilism and faith, Napoleon Bonaparte swept through the small town of Jena, located near Bavaria. He effortlessly crushed the army contingent that engaged him there. The

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[10] F.H. Jacobi, *Werke*, (1799), quoted in Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Fichte to Hegel* (Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 81 and 340n. Also see Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism,* 75.

[11] F. H. Jacobi, "Open Letter to Fichte," (1799), quoted in Warren Breckman, *Marx, The Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory* (Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 26. Warren Breckman, one of the leading Hegelian scholars, surveyed Jacobi's indictment of nihilism. Breckman also drew heavily from Beiser.

philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel personally witnessed the French attack. While this battle was rather anticlimactic in comparison to the larger battles of the Napoleonic wars, for Hegel personally, it was a significant event. He did not flinch like Jacobi had done with the Terror, rather, as he witnessed the erosion of feudalism, absolutism and Christianity, he had a profound sense that his world was changing before his eyes.

As legend has it, Hegel, at the time an unfunded lecturer at the University of Jena, completed his masterpiece, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* as Napoleon's cannons shelled the city. While this legend was slightly embellished (Hegel had already completed the majority of the manuscript well before the battle) it is nonetheless significant, even in exaggeration.[12] For Hegel, this battle, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars in general were the gateway to the modern era. Hegel believed that all of history was a rational progression toward freedom and the French Revolution was the final stage of this progression. The advance of reason, inaugurated at the beginning of history and with its culmination in the French Revolution, had brought freedom to all people, regardless of birth, class or creed.[13] In *Phenomenology*, regarding the role of the French Revolution in world history, he wrote "Absolute freedom ascends the throne of the world without any power being able to resist it."[14] The development of freedom, for Hegel, was unstoppable, and it was in history where it manifested itself.

The *Phenomenology* was in many respects a rebuttal of Jacobi.[15] Hegel did not see the French Revolution as Jacobi's nihilistic nightmare. Rather, he believed that the French Revolution was a "glorious mental dawn" for humankind.[16] For the first time in recorded history, man realized that his existence was the product of his own rational faculty, not the arbitrary whim of some mythical God. In direct contrast to Jacobi's nihilism, Hegel saw the French Revolution, even with the Reign of Terror, as the most purposeful event in the history of mankind. A return to faith now would be cowardice in the face of progress, an unwillingness to move ahead.

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[12] Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 229.
[13] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* , 357.
[14] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 357.
[15] Pinkard, 229.
[16] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree, with an introduction by David A. Duquette (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing, 2004), 525.

Beginning in ancient China and progressing though Persia, Greece, Rome and Medieval Europe, Hegel argued that the Human Spirit which was none other than the mind of humanity taken as a whole, developed rationally. History was teleological movement, meaning that it moved with a definite purpose and toward a goal. In the beginning, there was an undifferentiated unity of all things which Hegel referred to as the Absolute or God. This unity eventually ruptured. Yet this rupture was necessary for the Absolute to truly know and understand itself, to become a concrete entity. As one phase of history ended, its achievements were preserved in the next historical phase, thus no historical content was every truly past, it was always preserved in the next phase. The process of reunification of the Absolute was the teleological progress of history, of the Absolute becoming whole again, but with knowledge of itself.[17]

Thus historical events were not random, isolated occurrences. The executions of the Terror, while gruesome, were not the whims of sadistic madmen; they forged the hard path to freedom.[18] Specifically, Hegel argued the Terror occurred because the revolution was incomplete. At that stage, it had only established an abstract notion of freedom which the individual could not embrace because it was an alien concept.[19] Thus the Terror ensued to establish this abstract freedom at the expense of the individual. Yet this abstraction was the necessary precursor for the establishment of true, individual freedom, within the bounds of the objective state. Only when this occurred, would history culminate in the Absolute.[20]

The French Revolution and the Reign of Terror, as well as the Enlightenment produced feelings of uncertainty for many during the early nineteenth century. Jacobi's fear of nihilism was a poignant articulation of this uncertainty, and many agreed with it. In response to Jacobi's uncertainty, Hegel offered modernity a new type of salvation, based on purpose and reason. He also offered his unstable time a sense of hope, and

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[17] Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 537.

[18] For Hegel, freedom was not the ability to simply do as one pleased. Rather, freedom was when the individual became part of the community, when the individual no longer acted out of self-interest, but rather when his self-interest was identical to the interest of the community at large. Hegel termed this as *Sittlichkeit*, which has no true English translation. It is usually translated as "ethical community." Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 537, also see Laurence Dickey, *Hegel: Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit, 1770-1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ix.

[19] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 360.

[20] Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 534.

more importantly, a task to be performed and a goal to be reached. Events were not meaningless; people did not have to despair in the face of violence, even violence of the magnitude of the Terror. Historical events were meaningful but *only* in teleological progression toward the Absolute. Thus, Hegel viewed the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century with a sense of optimism, despite the violence and upheaval.

After the publication of *Phenomenology*, Hegel's popularity steadily grew. Where Jacobi represented a retreat, Hegel's ideas represented progress, and a desire to achieve the ideals of 1789. Many thinkers saw Hegelianism, with its emphasis on reason, scientific thinking and especially teleology, as a way to express the radical changes of the post-revolutionary society. Hegel attracted a small but devoted and powerful group of followers.[21] In 1818 he was asked to become the head of the University at Berlin.

In many ways Hegel's theories acted like a magnet, attracting some thinkers while repelling others. Conservative thinkers attacked Hegel for subverting traditional Christian faith and the notion of a personal and transcendent God. He was denied entry into the prestigious Royal Prussian Academy for the Sciences. In addition, he carried on a public and long running debate with his colleague at Berlin, the law professor Jakob Friedrich Fries, as well as the speculative theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. They each saw Hegel's theories as too abstract and objective for the individual.[22]

His most trenchant and biting critic however, was at the time an unheard of philosopher named Arthur Schopenhauer. What set Schopenhauer apart was not his deep hatred for Hegel, which many of his contemporaries shared, nor was it the ferocity of his attacks, which many of his contemporaries also shared. Rather, it was the motivation for his criticism of Hegel, which was unlike any other in Germany. Simply put, Schopenhauer denied any meaning in history exactly where Hegel affirmed it.[23]

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[21] John Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805-1841* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 30.

[22] Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, 42 and Frederick Beiser, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, 2d ed, "Hegel's ethics" by Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 224.

[23] One of the earliest philosophers to assess the debate impartially was the Australian Eugene Kamenka, in his work, *The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach,* published in 1970. He wrote that after the failed revolutions of 1848, Feuerbach "seethed in chagrin while the public turned to the suddenly fashionable Schopenhauerian pessimism." While brief, his assessment is extremely valuable. The tenor and climate of Germany's intellectual circles had changed drastically. Where Schopenhauer's pessimistic and nihilistic theories were at one time rejected for Hegelian teleology, Kamenka maintained that after 1848 they became the method of choice for some thinkers to assess German society. For some, reason and teleology were

Schopenhauer arrived at the University of Berlin in the hopes of attaining a teaching position. More accurately, he felt that a teaching position would allow him to counter the influence of Hegel by spreading his ideas to young and eager minds.[24] Schopenhauer had just recently published his major work, *The World as Will and Representation* in 1818. He obtained a teaching post and imprudently asked to schedule his lectures at the same exact time as Hegel. Hegel, bewildered and slightly amused, agreed. This proved to be an abject failure for Schopenhauer, for Hegel was much more popular. After one semester, Schopenhauer quit his post and never returned to academia.[25] He remained in the city for the rest of Hegel's tenure, a silent but patient adversary.

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rejected for nihilism.

A German historian, Arthur Hübscher, joined in the Hegel and Schopenhauer debate, clearly on the side of Schopenhauer. He wrote *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer in its Intellectual Context: A Thinker Against the Tide* in 1973 and an essay "Hegel and Schopenhauer, the Aftermath and the Present," in 1980. In *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* Hübscher was one of the first modern thinkers to label the conflict between Hegel and Schopenhauer as a "battle." He saw Schopenhauerianism as the dark undercurrent which perpetually underscored the notion of Hegelian progress of the 1830s and 1840s, and ultimately dismissed it in the 1850s. Similar to Foucault, Hübscher argued that after 1848 Schopenhauerianism became the method of choice for the assessment of society, because Schopenhauer had effectively elucidated the irrational element of man's nature and the universe which Hegel had failed to do. He ultimately saw Hegel's historical philosophizing eclipsed by the existentialist movement, to which he labeled Schopenhauer a precursor. In his later essay, "Hegel and Schopenhauer," Hübscher wrote that where Hegel identified history with spirit and transcendence, Schopenhauer simply saw history as an extension of man's animal nature. Hübscher contended that the shift to nature from Spirit inaugurated by Schopenhauer marked the course of twentieth century thought. The concluding sentence of the essay declares Schopenhauer's ideas more relevant and overall superior to that of Hegel's.

In 1983, the British historian Bryan Magee wrote what has become one of the definitive works on Schopenhauer, *The Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer*. It is primarily concerned with Schopenhauer, but Magee devotes a chapter to the feud between Schopenhauer and Hegel. As for their respective places in the history of ideas, Magee, writing during the Cold War and less than forty years after the end of World War II, like Hübscher ultimately holds Hegelianism responsible for Nazism as well as Stalinism because of his influence on Marx. Conversely, he views Schopenhauer as a sort of precursor to Darwin for his theories of struggle, Freud for his theories of will, and Einstein for his equation of matter and energy.

The American philosopher Frederick Beiser, similar to Kamenka, examined some of the tensions between Hegel's rationalism and the looming threat of nihilism in post-revolutionary Germany. Yet instead of examining the movement after Hegel, he examined the conditions that influenced Hegelianism. His major work, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, was published in 1987. In it, he argues that Hegelianism was an attempt to uphold the notion of Enlightenment reason after Jacobi's criticisms. While Beiser did not examine Schopenhauer in any detail, he did note one important aspect of their feud. Schopenhauer, contrary to Hegel, stressed the primacy of the will over the intellect and reason. This idea of a will driven existence eventually triumphed over Hegel's ideas of rational progression. Beiser's brief treatment of Schopenhauer is also important because it shows that both Hegel and Schopenhauer were reared in the same intellectual climate and both produced drastically different theories.

[24] Arthur Hübscher, *The Philosophy Schopenhauer in its Intellectual Context: A Thinker Against the Tide* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1973), 23.

The reasons for Schopenhauer's early neglect are complex. However, the most likely reason is that, as a whole, many were not ready to embrace his pessimistic and ultimately nihilistic ideas. Until the 1850s, references to Schopenhauer's work by other thinkers were minimal and not very many copies of his work were sold. The only serious writer to comment on his work was the novelist Jean Paul who praised its greatness, but also extolled its bleakness. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, while Hegelianism captivated Germany, Schopenhauer's works were available to anyone who wanted to read it. Most simply chose not to.

The recent historical events did not inspire any hope in Schopenhauer, because he did not see in them any teleological progression. Schopenhauer's attitude toward teleology is made explicitly clear in the *World as Will*. He wrote one would be foolish to believe, like the supposedly learned men of his time "that time itself as a whole has beginning and end, plan and development, and in some way has for its final goal the highest perfection."[26] Thus, the recent events were not phases in development; they were not steps toward any predestined goal. At best, man made advancements, but ultimately, all historical events such as the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror were nothing but a series of "wars and tumults."[27]

Schopenhauer did point to one recent event as noteworthy however, the Enlightenment and especially Kantian philosophy.[28] In trying to build a world based on reason, man discovered that his reason had limits. Schopenhauer, like Jacobi earlier, followed reason to a definitive boundary. He wrote "knowledge…opens the road to salvation."[29] Yet this was not any type of religious salvation, it was not Jacobi's God. Since man's knowledge of the objective world was limited, Schopenhauer turned inward toward his own consciousness. Here, he encountered his own will and desires, which he believed controlled the intellect. He then argued that one's subjective will was representative of all existence because one's will was actually only a piece of *the will*, the all-encompassing, irrational essence of all existence. In the face of this absurd and

[25] Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer,* 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 238.
[26] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 183.
[27] Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, 42.
[28] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will*, 416.
[29] Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, 21.

horrific prospect, one would come to the realization that true happiness lay in the denial of existence. For one who finally denied the will to live would come to realize "this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies is-nothing."[30] This was the highest and most sublime truth. There was no meaning to history or life, just the prospect of nihilistic salvation. Man's intellect allowed him to see this.

Schopenhauer argued that the Reign of Terror and the Napoleonic Wars were simply naked barbarism; he did not try to justify them in anyway by reverting to teleology or reason. However, instead of resigning to faith, Schopenhauer joyfully opted for nihilism. He would most likely have agreed with Hegel that faith was cowardice, but he would also have charged him with cowardice as well because he took refuge in another sort of faith; teleology. Schopenhauer saw the events of history, but particularly the modern events of the Enlightenment and the Terror as indicative of one inexorable conclusion: life was ultimately meaningless, and one must come face to face with this meaninglessness.

While Schopenhauer's influence was not immediately felt, his condemnation of Hegel represented a frightening conclusion to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Schopenhauer's work was not a direct answer to Jacobi's "ultimatum," yet it nonetheless represented the unthinkable adaptation of the option of nihilism, the latent realization that no one wanted to make. This realization was the "logic of nihilism," the brute fact that existence was purposeless and not worth living. And the Enlightenment made this fact clear to all. While many of Hegel's followers may not have known Schopenhauer *per se*, his nihilistic declaration was the most extreme, most bleak and pessimistic articulation of the theory of nihilism which was a hotly debated notion in early nineteenth century Germany.[31] It was nihilism, and by extension Schopenhauer's embracing of it, which Hegel's followers neglected. This of course is a historical reading of Schopenhauer, which has been made clearer in hindsight.

In the early nineteenth century, Hegel and Schopenhauer stood at the precipice of a historical crossroads. The Reign of Terror and the Napoleonic Wars forced many to ask if Enlightenment rationalism had been taken too far. Had it liberated man from the

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[30] However, Schopenhauer did not advocate suicide, as this was denying what was painful. One had to deny the pleasures in life, including food, and eventually starve, similar to some Hindu ascetics and Christian hermits. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will*, 411 and *Essays and Aphorisms*, 77.

[31] Breckman, *Marx, The Young Hegelians, and Origins of Radical Social Theory*, 27.

bondage of medieval Catholicism and absolutism and laid the foundation of the modern state, or did it simply reveal to man his own meaninglessness? Was the notion of God a fetter, or necessary condition for social stability? The events of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century affected Hegel and Schopenhauer in a particular way, and their divergent theories are evidence of this effect. Hegel and Schopenhauer's theories became a battle for the meaning of the historical events of their time and of history in general. Yet it was a battle not fought between them, but rather in the subsequent decades between their followers and detractors.

DAVID STRAUSS AND THE YOUNG HEGELIAN RUPTURE

Confronted with Jacobi's ultimatum of faith or nihilism in his interpretation of modernity, Hegel opted for a third avenue, that of a rational teleology. Yet, as he grew older, Hegel learned that the idea of progress could be a stubborn and even dangerous notion, because without a limit, it could go further than its author intended. While Hegel used the notion of progress to make peace with and in some respects justify the events of his time, some younger thinkers used his notion of teleology to call those very ideas into question. Hegel's teleology sparked an intellectual movement spanning from the publication of the *Phenomenology* in 1807 until the failed revolutions in 1848.

In light of the historical situation in post-revolutionary Germany, the movement that Hegel sparked became an answer to the question of the void, at least for a small group of German thinkers. In Hegelianism, Hegel's followers saw a way to give meaning to history after it had been called into question during the Terror and by the entire revolutionary movement in general. They did not believe in the void; they believed in progress. Thus, the adaptation of Hegelianism represented a victory for Hegelian teleology, at least in the short run. They seized upon Hegel's interpretation of modernity; however, they altered it in light of the conditions of their own time and society.[32] Friedrich Vischer, a prominent Hegelian, epitomized the Hegelian movement when he said "we [the Young Hegelians] were propelled by a fervent and proud trust that the

[32] William Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1970), 7.

Hegelian philosophy…gave us possession of the real truth."[33] This truth was the meaning of history; it was a secular, rational meaning, as opposed to faith and nihilism.

The battle for meaning, at least as the Young Hegelians waged it, was not static; it was continually affected by political factors, mainly the French Revolution of 1830. The revolution of 1830 resonated strongly with many German thinkers. While many embraced the revolution as a positive change, others were weary of revolution and conflict. In response, a good number of thinkers tended to lean toward conservatism. Hegel straddled a fine line as a philosopher employed by the increasingly conservative Prussian state and at the same time preaching a doctrine of progress and change. Hegel did not desire to turn back the clock or undo the revolution, however, he did firmly believe that progress had limits, and that limit had been reached. He felt that by the 1830s, the Prussian state had reached its apogee, or the Absolute. It had a constitutional monarchy, its citizens had civil liberties and overall, their freedom. For Hegel, the task now was to fine tune what was already apparent.

Hegel's more progressive followers did not share their conservative counterpart's enthusiasm for the Prussian state of the 1830s. In turn, many embraced the revolution of 1830 as a continuation of change. The revolution began to polarize the Hegelian school, which had been fracturing even during Hegel's lifetime, into three distinct factions; the conservative or Right Hegelians, the moderate or Center Hegelians, and then later the radical or Left Hegelians. The radical sect of Hegelianism emerged by the mid 1830s.[34]

The 1830s were vastly different from any other period of history, and one of Hegel's more radical followers, David Strauss, like many thinkers, was acutely aware of this. The use of photography, railroads, industrial factories, and the steam engine were some of the more notable advances. In addition, there was also the emergence of modern republican and bureaucratic nations such as America and France.[35] In short, Strauss lived in a world increasingly based on science and reason. He was a theologian and his primary concern was the relationship between traditional faith and the new visible science and

[33] Friedrich Vischer, *Altes und Neues: neue Folge* (1889): 228, quoted in William Brazill, *The Young Hegelians* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1970), 170.
[34] Frederick Beiser, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*. 2d ed. (Cambridge Companion Series. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). This is a compilation of various writings on Hegel from some of the most respected scholars in the field, including Alan Wood, Frederick beiser.
[35] The first railroad was built in Berlin in 1835, four years after Hegel's death. Brazill, 4.

reason.[36] In 1835, Strauss published his controversial work *The Life of Jesus: Critically Examined* and unwittingly solidified the divisions in the Hegelian School.

In *Life of Jesus*, Strauss unlike the more conservative Right and Center Hegelians bluntly denied the validity of Christianity, regulating it to the same position as Greek mythology and paganism. He argued that Christianity was no different from any other religion; it was simply a stage in the progression of history.[37] Instead of trying to uphold the doctrines of Christianity within the cultural void of the nineteenth century, Strauss sought to surpass Christianity and establish something more relevant to the modern age.[38] Specifically, for Strauss, the modern age of industry and revolution of the 1830s was not a prospect to be feared as Jacobi had, and it was not devoid of purpose as Schopenhauer suggested. Rather, Strauss saw the modern era as nearing the culmination of history. Strauss lamented the fact that modern day Christians turned away from the problems of the modern world and put faith into something that did not exist. He wrote "Shall we interest ourselves more in the cure of some sick people in Galilee, than in the miracles of intellectual life belonging to the history of the world?"[39] Strauss wanted man to realize *he* is God, but only as a species. Only as a species could man achieve salvation, but here on earth. Without this realization, man remained *alienated* from God and ultimately from himself. With the realization of pantheism, modern man could finally concentrate on the construction of the here and now, as some were finally beginning to do, of which modern science was a testament.[40] This realization was the purpose of history.

This notion of pantheism only appealed to a small number of thinkers however. Virtually all of the Right and Center Hegelians saw pantheism as a threat to individualism and traditional Christianity and thus disdained it. In addition, Jacobi had equated any type of pantheism with atheism and ultimately nihilism, for him, only a transcendental God based on faith could see man through the void. Strauss, as a result of his publication, was relieved of his teaching position at the University of Tubingen; he never held a significant

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[36] Toews, 259.
[37] David Strauss, *The Life of Jesus: Critically Examined*, 2d ed. trans. George Eliot from the fourth German edition (New York: MacMillan and Company, 25), 1892.
[38] Strauss, 758.
[39] Strauss, 781.
[40] Strauss, 784.

post again. Strauss's dismissal was one of the first casualties in the fight for historical meaning, yet instead of deterring later thinkers, it galvanized them.

Here, I propose that Strauss's ideas of pantheism became the weapon of choice for the small group of Left Hegelians. Many (but not all, as this article will illustrate) of them wielded various forms of pantheism against the ancient threat of faith and the modern threat of nihilism because as Strauss insisted, it was a way to keep the truth of Christianity, which was brotherhood and community, while pruning it of its mythical and otherworldly attributes, mainly its faith and dogma. The radical minded Hegelians after Strauss began to define their purpose in opposition to, not in accordance with, the existing Prussian and other increasingly repressive German regimes. They used pantheistic ideas to give meaning to the events of their time. However, the use of Strauss's pantheism to forge a meaning in the modern world did not go unchallenged. By examining this challenge, another battle for the meaning of the modern world emerges.

LUDWIG FEUERBACH AND MAX STIRNER

Strauss's "weapon" helped to further the radicalization already in progress. While it could be argued that the antecedents of pantheism were already present, both within and without the Hegelian school, it was Strauss who fully articulated this possibility, and what some saw as its logical conclusion, for Hegelian philosophy. However, the official position toward Hegelianism had continually grown more oppressive. During Hegel's lifetime many (although by no means all) thinkers welcomed or at least tolerated his thought. Yet after the Revolution of 1830 and Strauss's controversial work, many grew suspect of Hegelianism and its latent radicalism.

By 1840, the resistance to Hegelianism received a massive boost with the ascension of Frederick William IV to the Prussian throne on the death of his father, Frederick William III. In addition, the pro-Hegelian educational minister Altenstein also died in 1840 and was replaced by the anti- Hegelian Karl Eichorn. During his tenure, Altenstein had advocated for the teaching of Hegelianism in German universities. Yet Eichorn led a movement to ban the teaching of Hegelianism from German education. Frederick William IV envisioned an old school, absolutist state founded on a faith based

Christianity. Hegelianism was antithetical to all his aspirations. This increased governmental resistance shaped the course of Hegelianism for the rest of the 1840s.

Another factor that began to polarize the Hegelian school was the rise of industry in Prussia and other German states. While it was by no means on par with England, Prussia of the 1830s was in the embryonic stages of industrialization.[41] The *Burger* or the growing Prussian merchant class was becoming an increasingly visible force. The growing tide of industry would shape the theories of later followers of Hegel, Strauss and Feuerbach, most notably the journalists Arnold Ruge, Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx.

The next section of this article will examine two of Hegel's and Strauss's later followers, the one time theologian turned pamphleteer Ludwig Feuerbach and the Gymnasium teacher, Max Stirner. Both used Hegelian teleology to craft a radical vision of salvation for their volatile time. Feuerbach also appropriated Strauss's pantheism, yet Stirner rejected it and instead called for a militant individualism. Thus, a juxtaposition of their conflicting ideas can shed more light on the uses of Hegelian teleology in post-revolutionary Germany.

Feuerbach looked to actual, sensuous human beings as they appeared in nature and society. He concluded that individuals could simply not exist without each other, and only through the progressive movement of history could mankind finally recognize this fact. Thus, he gradually transformed Strauss's pantheism into a more radical pantheistic humanism, centered more on the sensuous conception of man rather than on abstractions like "humanity."[42] Three years after the publication of *Essence*, Stirner viciously attacked Feuerbach's humanism. Yet, his penetrating critique of humanism raised some very thorny questions regarding pantheistic and humanistic theories as a viable option for the modern age. Stirner used Hegelian teleology in a digressive fashion. He saw the end result of Hegelian teleology not as humanism or social unity, but simply as a radical individualism. Thus, these thinkers have been paired together in order to better illustrate some of the concerns over pantheistic and humanistic interpretations of Hegelian teleology.

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[41] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*, 27.

[42] Ludwig Feuerbach, "Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy," 1843, trans. Daniel Dahlstrom, ed. Laurence Stepelevich, *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 168. Also see Breckman, *Marx, The Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory,* 130 and 208.

Feuerbach published his major work *The Essence of Christianity* in 1841, and the essay "Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy," in 1843. In 1844, Stirner published his only work *The Ego and His Own*. This section will draw on these primary works. *The Essence of Christianity* was translated and published by George Eliot in 1957. "Provisional Theses" was translated by Daniel Dahlstrom and appeared in Laurence Stepelevich's *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology* in 1983. *The Ego and His Own* was translated and published by John Carroll of Churchill College in 1971.[43]

One of the most controversial Left Hegelian works, Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* was published in 1841 into the storm of government repression and censorship that commenced with the ascension of Frederick William IV to the Prussian throne. However, Feuerbach had been a target of the Restoration for eleven years already. His first work, *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*, published in 1830, despite the more relaxed policies of Frederick William III, had cost Feuerbach his teaching position at the University of Erlangen. After 1830, Feuerbach never held an academic position again. He continued his attack on Christianity and the Restoration.

Along with *Life of Jesus* and *The Judgment*, *Essence* became a rallying cry for the Left Hegelians. The book was instantly banned by the censors.[44] At the same time, many conservatives, fundamentalists and other anti-Hegelians rose to power in the Restoration

[43] In modern scholarship, the conflict has been addressed by almost every Left Hegelian scholar. In 1970, three books appeared which each addressed it; William Brazill's *The Young Hegelians*, Eugene Kamenka's *The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach* and R.W.K. Paterson's *The Nihilistic Ego: Max Stirner.* Each author approached the conflict in a similar fashion, yet not quite identically. Brazill did not put the two thinkers into dialogue with each other, but rather devoted one section to Feuerbach and another to Stirner. He wrote that Stirner, with his attack on Feuerbach broadened the concept of religion. In Stirner's estimation, no longer was religion simply traditional Christianity. He broadened religion to include any abstract system which claimed the individual's allegiance and unquestioned faith. Kamenka, like Brazill, also did not place the two thinkers in dialogue, and really did not deal significantly with Stirner. Kamenka, writing with a Feuerbachian bias, wrote that Feuerbach responded to Stirner that man as an individual was incomplete, and only through the species could he whole. Paterson, at various times puts Feuerbach and Stirner in dialogue, as well as compares their theories. With both techniques, he demonstrates Stirner's exact criticisms of Feuerbach's pantheistic conception of man. Overall Paterson, writing from a Stirnerian bias, wrote that only through his criticism of Feuerbach did Stirner define his position as a nihilistic egoist. In addition, he wrote that Stirner was Feuerbach's "grave digger." John Toews's 1981 work *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectal Humanism,* while only briefly mentioning the debate on the last page of the epilogue, nonetheless elucidated some crucial concepts of it. While Toews did not place the thinkers in an actual dialogue with each other, he argued Stirner's criticism showed that the liberation of the concrete self could in no way be reconciled with the revolutionary task of many of the Young Hegelians, specifically with their notions of unity, collectivity and social responsibility. This present work will expand on Toews's charge.

[44] Toews, 252.

atmosphere of the Prussian state due to the effects of the French Revolution of 1830.[45] The conflict that had been brewing over the last decade finally became apparent and the Left Hegelians increasingly defined themselves and their ideas in opposition to the blatant conservatism of the Prussian state.

In *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach opted for a type of Hegelian teleology to give meaning to the historical events of the nineteenth century, as opposed to traditional faith of Jacobi or the nihilism of Schopenhauer. Like Strauss, Feuerbach believed that in the modern, scientific age the notion of a transcendent God was outdated and had to be replaced with the new pantheistic, or more accurately, a new humanistic conception of "Man" (Man with capital M).

Feuerbach defined "Man" as the species-being, or the entire species taken together. An individual human being, in isolation, is limited. He has a limited number of talents and capabilities, as well as many faults. It was only in union with others that the individual could rise above his limited nature, because the faults of the individual were cancelled by the positive attributes of the species taken as a whole. For Feuerbach, "the *ego* [the individual] attains to consciousness of the world through the consciousness of the *thou* [another]."[46] This is Feuerbach's "I-thou" notion, and it is the cornerstone of his entire philosophy. Individuals needed each other, not God or even the Absolute, in order to be happy and more importantly, to have a purpose to exist at all. The "I" or the individual could only be perceived in the consciousness of the "thou," of another being. Feuerbach argued that God was not one, undividable supreme substance, rather, "God" could only exist as an exchange between two beings, and in the most profound instance, as a sexual union between man and woman.[47] He wrote that "without other men, the world is not only empty and cold, but meaningless."[48]

Here, Feuerbach approached Jacobi's and ultimately Schopenhauer's nihilism. He feared that without others, without love, companionship and cooperation, the world would be meaningless; it would be a nihilistic abyss of aimless individuals. There would

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[45] Toews, 253.
[46] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity,* trans. George Eliot with an introduction by Karl Barth and a foreword by H. Richard Niebuhr (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), 83.
[47] Feuerbach, *Essence*, 4.
[48] Feuerbach, *Essence,* 82.

be no society, no interaction and no creation. By worshiping a transcendent God outside of himself in the modern, scientific age, modern man alienated the "Thou" and fragmented the species, fragmented the true God, and hovered over this abyss. Feuerbach sought meaning in the "thou."

Feuerbach, like Strauss, believed that the stubborn and now outdated idea of a transcendent God, represented by the theories of Jacobi and the actions of Frederick William IV were not only superfluous, but harmful to the modern era. Feuerbach used Hegelian teleology in conjunction with Strauss's pantheism to situate the events of the modern era. His humanistic conception of "Man" was not an a priori notion, but a historically conditioned notion not attainable in past ages. Only in the modern age was "Man" beginning to be understood, but society still had an arduous task ahead of it to completely dispense with the notion of a transcendent God altogether. History was progressing and modern man needed to realize this and face it, not cower in front of it. Hence, Frederick William's idea of a Christian state was anathema to Feuerbach. The notion of a transcendent God was "in flagrant contradiction with our fire and life insurance companies, our railroads and steam-carriages, our picture and sculpture galleries, our military and industrial schools, our theaters and scientific museums."[49] Devotion to an alien God stunted humanities creative capabilities because instead of working towards achievable goals, the individual insisted on passively waiting for some transcendental salvation that was not going to come.

The crux of Feuerbachianism, as adopted from Hegel, is this: modern man had a duty. No longer could he hide behind the wall of faith and wish for a better life or meaning as Jacobi had argued for. Instead he had to courageously take it upon himself to realize his own earthly salvation through hard work, not prayer.[50] A man's vocation, his actual work and livelihood had to become his true purpose, "every man, therefore, must place before himself a God, i.e., an aim, a purpose." His work, his contribution to the species, became his worship, and "he, who has no aim, has no home, no sanctuary; aimlessness is the greatest unhappiness."[51] Without some form of responsibility and duty

[49] Feuerbach, *Essence*, xliv.
[50] Feuerbach, *Essence*, 106.
[51] Feuerbach, *Essence*, 64. Feuerbach echoed similar sentiments in his "Provisional Theses." Feuerbach, "Provisional Theses," 163.

to the species, the individual in modern society would sever himself from the new divinity of reason and community. Ultimately, he would face nihilism; his life would have no meaning. Man's highest calling was to contribute to the spiritual life of humanity, to art, science, literature and other creative endeavors. The knowledge and talents of one person were limited, only in conjunction with each could the true powers and capabilities of mankind emerge. The individual's entire existence was only a result of the common work and achievement of the species and thus he owed duty to it, for without it, he would be nothing.

During the height of Feuerbach's fame, an unknown secondary school teacher, who called himself Max Stirner (his birth name was Johann Casper Schmitt) was preparing an assault on Feuerbach's humanism that would implicate all of the other Hegelians as well. In 1841, Stirner began attending the boisterous meetings of a group known as "Freien" at Hippel's, a local Tavern in Berlin. The "Freien" (The Free) were one of many political-social groups that debated all sorts of political and philosophical topics in rowdy and drunken taverns. Stirner was quiet, usually smoked his cigar and rarely spoke a word, but he absorbed and appropriated the prominent doctrines of the time, namely those of liberalism, romanticism, Hegelianism as well as Feuerbachianism into his own work. With these common tenets as a starting point, Stirner then crafted the most radical and extreme method to interpret the modern epoch. Ironically, Stirner's method, derived from Hegelianism, came to represent what Jacobi feared, and what Schopenhauer would carry to its ultimate nihilistic conclusion.

This present work focuses on Stirner's attack of Feuerbach. However, Stirner agreed with Feuerbach on two critical points which are crucial to an understanding of Stirner's ideas. As a good Hegelian, Stirner's thought was teleological in nature, culminating in a goal. He interpreted the modern era as the result of a historical progression, referring to "we moderns" as the heirs of the modern era of the 1840s, as did Hegel. Like all of the Left Hegelians, Stirner felt that "we moderns" were engendered by the French Revolution and the Enlightenment.[52] In addition, like Feuerbach, Stirner argued that the worship of any type of religious essence alienated man from himself. All

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[52] Max Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* trans. John Carroll (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), 106.

deities and doctrines were simply enslaving abstractions which needed to be discarded in the modern age.

The religious questions raised by Strauss and Feuerbach over the validity and the future role of the biblical stories preoccupied almost all of the German thinkers during the 1840s. On a larger scale, the general trend of the period from 1789 to 1848 in all Western Europe was one of "emphatic secularization," as a result of the French Revolution and Industrialization.[53] The influence of this secularization is obvious in Stirner's criticism of Feuerbach. Ironically Stirner's work was actually passed through by the censors because they deemed it a piece of unintelligible nonsense which was too ridiculous to be offensive. Whatever the merit of this claim, Stirner's work nonetheless resounded within his small circle of thinkers.

Stirner attacked Feuerbach's use of "Man" to articulate the changes of the modern age. He argued that Feuerbach's notions of Man, species-being and society were meaningless phantoms that demanded the individual's allegiance and freedom, just like the former notion of the Christian God. He wrote "after the annihilation of faith" by Feuerbach "only the God is changed."[54] Stirner balked at Feuerbach's "raising of the individual to the species." There was no species, just competing individuals. There was no brotherly bond of virtue between men, only power. He simply retorted with "I am my species."[55] For Stirner, the "I," the flesh and blood self, the individual of Max Stirner, was the end of the Hegelian progression, not God, the Absolute, Love, Man or any other fictitious entity. Stirner, like Jacobi and Schopenhauer, faced the prospect of nihilism because for Stirner, there was absolutely nothing outside of the concrete individual that the individual had to affiliate with. Instead, everything outside the individual was there for the taking, there was no rule, no norm, no morality, nothing, just the individual lost in an indifferent world.

Stirner charged that liberalism and the likes of Feuerbach's *Essence* were the last manifestations of Christianity. The Enlightenment and French Revolution had destroyed the traditional notion of God, but Stirner argued that new Gods were put in its place by

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[53] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1962), 222.
[54] Stirner, 53.
[55] Stirner, 55.

liberals and socialists. He believed that the historical progression would eventually divest the individual of *all* alienations and lead straight to the flesh and blood individual.[56]

Since there was absolutely nothing outside of the individual, Stirner felt as little compelled to work for the species as he did to pray to God. This refusal to adhere to any outside authority is the crux of the Feuerbach Stirner debate. In opposition to Feuerbach, Stirner argued that Hegel's teleology did not lead to humanism, which was simply enslavement. Rather, for Stirner, Hegelian teleology led to the individual who, in the modern era had no calling, duty, responsibility or possibility. Stirner held the word "possible" responsible for all the enslavement in history because it compelled man to pray, to work, to believe, etc.[57] It led man to believe that he could achieve something that he could not. Regarding the word "possible," Stirner wrote that "thousands of years were…in ambush behind it," because for centuries men forced other men to pray, to believe in God, to be rational etc, all because they envisioned some unattainable possibility and then coerced others into pursuing it.[58] Stirner did not want to be moral, give his life to the species or even obey laws. All he wanted to do was enjoy life with no moral restraints and he believed that the modern era had finally made this possible. He saw Hegelian teleology lead to the extinction of any responsibility of the individual in the modern era.

Their debate posed a crucial question for Left Hegelianism in general: after the continuing criticism of traditional religion and its values of community, brotherhood, and purpose, could pantheism or radical humanism be a suitable replacement during the scientific era or was it simply just a new artificial religion? The Enlightenment and the French Revolution had irrevocably changed the status of the individual in early nineteenth century society. Feuerbach saw humanism as the Hegelian Absolute, while Stirner saw the individual as the Absolute. In the declining state of Christianity, and in light of Hegel's teleological movement of history, did the individual in the modern age still have a duty to contribute to society or was the individual now liberated from all external obligations in the modern age? Specifically, as an alternative to Schopenhauer's idea of meaninglessness, did the teleological progression of history lead to a new

[56] Stirner, 261.
[57] Stirner, 236.
[58] Stirner. 236.

pantheistic or humanistic concept of individual duty and responsibility to the species as a whole, or conversely, did it finally free the individual from all social unity and responsibility and simply leave the individual to himself?

For a brief moment, Hegel's ideas carried the day, at least in the form of his follower's theories. Both Feuerbach and Stirner saw a purpose in modernity, however varied their visions may have been. They believed that the events of the modern age had revealed a fundamental truth about humanity, a truth that could only be realized in the modern age.

CONCLUSION

When the revolutions of 1848 erupted, many of the Young Hegelians believed that a new world was emerging, a purposeful, meaningful world, and thus their rejection of nihilism, of which Schopenhauer's philosophy was the ultimate culmination. Yet, from 1848 through 1851 these dreams died on the barricades. Of course the revolutions were not the sole cause of Young Hegelian defeat. The rise of science and its vision of cold impersonal world, continuing religious criticism, the rise of industry, liberalism and bureaucracy all bucked against the Hegelian vision of transcendent absolutes and eternal purposes. By the 1850s, it became obvious to many that a new world was indeed emerging, but it was one in which the pessimistic ideas of Schopenhauer were much more relevant. JW Burrow, in his work *The Crisis of Reason*, refers to the 1850s as a sort of "hangover," when the disillusionment and failure of the previous decade had set in amongst many of the revolutionaries. The idea of revolution became a worn out, stale cliché, a rehearsed performance that people had grown tired of. Many began to see modern life as bureaucratic, entropic, devoid of all energy, creativity and leadership. Many felt a disgust with modernity.[59]

This is not to say that all Hegelian ideas were immediately forgotten. Strauss's criticism of the New Testament, if not his pantheistic conclusions of it, furthered what Burrow calls a time of de-Christianization. Feuerbach inspired one of the greatest religious thinkers of the twentieth century, Martin Buber. Stirner's ideas seem somewhat

[59] Burrow JW, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914* (Great Britain: St. Edmunsbury Press, 2000), 256.

compatible with the tenor of the later nineteenth century, most notably the stress on individualism. Yet, most of his ideas were couched in Hegelian jargon and teleological projections. Nonetheless, some later thinkers, while not directly inspired by Stirner, resembled him and his ideas toward individualism, most notable of these were Nietzsche and Sartre. Overall however, Strauss, Feuerbach and Stirner were and still are, largely neglected.

In all of this, Burrow argues that we are born from this modern tradition; post modernity is simply a gloss on modernism. If one agrees with Burrow, than modernity, our tradition must be critically examined with special attention given to its genesis. Here, Kouvelakis argues that to be modern means one has to face the questions of the Enlightenment and French Revolution. Yet, he also argues that this cannot be done from a distance.[60] We cannot be spectators. The events of the past are active and have a determining hand in the configuration of the present. And at the inception of modernity, our modernity, a struggle ensued between historical meaning and nihilism. If looked at with the discerning and backwards eye of the historian, we see that some thinkers like Feuerbach, called for modern man to fight for this purpose in the face of nihilism, not to be spectators. Yet his passionate voice was soon quieted during the second half of the nineteenth century, and we still live in that silence.

[60] Kouvelakis, 5.

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