ON THE JEWISH QUESTION (abridged)

Karl Marx (1818–1883)

I

Bruno Bauer, *The Jewish Question*

Braunschweig, 1843

The German Jews desire emancipation. What kind of emancipation do they desire? Civic, political emancipation.

Bruno Bauer replies to them: No one in Germany is politically emancipated. We ourselves are not free. How are we to free you? You Jews are egoists if you demand a special emancipation for yourselves as Jews. As Germans, you ought to work for the political emancipation of Germany, and as human beings, for the emancipation of mankind, and you should feel the particular kind of your oppression and your shame not as an exception to the rule, but on the contrary as a confirmation of the rule.

Or do the Jews demand the same status as Christian subjects of the state? In that case, they recognize that the Christian state is justified and they recognize, too, the regime of general oppression. Why should they disapprove of their special yoke if they approve of the general yoke? Why should the German be interested in the liberation of the Jew, if the Jew is not interested in the liberation of the German?

The Christian state knows only privileges. In this state, the Jew has the privilege of being a Jew. As a Jew, he has rights which the Christians do not have. Why should he want rights which he does not have, but which the Christians enjoy?

In wanting to be emancipated from the Christian state, the Jew is demanding that the Christian state should give up its religious prejudice. Does he, the Jew, give up his religious prejudice? Has he, then, the right to demand that someone else should renounce his religion?

By its very nature, the Christian state is incapable of emancipating the Jew; but, adds Bauer, by his very nature the Jew cannot be emancipated. So long as the state is Christian and the Jew is Jewish, the one is as incapable of granting emancipation as the other is of receiving it.

The Christian state can behave towards the Jew only in the way characteristic of the Christian state—that is, by granting privileges, by permitting the separation of the Jew from the other subjects, but making him feel the pressure of all the other separate spheres of society, and feel it all the more intensely because he is in religious opposition to the dominant religion. But the Jew, too, can behave towards the state only in a Jewish way—that is, by treating it as something alien to him, by counterposing his imaginary nationality to the real nationality, by counterposing his illusory law to the real law, by deeming himself justified in separating himself from mankind, by abstaining on principle

from taking part in the historical movement, by putting his trust in a future which has nothing in common with the future of mankind in general, and by seeing himself as a member of the Jewish people, and the Jewish people as the chosen people.

On what grounds, then, do you Jews want emancipation? On account of your religion? It is the mortal enemy of the state religion. As citizens? In Germany, there are no citizens. As human beings? But you are no more human beings than those to whom you appeal.

Bauer has posed the question of Jewish emancipation in a new form, after giving a critical analysis of the previous formulations and solutions of the question. What, he asks, is the nature of the Jew who is to be emancipated and of the Christian state that is to emancipate him? He replies by a critique of the Jewish religion, he analyzes the religious opposition between Judaism and Christianity, he elucidates the essence of the Christian state—and he does all this audaciously, trenchantly, wittily, and with profundity, in a style of writing that is as precise as it is pithy and vigorous.

How, then, does Bauer solve the Jewish question? What is the result? The formulation of a question is its solution. The critique of the Jewish question is the answer to the Jewish question. The summary, therefore, is as follows:

We must emancipate ourselves before we can emancipate others.

The most rigid form of the opposition between the Jew and the Christian is the religious opposition. How is an opposition resolved? By making it impossible. How is *religious* opposition made impossible? By abolishing religion. As soon as Jew and Christian recognize that their respective religions are no more than different stages in the development of the human mind, different snake skins cast off by history, and that man is the snake who sloughed them, the relation of Jew and Christian is no longer religious but is only a critical, scientific, and human relation. Science, then, constitutes their unity. But, contradictions in science are resolved by science itself. ...

Bauer, therefore, demands, on the one hand, that the Jew should renounce Judaism, and that mankind in general should renounce religion, in order to achieve civic emancipation. On the other hand, he quite consistently regards the political abolition of religion as the abolition of religion as such. The state which presupposes religion is not yet a true, real state.

> "Of course, the religious notion affords security to the state. But to what state? To what kind of state?" (p. 97)

At this point, the one-sided formulation of the Jewish question becomes evident.

It was by no means sufficient to investigate: Who is to emancipate? Who is to be emancipated? Criticism had to investigate a third point. It had to inquire: What kind of emancipation is in question? What conditions follow from the very nature of the emancipation that is demanded? Only the criticism of political emancipation itself would have been the conclusive criticism of the Jewish question and its real merging in the "general question of time."

Because Bauer does not raise the question to this level, he becomes entangled in contradictions. He puts forward conditions which are not based on the nature of political emancipation itself. He raises questions which are not part of his problem, and he solves problems which leave this question

unanswered. When Bauer says of the opponents of Jewish emancipation: "Their error was only that they assumed the Christian state to be the only true one and did not subject it to the same criticism that they applied to Judaism" (op. cit., p. 3), we find that his error lies in the fact that he subjects to criticism only the "Christian state," not the "state as such," that he does not investigate the relation of political emancipation to human emancipation and, therefore, puts forward conditions which can be explained only by uncritical confusion of political emancipation with general human emancipation. If Bauer asks the Jews: Have you, from your standpoint, the right to want political emancipation? We ask the converse question: Does the standpoint of political emancipation give the right to demand from the Jew the abolition of Judaism and from man the abolition of religion?

The Jewish question acquires a different form depending on the state in which the Jew lives. In Germany, where there is no political state, no state as such, the Jewish question is a purely theological one. The Jew finds himself in religious opposition to the state, which recognizes Christianity as its basis. This state is a theologian *ex professo* [by profession]. Criticism here is criticism of theology, a double-edged criticism—criticism of Christian theology and of Jewish theology. Hence, we continue to operate in the sphere of theology, however much we may operate critically within it.

In France, a constitutional state, the Jewish question is a question of constitutionalism, the question of the incompleteness of political emancipation. Since the semblance of a state religion is retained here, although in a meaningless and self-contradictory formula, that of a religion of the majority, the relation of the Jew to the state retains the semblance of a religious, theological opposition.

Only in the North American states—at least, in some of them—does the Jewish question lose its theological significance and become a really secular question. Only where the political state exists in its completely developed form can the relation of the Jew, and of the religious man in general, to the political state, and therefore the relation of religion to the state, show itself in its specific character, in its purity. The criticism of this relation ceases to be theological criticism as soon as the state ceases to adopt a theological attitude toward religion, as soon as it behaves towards religion as a state—i.e., politically. ...

The political emancipation of the Jew, the Christian, and, in general, of religious man, is the emancipation of the state from Judaism, from Christianity, from religion in general. In its own form, in the manner characteristic of its nature, the state as a state emancipates itself from religion by emancipating itself from the state religion—that is to say, by the state as a state not professing any religion, but, on the contrary, asserting itself as a state. The political emancipation from religion is not a religious emancipation that has been carried through to completion and is free from contradiction, because political emancipation is not a form of human emancipation which has been carried through to completion and is free from contradiction.

The limits of political emancipation are evident at once from the fact that the state can free itself from a restriction without man being really free from this restriction, that the state can be a free state without man being a free man. Bauer himself tacitly admits this when he lays down the following condition for political emancipation:

> "Every religious privilege, and therefore also the monopoly of a privileged church, would have been abolished altogether, and if some or many persons, or even the overwhelming majority, still believed themselves bound to

> fulfil religious duties, this fulfilment ought to be left to them as a purely private matter."
> [*The Jewish Question*, p. 65]

It is possible, therefore, for the state to have emancipated itself from religion even if the overwhelming majority is still religious. And the overwhelming majority does not cease to be religious through being religious in private.

But, the attitude of the state, and of the *republic* in particular, to religion is, after all, only the attitude to religion of the men who compose the state. It follows from this that man frees himself through the *medium of the state*, that he frees himself *politically* from a limitation when, in contradiction with himself, he raises himself above this limitation in an *abstract*, *limited*, and partial way. It follows further that, by freeing himself *politically*, man frees himself in a roundabout way, through an *intermediary*, although an *essential intermediar*y. It follows, finally, that man, even if he proclaims himself an atheist through the medium of the state—that is, if he proclaims the state to be atheist—still remains in the grip of religion, precisely because he acknowledges himself only by a roundabout route, only through an *intermediary*. Religion is precisely the recognition of man in a roundabout way, through an intermediary. The state is the intermediary between man and man's freedom. Just as Christ is the intermediary to whom man transfers the burden of all his divinity, all his *religious constraint*, so the state is the intermediary to whom man transfers all his non-divinity and all his *human unconstraint*. ...

The perfect political state is, by its nature, man's species-life, as opposed to his material life. All the preconditions of this egoistic life continue to exist in civil society outside the sphere of the state, but as qualities of civil society. Where the political state has attained its true development, man—not only in thought, in consciousness, but in reality, in life—leads a twofold life, a heavenly and an earthly life: life in the political community, in which he considers himself a communal being, and life in civil society, in which he acts as a private individual, regards other men as a means, degrades himself into a means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers. The relation of the political state to civil society is just as spiritual as the relations of heaven to earth. The political state stands in the same opposition to civil society, and it prevails over the latter in the same way as religion prevails over the narrowness of the secular world—i.e., by likewise having always to acknowledge it, to restore it, and allow itself to be dominated by it. In his most immediate reality, in civil society, man is a secular being. Here, where he regards himself as a real individual, and is so regarded by others, he is a fictitious phenomenon. In the state, on the other hand, where man is regarded as a species-being, he is the imaginary member of an illusory sovereignty, is deprived of his real individual life and endowed with an unreal universality. ...

Political emancipation is, of course, a big step forward. True, it is not the final form of human emancipation in general, but it is the final form of human emancipation within the hitherto existing world order. It goes without saying that we are speaking here of real, practical emancipation.

Man emancipates himself *politically* from religion by banishing it from the sphere of public law to that of private law. Religion is no longer the spirit of the state, in which man behaves—although in a limited way, in a particular form, and in a particular sphere—as a species-being, in community with other men. Religion has become the spirit of *civil society*, of the sphere of egoism, of *bellum omnium contra omnes* ["the war of all against all"]. It is no longer the essence of *community*, but the essence of *difference*. It has become the expression of man's *separation* from his *community*, from himself and from other men—as it was originally. It is only the abstract avowal of specific perversity, *private*

whimsy, and arbitrariness. The endless fragmentation of religion in North America, for example, gives it even *externally* the form of a purely individual affair. It has been thrust among the multitude of private interests and ejected from the community as such. But one should be under no illusion about the limits of political emancipation. The division of the human being into a *public man* and a *private man*, the *displacement* of religion from the state into civil society, this is not a stage of political emancipation but its completion; this emancipation, therefore, neither abolished the *real* religiousness of man, nor strives to do so.

The *decomposition* of man into Jew and citizen, Protestant and citizen, religious man and citizen, is neither a deception directed against citizenhood, nor is it a circumvention of political emancipation, it is *political emancipation itself*, the *political* method of emancipating oneself from religion. Of course, in periods when the political state as such is born violently out of civil society, when political liberation is the form in which men strive to achieve their liberation, the state can and must go as far as the *abolition of religio*n, the *destruction* of religion. But it can do so only in the same way that it proceeds to the abolition of private property, to the maximum, to confiscation, to progressive taxation, just as it goes as far as the abolition of life, the *guillotine*. At times of special self-confidence, political life seeks to suppress its prerequisite, civil society and the elements composing this society, and to constitute itself as the real species-life of man, devoid of contradictions. But, it can achieve this only by coming into violent contradiction with its own conditions of life, only by declaring the revolution to be permanent, and, therefore, the political drama necessarily ends with the re-establishment of religion, private property, and all elements of civil society, just as war ends with peace. ...

We have, thus, shown that political emancipation from religion leaves religion in existence, although not a privileged religion. The contradiction in which the adherent of a particular religion finds himself involved in relation to his citizenship is only one aspect of the universal *secular contradiction between the political state and civil society*. The consummation of the Christian state is the state which acknowledges itself as a state and disregards the religion of its members. The emancipation of the state from religion is not the emancipation of the real man from religion.

Therefore, we do not say to the Jews, as Bauer does: You cannot be emancipated politically without emancipating yourselves radically from Judaism. On the contrary, we tell them: Because you can be emancipated politically without renouncing Judaism completely and incontrovertibly, *political emancipation* itself is not human emancipation. If you Jews want to be emancipated politically, without emancipating yourselves humanly, the half-hearted approach and contradiction is not in you alone, it is inherent in the nature and category of political emancipation. If you find yourself within the confines of this category, you share in a general confinement. Just as the state *evangelizes* when, although it is a state, it adopts a Christian attitude towards the Jews, so the Jew acts *politically* when, although a Jew, he demands civic rights.

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But, if a man, although a Jew, can be emancipated politically and receive civic rights, can he lay claim to the so-called rights of man and receive them? Bauer denies it. ...

According to Bauer, man has to sacrifice the "*privilege of faith*" to be able to receive the universal rights of man. Let us examine, for a moment, the so-called rights of man—to be precise, the rights of man in their authentic form, in the form which they have among those who discovered them, the North

Americans and the French. These rights of man are, in part, political rights, rights which can only be exercised in community with others. Their content is participation in the *community*, and specifically in the *political* community, in the *life of the state*. They come within the category of *political freedom*, the category of civic rights, which, as we have seen, in no way presuppose the incontrovertible and positive abolition of religion—nor, therefore, of Judaism. There remains to be examined the other part of the rights of man—the *droits de l'homme* [the rights of the man], insofar as these differ from the *droits du citoyen* [the rights of the citizen]. ...

Feudal society was resolved into its basic element—*man*, but man as he really formed its basis—*egoistic* man.

This man, the member of civil society, is thus the basis, the precondition, of the political state. He is recognized as such by this state in the rights of man.

The liberty of egoistic man and the recognition of this liberty, however, is rather the recognition of the unrestrained movement of the spiritual and material elements which form the content of his life.

Hence, man was not freed from religion, he received religious freedom. He was not freed from property, he received freedom to own property. He was not freed from the egoism of business, he received freedom to engage in business.

The *establishment of the political state* and the dissolution of civil society into independent individuals —whose relation with one another depend on *law*, just as the relations of men in the system of estates and guilds depended on privilege—is accomplished by *one and the same act*. Man as a member of civil society, unpolitical man, inevitably appears, however, as the natural man. The "rights of man" appears as "natural rights," because *conscious activity* is concentrated on the political act. *Egoistic* man is the passive result of the dissolved society, a result that is simply *found in existence*, an object of *immediate certainty*, therefore a natural object. The *political revolution* resolves civil life into its component parts, without *revolutionizin*g these components themselves or subjecting them to criticism. It regards civil society, the world of needs, labor, private interests, civil law, as the *basis of its existence*, as a *precondition* not requiring further substantiation and therefore as its natural basis. Finally, man as a member of civil society is held to be man in the proper sense, *homme* as distinct from *citoyen*, because he is man in his sensuous, individual, immediate existence, whereas political man is only abstract, artificial man, man as an *allegorical, juridical* person. The real man is recognized only in the shape of the *egoistic* individual, the *true* man is recognized only in the shape of the *abstract citizen*.

Therefore, Rousseau correctly described the abstract idea of political man as follows:

> "Whoever dares undertake to establish a people's institutions must feel himself capable of changing, as it were, human nature, of transforming each individual, who by himself is a complete and solitary whole, into a part of a larger whole, from which, in a sense, the individual receives his life and his being, of substituting a limited and mental existence for the physical and independent existence. He has to take from man his own powers, and give him in exchange alien powers which he cannot employ without the help of other men."

All emancipation is a reduction of the human world and relationships to man himself.

Political emancipation is the reduction of man, on the one hand, to a member of civil society, to an *egoistic*, *independent* individual, and, on the other hand, to a *citizen*, a juridical person.

Only when the real, individual man re-absorbs in himself the abstract citizen, and as an individual human being has become a *species-being* in his everyday life, in his particular work, and in his particular situation, only when man has recognized and organized his "own powers" as *social* powers, and, consequently, no longer separates social power from himself in the shape of political power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished.