

Stirner's Critics

Max Stirner

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Clarifying the Unique¹ and Its Self-Creation: An introduction to “Stirner’s Critics” and “The Philosophical Reactionaries”

“The World has languished long enough under the tyranny of thought, under the terrorism of ideas; she is waking from the heavy dream....” - Max Stirner, “The Philosophical Reactionaries” (1847)

Max Stirner’s 1844 masterwork, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*² (*The Unique and Its Property*), is one of the most

1. Following the translator’s choice (which happens to be my own as well), I will speak of the “Unique” whenever I refer to Max Stirner’s “Einzige.” “Einzige” can be translated from the German to English most felicitously as “unique” or “unique one.” However, within Max Stirner’s texts, it should be remembered at all times that he explicitly intends to use this noun not as a typical concept (of an incomparable, particular individual, for example), but as a name which points to the actual, *nonconceptual* person’s life – that life as it is experienced prior to any conceptual interpretation. Thus, when I speak of Stirner’s “Einzige” I will employ “Unique” beginning with an upper-case “U” to indicate and reinforce his intended meaning. When I speak of “unique” entirely in the lower case, I will be intentionally employing the word as a concept, rather than as a name.

2. Max Stirner’s major work appeared sometime in the second half of 1844, though the publishing date was 1845. The original title was *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, though at some point towards the end of the 19th century the German spelling of “Eigentum” was revised to “Eigentum.” The English-language translation by Stephen Byington, was

subversive, radical and, therefore, extreme texts in all of history. It can also be described as one of the most misread, misinterpreted and misunderstood books in the history of modern Western thought.³ This should not be unexpected. Subversive,

published by Benjamin Tucker in 1907 under the extremely unfortunate title of *The Ego and His Own*, despite the fact that a more accurate translation would have been *The Unique and Its Property*, which I will use here in accordance also with the translator's preference. (As indicated by the title of this introduction, I would consider *The Unique and Its Self-Creation* to have been a much more meaningful choice for Stirner's book. But Stirner never asked me, though he does use terminology of "self-creation" suggestively in his review of Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*, 1843.) As Benjamin Tucker says in his own introduction to the original edition, he alone is "responsible for the admittedly erroneous rendering of the title" as *The Ego and His Own*. However, little did he likely realize how much confusion and mystification his inaccurate title would create for English-speaking readers over the next century (even, eventually, helping to encourage misinterpretation by later German-language readers of the original text). This confusion and mystification has only been reinforced with the more recent (only slightly more correct) re-translation of the title as *The Ego and Its Own*, in which the possessive pronoun has been changed to a more accurate (non-gender-specific) form. Despite the "ego" in these titles, and interspersed occasionally in the only English-language translation of text, Stirner never once uses the word. It is only now that this confusion and mystification is finally being thoroughly dispelled, by this translation of "Stirner's Critics," along with publication of an edited version of the first part of my recent review of John Clark's *Max Stirner's Egoism* (published under the editors' title of "John Clark's Spook" in *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* #64, March, 2010). The publication of my entire, unedited review under the original title of "John Clark's Stirner" is also planned, as well as publication of a newly revised translation of Stirner's *The Unique and Its Property*.

3. It can be plausibly argued that Stirner's text is one of the most misread, misinterpreted and misunderstood books in the entire history of thought, West or East. But it certainly can be considered at least one of the more, if not *the* most misunderstood in modern Western thought. Paradoxically, as a European text it is definitely Western – though not necessarily in its perspective and orientation (being completely nominalistic, atheistic, anarchistic, amoral and egoistic at the same time, counter to the major themes of Western thought). Historically, though it falls squarely within the modern period, it is also clearly anti-modernist to a degree only vaguely hinted by the nominally *post*-modern texts of contemporary theory.

radical and extreme texts will always obtain hostile receptions from those targeted by their critiques, whether the critiques are accurate and justified or not.

The book is rather simply – though very cleverly – written with very little use of technical terminology. And Stirner goes out of his way in an attempt to use common language wherever possible, though he often does so very creatively and idiosyncratically. It is also a fairly demanding text for anyone (including nearly every contemporary reader) who is unfamiliar with the cultural background within which it was conceived, written and published. It *is* possible for it to be read and appreciated without knowledge of this background, however the prospect of adequate understanding – not only of the central points but also their extensive implications – definitely recedes the less a reader is familiar with topics like nominalism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, analytical and dialectical logic, and critiques of religion, ontology, epistemology, ideology and language that were current in Stirner's day.⁴

4. I'm not speaking of particular forms of nominalism, phenomenology or analytical and dialectical logic here, but generically. Stirner is not merely a nominalist with regard to either essences or to universals in particular, but a generic nominalist. Nor is he a phenomenologist in the now predominantly understood philosophical sense of Edmund Husserl, nor in the particular philosophical senses in which Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty or others used the term in following decades or in the following century (although certain similarities or resemblances will be inevitable). Remember that Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty followed earlier phenomenologists, including some like Stirner who did not use the term, among others who did use the term like Johann Heinrich Lambert, Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, G.W.F Hegel and Franz Brentano. For each of them phenomenology is a method, but for the philosophers – unlike for Stirner – it is always a method determined by presupposed fixed ideas. Stirner is an early, generic practical phenomenologist, developing the project of an empirical investigation without presuppositions (thus nonphilosophically) in an unprecedented manner which has yet to be fully appreciated. Nor – unlike Hegel, or Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels for that matter – does Stirner employ a metaphysical dialectic. Stirner's analytical and dialectical logic remains, like his nominalism and phenomenology, fully self-critical and uncommitted to any fixed metaphysical, epistemological or normative foundation or presupposition. It is merely an empirical method of self-

From the moment Stirner's text first appeared, it directly and fundamentally challenged every religion, philosophy and ideology. It didn't just politely challenge every existing *historical* religion, philosophy and ideology, which would already have been enough to have made its author many enemies. It also blatantly and scathingly challenged every existing *contemporary* religion, philosophy and ideology of the day. This, unsurprisingly, made its author *persona non grata* for all theologians, philosophers and ideologists busily working to perfect or put into practice their grand ideas and theories.⁵

understanding, a development of the lived, practical and conceptual logic of the immanent, phenomenal Unique. (Technically, it would be preferable to forego even the very broad description of the Unique as "immanent," "phenomenal" or even "nonconceptual," but it is very clear that most readers require these repeated hints or they immediately fall back into their (unthinking) habit of interpreting all names as names of symbolic concepts rather than as possible names of nonconceptual experiences.)

5. Stirner's big crime, a crime that cannot be named without calling attention to exactly what all his enemies wish to hide, is his entirely transparent, sarcastically brutal charge that not only the emperor, but every empire and all emperors everywhere, have "no clothes." Their pretenses are all empty and cannot hide their actual nakedness. Their powers are composed of the naked self-alienation which constitutes a popular submission that must be continually implicitly encouraged at the same time that it is explicitly ignored and covered-up. Religion, philosophy and ideology are rationalist fetishizations. Their explanatory, normative and regulative powers are all based upon transparent lies, but lies which are for the most part welcomed, repeated continuously and ultimately enforced with violence in order to maintain institutional powers of every kind: religious, political, economic, social, academic, scientific and cultural. Hans Christian Andersen risked changing the ending of his original version of "The Emperor's New Clothes" just before publication to add the little child crying out: "But he has nothing on!" However, the expectation that the "whole people at length" would then go on to join the little child in repeating the child's charge is utterly fantastic. Even Andersen afterwards made no further criticisms aimed at the court, reportedly bought off with gifts of jewels from the king. The reception given to Stirner's critique is necessarily the norm for treatment of such unwanted and unrepentent outbursts – at least as long as the institutions of modern civilization hold sway. The second this fact changes the entire social world will also change.

Thus the stage was set for over a century and a half of (most often successful, because most often unopposed) mystification of Stirner's intentions by his many critics from 1844 through the present. Even the great majority of self-proclaimed proponents of Stirner's work too often tended to add to the mystification through their own misunderstandings and unself-critical oversimplifications.⁶ The most common critical responses to Stirner's text have probably been dismissal or evasion – to simply disqualify it from discussion or avoid comment and change the subject as quickly as possible. But for those few critics unafraid to actually mention Stirner's name and ideas, the dominant response has been denigration and misinterpretation, often bordering on (or including) intentional misdirection.

6. Just like his critics many, if not most, of Stirner's admirers often seem to latch on to one, two or a few of Stirner's concepts and arguments or attitudes, take them as Stirner's central message, and go on to attempt to reinterpret all of Stirner's work from the resulting narrow, often very one-sided, partial perspective they have derived. This is made all the more tempting by the lack of any genuinely coherent, generally accepted understanding of Stirner's work. Readers who are already predisposed to positively employ one of the traditional meanings of "egoism" are especially prone to then promote a misinterpretation of Stirner based upon their preferred use of this word, brushing aside any of the many glaring inconsistencies such readings produce as unimportant (as yet to be understood or worked out, as a result of one of Stirner's supposed "idiosyncracies" of expression or an unexplained lapse in Stirner's logic, as a problem with translation or the interpretation of 19th century word use, etc.). Stirner's more superficial critics (the great majority of all his critics) generally employ the same method, but their predisposition toward negative evaluations of traditional meanings of "egoism" often leads them to somewhat similar results, but with an emphasis on the problems and evils. They then have every reason blame any inconsistencies in their own misinterpretations on supposed lapses in Stirner's logic, excessively idiosyncratic modes of expression, untrustworthiness (because he is self-serving), etc. In either case, this is where the unfortunate English title translation and occasional entirely inappropriate use of the word "ego" in the translation tend to greatly reinforce erroneous tendencies in interpretation even for readers who think they are in agreement with Stirner. Given the contemporary denotations and connotations of the word "ego," its use in translating any but the most clearly critical references to a concept of the "ego" or "the I" in Stirner's text should be avoided, or at least clearly explained. At this point anything less will be considered unacceptable by any perceptive readers, commentators and critics.

Sometimes it can be blatantly clear that misinterpretations are not accidental but quite deliberate, especially with regard to the more absurd attacks of ideologues. But often it is unclear whether Stirner's critics are too intellectually and emotionally challenged by his text to be held accountable for consciously knowing what it is that they are doing. Regardless, the net effect of the constant streams of denunciation and false portrayals – both pro and con – has unquestionably taken its toll.

Max Stirner's original published critics were all contemporaries writing from within the radical literary, philosophical and political milieu of Vormärz Germany.⁷ They included Ludwig Feuerbach (the well-known author of *The Essence of Christianity*, a central founding text of modern humanism), Moses Hess (at the time a Feuerbachian communist associate of the young Karl Marx), Bruno Bauer (a former defender of conservative Hegelianism turned radical critic), Szeliga (pseudonym for Franz Zychlin von Zychlinski, a Prussian officer who was also a proponent of Bruno Bauer's "critical criticism"), Kuno Fischer (while still a student, author of a vociferous pamphlet denouncing Stirner – along with other left Hegelians – as a "new sophist," later a respectable historian of philosophy) and the pseudo-proletarian duo of Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx (although Marx and Engels' criticism wasn't actually published until 80 years later!). Of these, three criticisms were published soon enough following the original issuance of his text for Stirner to respond in *Wigand's Vierteljahrschrift* in 1845, under the title of "Recensenten Stirner's" ("Stirner's Critics"). Although Stirner never replied to him in print, Bruno Bauer's response to Stirner's book also appeared in that same 1845 issue. Later in 1847 Stirner (writing as G. Edward) then responded to Kuno Fischer in the fifth volume of *Wigand's Epigonen*, under the title of "Die Philosophischen Reaktionäre" ("The Philosophical Reactionaries"). Unfortunately, Stirner never had a chance to dispense with Marx and Engels' lengthy, nearly unreadable, diatribe entitled *Die Deutsche Ideologie* (*The German Ideology*) since they were unable to get it published

7. The Vormärz was the period before the German Revolutionary events of March, 1848 began.

either in Stirner's or their own lifetimes.⁸

The massive tides of historical misreading, misinterpretation and misunderstanding have too-long tended to swamp any possibility of a genuine popular understanding of Stirner's work, especially in the English language given the mistranslated titles in every edition so far published. Along with publication of a much needed *revision* of the English translation and its misleading title, probably the most important place to begin the reinterpretation of Stirner's work on a much more accurate basis is with publication of this long-overdue translation

8. Although Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were unable to publish their *Die Deutsche Ideologie*, it was apparently not for lack of trying. At any rate, besides the problem of the apparent cluelessness of Marx and Engels regarding the most central aspects of Stirner's *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* demonstrated by their flailing attacks in *Die Deutsche Ideologie*, the appearance of "Recensenten Stirner's" also completely undermined and refuted major arguments of Marx and Engels well before their text was even completed. Unfortunately, Marxist scholars, and even the critics of Marxism, all appear to remain ignorant of the latter fact to this day. So far as I have found, even those few academics who have been aware of the content of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* and "Recensenten Stirner's" have uniformly refused to follow its arguments to their logical conclusions. In *Die Deutsche Ideologie* Marx and Engels attempt to present a more sophisticated, Hegelianized, historical version of materialist philosophy in response to Stirner's destruction of the foundation of their previous Feuerbachian, humanist materialism. But the self-delusional, essentially religious, nature of their project of rationalist realization requires a (self-negating & self-alienating) identification with the ideological construction of a supposedly transcendent, collective historical subject. This makes the misinterpretation and intentional misrepresentation of Stirner's own immanent, intentional egoism a historical necessity for the survival of Marxist ideology in any form. This is the pathetic secret of the Marxist *ideological* critique of ideology in *Die Deutsche Ideologie*. In order to maintain the survival of Marxism as an ideology, Marxists are forced to paint the genuinely non-ideological as "ideology" even if this requires the maintenance of a permanent, blatant lie: anarchists must all be portrayed as bourgeois egoists from Max Stirner on. Anything less would be an admission of the ideological, self-alienating foundation of the Marxist "science" that perfected the mass-enslavement and genocidal campaigns of the Soviet and Maoist collectivizations, gulags, re-education camps, resettlements, etc., as if its obviously ideological nature should be in need of any additional revelation.

of Stirner's responses to his initial critics.⁹ But both Stirner's texts and his responses to his critics first need to be put in a comprehensible context.

* * * * *

Max Stirner is the pseudonym of Johann Kaspar Schmidt, born on the morning of October 25, 1806 in Bayreuth, Bavaria, just after the Battle of Jena and the beginning of the Napoleonic occupation of Prussia. He was the son of a flute-maker who died when Johann was only an infant. Before he reached the age of three his mother remarried an older apothecary (pharmacist) and thereafter moved with him to Kulm on the Vistula River in West Prussia (now Poland). As soon as possible (in 1810) Johann was also brought to live in Kulm, where he spent his boyhood. Then in 1818 Schmidt moved back to Bayreuth to live with his uncle and godfather as he began his humanistic Christian education at the famous gymnasium there founded in 1664. He proved to be "a good and diligent pupil," and left the gymnasium with high marks in September, 1826.¹⁰ He then moved to the city of Berlin where he would continue his education at the university until 1835, live most of his remaining life, and finally die in 1856.

Before his unexpected book, *The Unique and Its Property*, briefly lit up the literary firmament after its initial appearance

9. A very incomplete English translation of "Stirner's Critics" has long been available, "abridged and translated by" Frederick M. Gordon and published in *The Philosophical Forum*, vol. viii, numbers 2-3-4; Spring 1977, pp. 66-80. More recently, an original and complete new translation of "The Philosophical Reactionaries" by Widukind de Ridder was published in *Max Stirner* (ed. Saul Newman, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, NY, 2011), independently of the Wolfi Landstreicher's translation herein, which itself was completed in 2011, following his translation of "Stirner's Critics." De Ridder's translation confirms most, though not all, of Landstreicher's choices in his own translation presented here.

10. John Henry Mackay, translated by Hubert Kennedy, *Max Stirner: His Life and his Work* (Peremptory Publications, Concord, CA, 2005), page 32.

in late 1844, Stirner (as Schmidt) was most notably a respected teacher in a “Teaching and Educational Institution for Young Ladies” from 1839 until 1844 in Berlin. After he became infamous as the author and critic Max Stirner, he started an ill-fated dairy business and worked as a writer and translator, producing the most important German translations of Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* and Jean-Baptiste Say’s *Traité d’Économie Politique*.

Stirner studied for many years under the heavy influence of Hegelians, both at his gymnasium and at the Universities of Berlin and Erlangen. In Berlin he began his university studies in 1826 and ended his institutional enrollment after several interruptions in 1834, completing his *pro facultate docendi* exams in 1835.¹¹ In Erlangen he studied only briefly in 1829. His Hegelian influences included the rector at the gymnasium in Bayreuth where he had studied for eight years, Georg Andreas Gabler. (It is important to note that it was Gabler who went on to take over the University of Berlin chair in philosophy when Hegel died.) They also included other prominent Hegelian professors like P.K. Marheineke, Christian Kapp and Karl Michelet under whom Stirner studied. Most importantly, Stirner attended the lectures of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel himself at the University of Berlin in 1827 and 1828 at the height of Hegel’s popularity. In addition to the Hegelians, in Berlin Stirner also studied most notably under Friedrich Schleiermacher (theology),¹² Heinrich Ritter (logic), and (in classical philology

11. In 1835 he was granted *qualified facultas docendi* status following extensive examinations. Stirner could have qualified for doctorate status, but he never applied.

12. Stirner’s studies under Friedrich Schleiermacher, although centering on theology (philosophical, historical and practical theology), also integrally included Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics, criticism, ethics, and dialectics. It is likely that Stirner learned much more from the latter four than from Schleiermacher’s presentation of theology, with its apologetics, polemics, dogmatics, statistics and symbolics, and in the case of practical theology, such exciting topics as principles of church service, pastoral work, and principles of church government. (See Friedrich Schleiermacher, revised translation of the 1811 and 1830 editions by Terrence N. Tice, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*, 3rd Edition [Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY,

studies) Philipp August Böckh and Johann August Wilhelm Neander.

Following the completion of his studies and the beginning of his career as a teacher, Stirner began to socialize with the group of radical intellectuals around Bruno Bauer then called *die Freien* (“the Free”). This group can be considered a successor to an earlier group called the *Doktorclub* (“Doctors’ Club”), which according to one member had consisted “of aspiring young men, most of whom had already finished their studies” in which “reigned supreme ... idealism, the thirst for knowledge and the liberal spirit...”¹³ Aside from Bruno Bauer’s central role, the earlier group had also been notable for the participation of the young student, Karl Marx. However, by the time Stirner began his long association with *die Freien* Marx had moved on, rejecting any further association with most of its members. At one time or another many of those identified as “Young Hegelians” or “Left Hegelians”¹⁴ seem to have shown up at meetings of either the *Doktorclub* or *die Freien*. *Die Freien* usually met in the evenings at one or another Berlin wine bar or beer tavern – eventually settling on Hoppel’s as its most stable venue – for conversation, criticism, debate, jokes, card-games, smoking and drinking. And it was there that Stirner found an ever-changing group of intelligent, often challenging and outspoken comrades with whom he could feel at home as long as he continued living in Berlin. Amongst the more notable participants in *die Freien*, Bruno Bauer became one of Stirner’s best friends (attending both his second marriage as witness, and

2011].) Although Stirner was certainly influenced by the whole range of (especially German) Romantics, it seems likely that Schleiermacher’s emphasis on perception and feeling – and their central place in hermeneutics – constituted a significant influence helping Stirner to undermine and overthrow Kantian and Hegelian rationalism, right along with Schleiermacher’s own dogmatic Christianity.

13. David McLellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (Harper & Row, New York, 1973) p. 32.

14. “Left” Hegelian in this case indicated one’s stance towards religion. Those on the left were critical of religion while those on the “right” were supporters of a Christian interpretation of Hegelianism in one form or another.

his funeral) and the young Prussian officer Friedrich Engels for a time also became an enthusiastic duzbruder with Stirner before beginning his later intense friendship with Karl Marx.

It was during the apogee of Left Hegelian ascendancy in the social and political thought of the time, while Stirner was fully engaged with *die Freien*, that Stirner began contributing to the radical press as correspondent, reviewer and essayist. Most importantly this included his contribution of essays entitled “The False Principle of our Education” and “Art and Religion” to *Rheinische Zeitung* supplements in April and June 1842 (both coincidentally appearing just before Karl Marx took over as editor). Other contributions appeared elsewhere. And eventually, he began hinting that he was even writing a book. However, none of his comrades was prepared for the radical power and scope of *The Unique and Its Property* when it actually appeared. As it turned out, Stirner had not only been working on a critique of particular philosophical ideas or positions, nor even a critique of the entire Hegelian philosophical system and its own radical critics. Stirner had, instead, completed an unprecedented critique of *every possible* religious, philosophical and ideological system.

* * * * *

It was in the fall of 1844 that the initial public copies of Stirner’s *The Unique and Its Property* first appeared. Assuming the inevitable public controversy ahead, Stirner had already given notice to quit his teaching position as of October 1st. The book was initially received with a wide range of reactions from excitement to outrage, and confusion to consternation. A few laudatory comments were made, notably in letters from Ludwig Feuerbach, Friedrich Engels and Arnold Ruge.¹⁵ But,

15. Ludwig Feuerbach wrote about Stirner’s book in a letter that: “It is a brilliant and ingenious work....” And after giving criticisms of Stirner, he then went on to say that: “He is nonetheless the most ingenious and freest writer I’ve had the opportunity to know.” In a letter to Marx dated 19 November 1844, Friedrich Engels wrote that “Clearly Stirner is the most talented, independent, and hard-working of the ‘Free’....” Arnold Ruge, publisher of the *Hallesche Jahrbücher für deutsche Kunst und*

in the most prominent cases, any initial openness to Stirner's critique quickly gave way to a closing of minds, superficial dismissals, and shudders of contempt for the manifest evils Stirner was then alleged to have unleashed on an unsuspecting world.

Max Stirner announced his intentions in the opening pages of his book. He argued that if egoism was suitable for God, humanity or the sultan, why not for me? Why is it always only the actually-existing, individual egoist who is disparaged, while the imagined masters of the world are so lauded? Why don't we learn from these imagined masters and put ourselves in their place as masters of our own lives? Stirner goes on to do just this for himself, inviting us to follow his lead. The rest of the book is an examination of the implications which follow from this change of perspective from willing servitude to conscious self-creation.

For the vast majority of thinking human beings, it was in Stirner's time – and remains – God or gods, humanity, Man, society, the political state, the economy, or particular figures like emperors, kings or presidents who were not merely allowed, but often expected, to proclaim their power – their egoism – without any necessity of justifying themselves. These figures, all imaginary to one degree or another, depend for the largest part of their existence and powers precisely on the *mass belief* people have in their imagined reality and power. On its most important level, Stirner's masterwork is a consistent examination and critique of this phenomenon, depicting where and how people in practice invest aspects of their own reality and pow-

Wissenschaft and co-editor (with Marx) of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, announced in a letter to his mother that it was "the first readable book in philosophy that Germany has produced." (Max Stirner, edited by David Leopold, *The Ego and Its Own* [Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995] p. xiii. I cite David Leopold's Cambridge University Press edition of Stirner's work, not because it is adequate, but merely because it is the best of an otherwise worse lot. The sad state of Stirner scholarship in general is exhibited in the inadequate – and in some sections incompetent – introduction by Leopold in this edition, although his extensive notes and the index in this edition are themselves competent and important achievements. All citations from the English translation of *The Ego and Its Own* in this essay refer to this edition.)

ers in these phantoms through a process of self-alienation.¹⁶ Stirner's critique of this nearly ubiquitous, but most of the time unquestioned, phenomenon is at the same time necessarily an immanent critique. It is an immanent critique because Stirner does not lay claim to any transcendent or absolute Truth, Value or Reality (which would itself require the same type of self-alienation to create) or access to any other privileged perspective which would allow him to speak from any position beyond his own particular, finite, unique perspective.¹⁷ That no person

16. In his unprecedented critique of self-alienation, Stirner ultimately focuses on the centrality of religion since, historically, all systematic self-alienation begins with religion. Etymologically "religion" is a "Romance word" expressing "a condition of being bound." (Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, p. 48) But, as Stirner earlier points out in his essay on "Art and Religion," religion is first of all "a thing of the understanding," which means that it is actually a *conception* to which we are *bound*. Since there has never proven to be any genuinely credible empirical evidence for the actual existence of any transcendent spiritual beings, religion is in actuality a conceptual *fetishization*. Phenomenally, religion is the self-alienation of one's own powers and activities through the imagination and belief that they are manifestations of a (fantasized) spiritual being. However, self-alienation is by no means confined to religion as such.

17. The distinction and dispute between attempts to posit "transcendent or absolute Truth, Values or Reality" that are supposed to rule over our lives versus Stirner's "own particular, finite, unique perspective" comes down to whether the ultimate rationale for rationalist reification makes any sense: the need to somehow guarantee a special status for oneself in one's world. A special access to nonsubjective, eternal, transcendent Truth, Value or Reality. A version of Juvenal's question then always arises in one form or another: "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" ("Who will guard the guardians?") Or in this case, implicitly, "Who can know a truth is *the* Truth, a value is *the* Value, or a reality is *the* Reality?") Rather than providing a foolproof solution to one's problems, subjecting one's life to a higher level of rule in order to guarantee adoption of appropriate beliefs and actions leads to a recursive nightmare. Instead of directly appropriate decision-making based on the actually experienced situation here and now at hand, the decision is in advance "kicked upstairs," where there is no knowledge or understanding of the particular situations in which the decisions will actually be applied and thus no possibility of full responsibility – no ability to respond according to one's own felt, sensible and engaged recognition and understanding. In this rationalist mirror-world Truth, Value and Reality are all representations rather than lived activities in themselves. Stirner radically reverses this perspective

before him (nor in fact many after) had similarly made this simple observation and critique only confirms its central importance and his original, incredible audacity.

Despite the mightiest of efforts, once this Pandora's box had been opened it could not be closed. However the efforts continue every moment of every day from theologians, philosophers, preachers, moralists, politicians, economists, judges, police, ideologists, psychologists and all the other technicians of sacred power. They all want each of us to join the chorus disparaging the egoism of any and all actually-existing, particular individuals in order to pledge our allegiance to whichever of the imagined egoist masters we prefer to serve. Do you want to subordinate your life and prostrate yourself to God, to Nature, to Jesus, Ecology, Peace, Love or Science? Or to the Proletariat or Communism, to Free Enterprise or Capitalism, to Language, Freedom or the Void? To many people it matters much less in whom or what you believe enough to pledge your self-enslavement than that you at least believe in *something*, anything that you imagine to be greater than yourself! The biggest tabu is non-belief.

Only immanent critique (critique from within) can hope to dislodge those who insist on their self-enslavement to a reified or imaginary ideal (to a "spirit," "ghost," conceptual "essence," or "fixed idea" in Stirner's terms). Any successful transcendent critique, on the contrary, merely removes this self-enslavement from one imaginary ideal or reification in order to restore it to some other imaginary ideal or reification. To remove every form of self-enslavement from any possible reification or ideal requires not the critique of particular ideals to which people enslave themselves, it requires the critique of the *practice* of self-enslavement itself. And this is where Stirner devotes his primary efforts. He understands that attempts from outside to liberate passive people from one institution of slavery will usually only leave them ready to re-enslave themselves in another

and admits only his *own* truths, his *own* values and his *own* reality, and invites us all to do the same. Especially since it is impossible for any nonsubjective Truth, Value or Reality to exist for *anyone* in the first place except as that person's *own* imagined projections of such things.

form. The abolition of all forms of slavery requires that those who are enslaved fight for their own liberation to reclaim their own practical autonomy and self-possession. Each of those enslaved must construct her or his own immanent, practical critique of every form of enslavement. Or else condemn themselves to remain enslaved.

Like anyone else, Stirner constructed his critique from within a particular time and place, history and culture, situation and milieu. His critique, while certainly applicable to anyone able to read, reason and relate it to his or her own life, can appear narrower or more particular than it actually is if those who read it do not have an understanding of the particular context of the situation in and from which he wrote and its relation to our contemporary situations as readers. The relationships between particular ideas, phrases and themes in *The Unique and Its Property* and understandings of our more generally shared contemporary situation can be described from different perspectives and more or less accurately phrased in a variety of manners and styles. Some of the most important of these ideas, phrases and themes include the nature of Stirner's understanding of egoism, self, concepts, names and language, property, alienty and ownness in relation to his understanding of the sacred, spirit, essence, fixed ideas, religion, language, philosophy, society, humanity and nature. Interpretation of Stirner's perspective on each of these most often founders in the translation of his own words from their particular contexts in his text into the chosen language of each individual interpreter's own particular context of understanding and interpretation and, at the same time, within the more general context of prevailing social, linguistic and cultural reifications – compulsory pre-suppositions or prejudices that cannot be questioned within an imagined consensus reality of ubiquitous self-alienation. This includes the greatest prejudice of all (especially for all those who remain self-enslaved), that of the impossibility of self-creation and self-possession.

* * * * *

One way to better understand what Stirner does in *The*

Unique and Its Property is to grasp his effort as an attempt to employ a particular method to all of the general cultural phenomena of religion, philosophy, morality, science and ideology. This method was an *egoist* method, possibly modeled in part on Ludwig Feuerbach's anthropological method.¹⁸ But whereas Feuerbach was concerned to reduce the imaginary ideals of religion to the supposed reality of "Man" or the "Human," Stirner had a much more radical concern. His *own* concern, and by implication each of our *own* concerns. Instead of reducing imagined ideals into another supposedly more *real* conceptual ideal as does Feuerbach, Stirner dissolves every imaginary ideal into himself and suggests that we all choose to do likewise. What ultimately makes Stirner's critique so powerful and irrefutable is that it does not, like Feuerbach's (or any other possible) critique begin from *any* fixed-idea or ideal. Not even any conceptual ideal of an "I" or an ego. Instead it begins from his own, and by implication each individual person's own particular, phenomenal, uniquely lived experience.¹⁹ Thus, Stirner's egoism and his egoist method do not involve any reference to any other of the usual depictions (conceptions or representations) of these "ego" words as aiming at self-transcendence (whether "egoistic" or "altruistic"). They resolutely and consistently express a nominalist, or phenomenal – and thus an immanent – understanding. This nominalist or phenomenal or immanent egoism is purely descriptive and empirical, with no normative or metaphysical content in itself. It is an egoism of intentionality that cannot itself be alienated, because it is exactly what one

18. Stirner's egoist method was possibly modeled in part on Ludwig Feuerbach's anthropological method, but may have been developed independently as part of an ongoing process of which Stirner's seminal "Art and Religion" essay (published in early 1842, and most likely written in late 1841) is one milestone. However, given the publication date of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* in 1841 and ensuing likelihood that Stirner read it soon after, the probability that Stirner's egoist method was strongly influenced by Feuerbach should not be discounted. Feuerbach's method was in turn undoubtedly derived from David Strauss's earlier *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (1835-1836).

19. Neither, of course, does it begin from any particular *fixed idea* of what each person's uniquely lived experience is supposed to be. It begins from that experience as it is non-conceptually *lived*.

chooses and does, nothing more and nothing less. (It's definitely not an egoism of ends or goals oriented towards some self-alienated image of self-interest.) As Stirner says, it "points" to something which it cannot possibly explain or define in words. It is not an ultimate reality or truth, since these concepts cannot possibly express what it is. Stirner's egoism points to Stirner's figure of the Unique, which points merely to Stirner himself.²⁰ Similarly, according to Stirner's usage, any particular person's egoism will point to the whole of that person's uniquely lived experience.

That words and language – especially in their conventional usages – are inadequate to fully convey the meaning here is obvious, and is part of the problem of both adequately understanding Stirner and avoiding all the (more or less easy and more or less consciously intentional) misinterpretations of Stirner's work. The process of self-alienation – of separating an idea or representation of oneself from one's living self and then subordinating one's living self to that image – which Stirner describes and criticizes is so ubiquitous and fundamental to the functioning of modern societies that it permeates nearly every aspect of social life.²¹ Enslaving oneself to a fixed idea or

20. As Stirner proclaims in *The Unique and Its Property*, the "Unique" points to that which precedes all conceptualization. This means the "Unique" does not point to any ideal individual person, not to a physical person, not to some conception of a soul or a self. But to the entire lived experience of the person. It therefore includes one's entire life, including both objective and subjective aspects, which must themselves be artificially determined and separated from each other in order to be brought into being – out of the always pre-existing nonconceptual Unique – as concepts.

21. The process of self-alienation – of separating an idea or representation of oneself from one's living self and then subordinating one's living self to that image – is not just the foundation of modern life or modernity, it is also the foundation of so-called "traditional" societies, basically from the neolithic age onwards up to modernity. Though it appears it was precisely *not* the foundation for the earlier (one could argue more aptly-named "traditional") paleolithic and, later, gathering and hunting societies that are now usually called "primitive." What distinguishes non-primitive traditional societies from modern societies can be characterized as the intensity and ever-wider dispersion of this self-alienation throughout

imaginary ideal (or any number of them) is not a simple thing. It requires an immense amount of effort to work itself out in practice. This effort, in large part, it has been the primary function of all religion, philosophy and ideology to facilitate from the earliest days of symbolic communication. This effort also is embodied in a large number of habits, attitudes, modes of thought, and techniques of subordination that must be and have been learned and perfected by the masses of people in contemporary societies. And it is enforced by the sanctions of social, economic, political and military institutions that are constructed and maintained through the same types of self-alienated acts en masse.

To refer to the absence of all these processes of mass self-alienation is what Stirner intends with his figure of the Unique and the practice of *conscious* egoism. That this would mean that Stirner is a mystic²² and that the Unique is some sort of conceptual absolute, as many suggest (most often, it would

all aspects of life, including every social institution and form of social practice. Although it is proper to call Max Stirner the most radical, coherent and consistent critic of modernity, it would be incorrect to understand him as defending these traditional institutions or life-ways. He is equally a critic of premodern traditional and modern societies. (Given the limits of archeological and anthropological knowledge in his time, it is not surprising that Stirner never mentions or hazards any guesses regarding what are now called “primitive” societies.)

22. Mysticism is derived from the Greek “mystikos,” and generally used to indicate some claim to direct or immediate knowledge transcending normal human experience, especially of a sacred or divine nature as in communion with gods. Stirner, on the contrary, is completely concerned with the here and now, the immanence of mundane, everyday experience – an atheistic, anarchistic, egoistic immanence. Although many mystics tend to refer to “immanence” or at least imply some *form* of “immanence” in their statements, they in fact – as mystics – are always referring to religious forms of the “immanence” of otherwise transcendent ideas or spirits. This means that they are never speaking of any actual immanence, but of the self-alienation of human qualities which are then re-imported back into everyday life in some sense in which these self-alienations are then said to lie within reality, the world, the person, etc. The title of Leo Tolstoy’s Christian homily *The Kingdom of God is within You* (based on Luke 17:21) is a typical example of this genre of religious, if not mystical, “immanence.”

seem, precisely *for* purposes of mystification or muddling the issue), is absurd. It does not follow that Stirner is speaking of an *imaginary ideal* or a *fixed idea* of an ineffable, transcendental reality simply because words cannot adequately describe the nonconceptual, self-determining figure of Stirner's critique, his own immanent life-experience as it is lived here and now prior to its conceptual representation. To understand Stirner is to understand that he refuses any and all forms of self-alienation. He refuses to separate himself (as his nonconceptual life process) from himself in *any* fixed symbolic form, while at the same time – given the nearly ubiquitous diffusion of language into nearly every aspect of our culture – he cannot escape expressing himself and communicating with those same symbolic forms. But his expressions are always intended in non-fixed, atheistic, nominalist, immanent ways that together function as a critical self-theory.

Although Stirner himself uses few of our common contemporary theoretical categories to express himself, the meaning and implications of his Unique are clearly indicated in his text if we but pay close enough attention, prefiguring to one degree or another the vocabulary of modern hermeneutics, phenomenology and existentialism (though always in a consistently non-fixed, atheistic, phenomenal and nominalist manner). Stirner's full embrace of the nonconceptual in the Unique as prior to any conceptual understandings can be seen in particular as prefiguring Wilhelm Dilthey's "life as it is lived" or "Lebenskategorie" ("category of life"), albeit in a much more radical, presuppositionless form. Dilthey followed Stirner in abandoning the common notion of the centrality of language for all understanding in favor of Stirner's much more nuanced and coherent (reversal of) perspective on language in which conceptual understanding is seen as built upon a more fundamental level of nonconceptual understanding (or preconceptual, bodily, perceptual or lived understanding) *as a process of* that nonconceptual lived understanding itself.²³ Similarly, Stirner's

23. Wilhelm Dilthey obtained his doctorate in philosophy in Berlin in 1864 from the same university where Stirner studied, and less than twenty years after that university's most radical student had published the most outrageously notorious *critique of philosophy* ever written.

While there is a slight possibility that Dilthey was completely unaware of Stirner's work, it is much more likely that he was extremely aware of it. Especially given the existence of other more reputable sources that contributed to his developing understanding of understanding, if Dilthey borrowed anything at all from an encounter with (and inevitably a rejection of the most radical aspects of) Stirner's work, he would not by any means be the first to do so (both) without mentioning the debt. (Where, for example, would Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels have ended up without their debts to Stirner's work – gained through its partial appropriation while rejecting its most fundamental and radical basis? It has only recently begun to be appreciated how much their metaphysical dialectics of historical materialism and their ideological critique of ideology owe to their encounter with his work – even if they never actually understood Stirner, nor the full import of their own rationalist metaphysics. And what about Nietzsche's later encounter with Stirner, which he strove so hard to hide? Instead of looking for similarities and plagiarism, anyone who understands the shallowness of Nietzsche's rhetoric will realize that he didn't *steal* from Stirner, so much as he *fled* from the radical implications of the iron logic of Stirner's critique, while appropriating a few of the less central themes from Stirner that Nietzsche was then never able to fully master). The similarities between some of the fundamental attitudes of Dilthey's work (from its beginnings) and Stirner's would be somewhat uncanny if there is no connection. For one example, Dilthey's critiques of Kant and Hegel clearly echo (obviously, in a much less radical manner) Stirner's. For another, Jacob Owensby's characterization of the foundation of Dilthey's historical understanding could almost serve as a partial (though less than adequate) description of Stirner's project: "...all knowledge is rooted in life itself as it is given in lived experience. Life is not, however, reducible to subjectivity. Rather, life is an I-world relation prior to the subject-object distinction." (Jacob Owensby, *Dilthey and the Narrative of History*, p. ix.) What probably clinches Dilthey's acute awareness of Stirner's work *and* the extreme danger, if not impossibility, of his acknowledging *any* debt to Stirner's work is the fact that Dilthey's original mentor was the same Kuno Fischer whose attempted critique was so unceremoniously demolished by Stirner in "The Philosophical Reactionaries." Kuno Fischer was Dilthey's teacher in Heidelberg, *before* Dilthey began studying at the University of Berlin in 1853, itself only six years after Fischer's anti-Stirner pamphlet had been published. It is also important to note that any acknowledgment that he borrowed anything, even critically from a hyper-radical source like Stirner could have meant the early destruction of Dilthey's academic career in a potential scandal similar to the one which temporarily derailed Kuno Fischer's career in Heidelberg over the latter's alleged ties to Spinozism. On another tangent, Dilthey was also influenced by two of the same University of Berlin professors who had

discussion in “Stirner’s Critics” of the “worlds” of Feuerbach, Hess and Szeliga make it clear that he is speaking of what we would now be more likely to call “life-worlds” after Edmund Husserl’s usage (“Lebenswelt”) introduced nearly a hundred years later in *The Crisis of the European Sciences* in 1936.²⁴

earlier taught Stirner, and from whom both undoubtedly learned much of their philology, hermeneutics and criticism, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Philipp August Böckh. There are other connections which could be cited as well. For more information on Dilthey, see Jacob Owensby, *Dilthey and the Narrative of History* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1994).

24. As were very probably a majority of the most noteworthy German-language radicals, philosophers, critics and literary figures since the mid-nineteenth century, Edmund Husserl was at least in some fashion familiar with the nature and meaning of Stirner’s work. Bernd Laska reports that “Edmund Husserl once warned a small audience about the ‘seducing power’ of *Der Einzige* – but never mentioned it in his writing.” (Bernd Laska, “Max Stirner, a durable dissident – in a nutshell,” available on the internet on the *Isr-projekt.de* web site in a number of languages, including English.) However Dermot Moran, in *Edmund Husserl: Founder of Phenomenology* (Polity, Cambridge, 2005, p. 131.), also reports that “...in publications from *Logische Untersuchungen* to *Méditations Cartésiennes*, Husserl’s approach is predominantly individualist, or ‘egological’, describing conscious life primarily in the context of the individual self, for which he even invokes Max Stirner’s title,...(*der Einzige und sein Eigentum*; 35: 94).” Husserl’s distinction (developed from Bolzano’s distinction between subjective and objective ideas or representations) between “noesis” (the intentional process of consciousness) and “noema” (the object of conscious intention) is a weak alternative (relegated only to consciousness) to Stirner’s nominalist and non-metaphysical distinction between “egoism” (nonconceptual or phenomenally-lived intentional activity) and “property” (the object of egoist action, including acts of consciousness). Similarly, Husserl’s conception of “intentionality” (adopted from Brentano – who adapted the scholastic version of Aristotle’s conception) is also a weak philosophical (metaphysical) alternative to Stirner’s phenomenal “egoism.” Husserl cannot avoid reproducing most of Stirner’s distinctions in the later phenomenology he “invented,” though each of his inventions pale before Stirner’s creative appropriation and synthesis of Fichtean, Hegelian and Feuerbachian phenomenological currents.

The case of Brentano is interesting since it brings up the likelihood that Stirner was, like Brentano (with his conception of intentionality), also in part influenced by Aristotle’s *De Anima* in developing his nominalist/phenomenal conception of egoism. Once Stirner conceived

And, not least in importance, Stirner's Unique should obviously be seen to prefigure Martin Heidegger's "Dasein," albeit, once again, in a much more radical, presuppositionless form. While Heidegger's attempt, with his conception of the "preunderstanding" of "Dasein," to reject the Cartesian Cogito while hanging on to Being, ultimately fails, Max Stirner's more radical rejection of Descartes' Cogito and his dualism of mind and body succeeds by insisting on abandoning not only the reification involved in any fundamental *concept* of an independent ego as a thinking subject, but also the reification necessarily involved in the construction of any and all fixed ideas of speculative ontology, including even phenomenological ontological *concepts* such as Dasein.²⁵ Even more radically, Stirner's non-conceptual Unique is explicitly non-dualistic, undermining the dualism of both Descartes' and all of Western philosophy.²⁶ It

and developed his egoist method, he undoubtedly brought it to bear in reclaiming all of the self-alienated predicates of every major conception of god, soul and spirit. This means that he most likely examined the general range of results produced by applying the egoist method to every one of the major philosophies *before* proceeding to compile the first draft of what would become his *magnum opus*.

25. Ultimately, Heidegger's concepts of "Sein" and "Dasein" are highly abstract, cognitive metaphysical categories, and as such remain compatible with the Cartesian tradition of rationalist philosophy of consciousness. To this type of preaching, Stirner explains: "...for absolute or free thinking..., thinking itself is the beginning, and it plagues itself with propounding this beginning as the extremest 'abstraction' (such as being). This very abstraction, or this thought, is then spun out further."

Absolute thinking is the affair of the human spirit, and this is a holy spirit. Hence this thinking is an affair of the parsons, who have 'a sense for it,' a sense for the 'highest interests of mankind,' for 'the spirit.'"

26. All dualism is necessarily conceptual in nature. By starting directly from the nonconceptual, from which subjective and objective poles (or mind and body, or self and world) have not yet been abstracted, Stirner deftly bypasses the most fundamental problem for all philosophy, the metaphysical problem which actually founds and defines philosophy. Although the attempt is often made by philosophers to avoid conceptual dualism with the creation of monistic metaphysical systems (for examples, Schelling's and Hegel's), these attempts always founder immediately on their invariably conceptual nature. Even when they are supposed to point to something nonconceptual (for example with Schelling's idea of Nature), this nonconceptual is still immediately then

is beyond (or prior to) any subject/object dualism because both subjectivity and objectivity are understood as merely self-created abstractions derived from the nonconceptual totality of the Unique, and not conceived as ontological entities with any real existence of their own.

* * * * *

“Both religion and philosophy,” as one of Stirner’s teachers, Philipp August Böckh has written, “...work by a priori reasoning.”²⁷ This is another way of noting that all religion and all philosophy exist only as long as they include a dogmatic or rationalist doctrinal moment, since unprincipled empirical investigation – conceptually presuppositionless phenomenology – cannot qualify as either religion or philosophy.²⁸ Even

metaphysically *conceptualized* in non-nominalist ways (as Being, God, Nature, the Absolute, etc.), rather than simply left unaltered as with Stirner. This always leads to the reproduction of the originally evaded overt dualism *within* the monistic principle itself. Within Kantian philosophy the metaphysical dualism is overt. Within Fichtean philosophy the overt dualism is avoided, but then immediately reproduced within a phenomenological subjectivity. Within Schelling’s philosophy the overt dualism is avoided, but then immediately reproduced within objectivity. Hegel merely retraces Fichte’s route, avoiding overt dualism, while reproducing it within subjectivity, but a subjectivity combining being and reason.

27. Quoted from Böckh’s “Formal Theory of Philology” in Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt (ed.), *The Hermeneutics Reader* (Continuum Publishing Co., New York, 1997) p. 133. At the University of Berlin Stirner studied philology and hermeneutics under Philipp August Böckh (who, according to Mueller-Vollmer, “combined the ideas of Schleiermacher with the exacting methods of classical philology taught by Wolf and Ast” [p. 132]). Stirner also studied under Schleiermacher himself. Among the other possible perspectives on his critical self-theory expressed in *The Unique and Its Property*, we can also characterize it as a practical hermeneutics of self-understanding and a critical hermeneutics of self-alienation and self-enslavement.

28. To my knowledge there is no significant writer or theorist in all of history who has ever made any logically consistent claim that completely unprincipled (in the sense of no a priori, necessary, eternal or absolute metaphysical principles or laws) empirical investigation or conceptually presuppositionless phenomenology could constitute what is called

philosophers not generally considered counted amongst rationalists, from Heraclitus to David Hume, among many others, dogmatically maintain rationalist doctrinal presuppositions, though they are not always obvious.²⁹

religion or philosophy (or in most cases, if not all, science as well). On the other hand, it is no problem to find explicit evidence that every major theology, revealed religion and philosophy fundamentally depends upon claims to such principles and presuppositions. There *have been* confused claims from many recent philosophers and scientists that they employ no metaphysical principles or presuppositions even as they at the same time claim or assume (sometimes apparently without realizing it) that their theories can provide some form of (metaphysically) a priori, necessary, eternal or absolute knowledge!

These naively self-contradictory theorists most often claim to be empiricists, defenders of science or post-modern critics. However, one of the more sophisticated and sometimes-influential claims in a related but different direction is Klaus Hartmann's quite-justifiably controversial attempt at a non-metaphysical reading of Hegel's philosophy made in "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View" (Klaus Hartmann, *Studies in Foundational Philosophy* [Editions Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1988] p. 267-287). But, as Hartmann at one point confesses, even with the "categorical" and "systematic understanding" of Hegel that he advocates, "we realize that the notorious transition from Idea to Nature, or from the *Logic* to 'Realphilosophie,' can only be a metaphor." (p. 277) Either Hegel is read metaphysically (as Hegel explicitly asks), or his "philosophy" or "metaphysics" can be read non-metaphysically as mere *metaphor*, and any claims regarding the real world vanish, and with them so vanishes the metaphysical claims of the *Logic* as well. Similarly, the "presuppositionless" nature of Hegel's categories in the *Logic* is also hedged by Hartmann, as a mere "reconstruction," whose "sequential forward reading cannot be the whole story. How could a presuppositionless beginning lead to anything....?" Only Stirner's nonconceptual Unique offers the genuine possibility of a conceptually presuppositionless beginning, and does so only by intentionally abandoning philosophy.

29. The rationalist moment in Heraclitus was, of course and not least, his apparently metaphysical answer to the search for the ultimate substance of reality (the noumenon beyond the phenomenal world), which he decided was fire, modified by stages of rarefaction and condensation. Consistent with the unstable and transient image of fire, Heraclitus maintained a dynamic perspective on this reality in which change or flux is constant. But he certainly did not renounce metaphysical speculation, portraying his views not as mere poetic art, but as a revelation of an eternal Logos. His belief that one cannot step into the same river twice did not stop him from believing that he had some special knowledge of the transcendent

Yet modern philosophy also always contains a restless, skeptical, self-critical moment. The critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant, by setting limits to undisciplined flights of pure reason, aimed to deflate the most dogmatic and illogical forms of religion and metaphysics, but primarily served to validate what proved to be less-obvious but in many ways even more potent forms of metaphysical dogma.³⁰ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel attempted in his own novel way to advance

foundations of the world.

Despite David Hume's well known empiricism and skepticism, his philosophical speculations (like all *philosophical* empiricists and skeptics) also contain unmistakably rationalist moments, metaphysically necessary or a priori presuppositions that remain unproven and unprovable, but are not to be questioned or in most cases even acknowledged. For Hume this includes the usual naive empiricist presupposition of a metaphysical subject-object dualism, in which atomistic sense-data or perceptions are conceived as the subjective representations of a supposed – though not necessarily proveable – objective world.

Despite the fact that many philosophical empiricists and skeptics have genuinely attempted to reduce their fetishizations of reason, as long as they fail to reject the alleged independent truth of *every* rationalist presupposition they in fact invariably remain in thrall to rationalist reification in those remaining unquestioned forms. For more examples and detailed examination of relation of reification to empiricist philosophy, see the longer version of note 29 in an earlier version of this essay appearing in *Modern Slavery* #1/Spring-Summer 2012 (CAL Press, POB 24332, Oakland, CA 94623; <http://modernslavery.calpress.org>).

30. Kant himself claimed to have destroyed all previous forms of metaphysics. He was more reticent and ambiguous regarding claims to religious critique, though he did openly take on some of the more obviously illogical or irrational claims like that of the supposed ontological proof of the existence of God. In their place he elevated the analytic and synthetic a priori, a metaphysical conception of mathematics, fixed categories of the understanding, wiggle room for the possibility of religion, and an intractable metaphysical dualism of appearance and thing-in-itself. As Kant himself explains: "All pure a priori knowledge... has in itself a peculiar unity; and metaphysics is the philosophy which has as its task the statement of that knowledge in this systematic unity. Its speculative part, which has especially appropriated this name, namely, what we entitle *metaphysics of nature*,...considers everything in so far as *it is* (not that which ought to be) by means of a priori concepts,...." (Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, A845 B873).

Kant's critical impetus, even though Hegel's dialectical philosophy was also at least partly a critique of Kant's rigid conception of the categories of understanding and of Kant's attempt to completely separate appearance from things-in-themselves, as well as pure from practical reason (by way of a partial appropriation of Fichte's phenomenology and Schelling's philosophy of identity). However, Hegel's metaphysical conception of a transparently self-conscious dialectical logic of historical spirit once again reinstated dogma in place of consistent critique.³¹ It was at this point that Hegel inadvertently started the reductionist process which ultimately deconstructed his own (and all) philosophy by himself reducing Christianity to historical Spirit.³² It was left to the post-Hegelians to then relentlessly carry on this critique to its end. David Strauss next reduced the Christ figure to the concept of the human species in his *Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (1835-1836).³³ In 1841

31. Hegel claimed to carry on Kant's critique in an attempt at a presuppositionless phenomenology and logic, but in practice only begged the question (the logical fallacy of already assuming that which is to be proven) by implicitly presupposing his conceptual or logical metaphysics from the beginning. For example, in his doctrines of being and essence, Hegel always already assumes that an immediate experience (lived experience, unmediated by conceptual thought) does not and cannot exist, by always beginning from thinking (mediation) itself, rather than beginning from outside of thought. He then concludes, quite logically given his implicit presupposition, that immediacy is impossible. As Hegel states in his *Science of Logic* (translated by A.V. Miller and published by Humanity Books, 1999, p. 50.): "... what we are dealing with ... is not a thinking *about* something which exists independently as a base for our thinking and apart from it ... on the contrary, the necessary forms and self-determinations of thought are the content and the ultimate truth itself."

32. See Nicholas Lobkowitz, "Karl Marx and Max Stirner" in Frederick Adelman, *Demythologizing Marxism* (Boston College, Chestnut Hill, 1969) pp. 64-95. (Especially relevant are pages 74-75.)

33. Strauss was actually influenced far more by Friedrich Schleiermacher than Hegel, but he is usually represented as the first of the post-Hegelians, having coined the terms "right Hegelian" and "left Hegelian" to describe more tradition-oriented Christian Hegelians (like Bruno Bauer in 1838) and more liberal or progressive approaches to scriptural interpretation (as was his own). Strauss wrote: "This is the key to the whole of Christology.... In an individual, a God-man, the properties and functions

Ludwig Feuerbach extended Strauss' insights in his critique of Christianity and religion as a whole, replacing them with a philosophy of Man ("...no abstract, merely conceptual being, but a *real* being," as he said), which he then went on to suggest was actually a "negation of philosophy."³⁴ However, as Stirner easily shows, Strauss and Feuerbach merely replaced the religion of gods with the religion of an abstract ideal of Man or Humanity. This ultimately left Feuerbach increasingly silent in the face of Stirner's unanswerable critique. Around this time Bruno Bauer also advanced a project of critical criticism, a commitment to the critique of all transcendent universals from a perspective of free, infinite self-consciousness, implying the individual critic's divestment of any and all "private" concerns – thus reducing him to a mere shell of abstract universality.³⁵ Moses Hess

which the Church ascribes to Christ contradict themselves; in the idea of the race, they perfectly agree." And "By faith in this Christ, especially in his death and resurrection, man is justified before God; that is, by the kindling within him of the idea of Humanity, the individual man participates in the divinely human life of the species." David Friedrich Strauss, translated by George Eliot, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (Swan Sonnenschein, London, 1892) p. 780.

34. See Ludwig Feuerbach, translated by George Eliot, *The Essence of Christianity* (Barnes & Noble Books, New York, 2004) p. xix. Feuerbach argues that his philosophy: "...does not rest on an Understanding *per se*, on an absolute, nameless understanding, belonging one knows not to whom, but on the understanding of man;—though not, I grant, on that of man enervated by speculation and dogma;—and it speaks the language of men, not an empty, unknown tongue. Yes, both in substance and in speech, it places philosophy in the *negation of philosophy*, *i.e.*, it declares *that* alone to be the true philosophy which is converted in *succum et sanguinem*, which is incarnate in Man;...."

35. "Reason is the true creative power, for it produces itself as Infinite Self-consciousness, and its ongoing creation is...world history. As the only power that exists, Spirit can therefore be determined by nothing other than itself, that is, its essence is Freedom...Freedom is the infinite power of Spirit...Freedom, the only End of Spirit, is also the only End of History, and history is nothing other than Spirit's becoming *conscious* of its Freedom, or the becoming of Real, Free, Infinite Self-consciousness." Bruno Bauer, "Hegel's Lehre von der Religion und Kunst von dem Standpunkte des Glaubens aus Beurteilt" (1842), translated by Douglass Moggach, 2001. Anticipating his later, more detailed arguments, Max Stirner implicitly criticized Bauer's "infinite self-consciousness" with his

(at the time a comrade of Marx and Engels), in 1844, argued on the contrary that the “essence of man is...social being,” moving further from the species to society – as “the cooperation of various individuals for one and the same end.”³⁶ Later still, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels attempted to salvage a critical social theory from the wreckage of Hegelian dialectics and their own by-then-discredited (by Stirner) Feuerbachian materialism. However, this attempt at critical social theory amounted to an obviously *ideological* critique of ideology, itself requiring uncritical belief in a metaphysically materialist dialectical logic, supposedly immanent in history. We now know from its subsequent development where that story leads: Marx’s project of the realization of philosophy is (to paraphrase Stirner) necessarily another form of slavery.

It was left for Max Stirner to advance his egoistic critique, a critical self-theory which did not (unlike *every* religion, metaphysics or ideology) advocate the self-alienation of *any-one’s* actual powers or life-activity. Stirner’s egoistic critique has two sides. Negatively, it is a critique of all rationalist religious, philosophical, moral and ideological presuppositions. Positively, it provides a phenomenal description of unalienated self-possession or completely self-determined activity, which can also be characterized as undetermined self-creation. (That is, self-creation undetermined by heteronomous powers.)

There are three integral moments to Stirner’s immanent,

own critique of Hegel’s teaching in an essay titled “Art and Religion,” which also appeared in 1842.

36. “Feuerbach says that the essence of God is the transcendent essence of man, and that the true doctrine of the divine being is the doctrine of the human being. Theology is anthropology. This is correct, but is not the whole truth. One must add that the essence of man (*das Wesen des Menschen*) is the social being (*das gesellschaftliche Wesen*), the co-operation of various individuals for one and the same end...The true doctrine of man, true humanism, is the doctrine of human socialization, that is, anthropology is socialism.” Moses Hess, “ber die sozialistische Bewegung in Deutschland,” *Neue Anekdoten*, edited by Karl Grün (Darmstadt, 1845), p. 203, quoted in Nicholas Lobkowitz, “Karl Marx and Max Stirner,” Frederick Adelman, *Demythologizing Marxism* (Boston College, Chestnut Hill, 1969) p. 75.

egoist critique. Each one, without the others would leave the critique, not only incomplete, but incoherent and ineffective. The three moments can be characterized as nominal, phenomenal and dialectical. The nominal moment consists in the refusal to invest symbols or concepts with any special ontological status of their own. The phenomenal moment consists in a presuppositionless phenomenology or empiricism (a *presuppositionless* – and thus a completely non-metaphysical, non-philosophical and non-scientific – empiricism). And the dialectical moment consists in a perspectival, contextual and pragmatic logic that allows a completely dynamic, fluid use of conceptual distinctions and relations (with no necessary, a priori, fixed ideas). However, given the extreme creativity of Stirner's unprecedented critical synthesis of these moments, additional explanation of each of these moments is required to avoid the typical misinterpretations and incomprehension that too often greets unwanted innovations which upset received dogmas and prejudices. This is in part because, despite the relative simplicity and elegance of presentation of Stirner's critiques, he never speaks directly about the nature of his methods. Like the early Taoists Lao-tsu and Chuang-tsu, and the proto-Taoist Yang Chu (whose texts all share some notable similarities to *The Unique and Its Property*³⁷), Stirner leaves

37. Max Stirner was undoubtedly aware of at least the *Lao-tsu* – or *Tao-te-ching*, since it was included in Hegel's lectures on the History of Religion attended by Stirner in the winter of 1827-1828. Many of the early Taoist texts share distinct nominalist, phenomenological and dialectical traces (in which the nonconceptual nature of the Tao is sometimes expressed similarly to the nonconceptual nature of Stirner's Unique). The most remarkable for their similarities with Stirner's work – including their wide disrepute amongst humanists of both East and West – may be the texts attributed to Yang Chu. The question of whether Stirner may have had any direct familiarity with the Chuang-tsu texts or Yang Chu texts requires further investigation. Interestingly, though, as far as I have been able to find to date, the first published German translation of Yang Chu's texts was prepared by someone very familiar with Stirner's work, Martin Buber. Buber, who – though he was quite (uncomprehendingly) critical of Stirner – was also a very good friend of Gustav Landauer, whom it should be noted, was at one point enthusiastic enough about Stirner's work that he used Stirner's given name for his own pseudonym. Landauer, of course, is most widely known for a quotation in which he paraphrases Stirner (while leaving out the mediation of people's belief in fixed ideas):

it up to us – if we wish – to observe and describe the methods for ourselves.

As Stirner understood well, if the word is sacred, then I am its slave. In *The Unique and Its Property* he says: “For me paltry language has no word, and ‘the Word,’ the Logos, is to me a ‘mere word.’”³⁸ This means that for Stirner a complete nominalism must be central to any consistent critique of reification. Historically, various types of nominalism developed through a series of critical responses to belief in the *real* existence of Platonic forms, essences, universals or other abstract concepts like Pythagorean numbers supposedly existing somewhere independently outside of space and time. Stirner uses nominalism in its widest possible meaning as the refusal of any belief that symbols or concepts can be more than mere arbitrary objects used for thought and communication. Even though there is no valid or coherent argument that can be made for a rationalist (non-nominalist, realist) understanding of symbols and concepts that doesn’t in some central way beg the question (by assuming as a premise what is to be proved), most traditional and modern forms of thought reject nominalism, anyway, out of hand.³⁹ And those that do accept nominalism usually do so

“The state is a social relationship, a certain way of people relating to one another. It can be destroyed by creating new social relationships, i.e. by people relating to one another differently.”

38. Max Stirner, edited by David Leopold, *The Ego and Its Own* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995), p. 164.

39. Critiques of nominalism have historically relied on premises provided by unexamined rationalist presuppositions. These presuppositions are either smuggled in through unexamined metaphysical or epistemological contextual assumptions, or both. Typically, for a start, some type of ontological subjective/objective dualism and rationalist, representational epistemology is presumed. Then nominalism is usually rejected because it is inconsistent with or cannot provide proofs for the presupposed rationalist forms of reality or knowledge. That the demands imposed by adoption of rationalist presuppositions do not and cannot logically justify any general, presuppositionless critique of nominalism is never considered. This is a corollary of Hume’s critique of induction and Stirner’s critique of rationalist presuppositions, which I call “McQuinn’s Law.” (Since I’m an anarchist, this is – at least partly – a joke!) McQuinn’s Law can be stated as: Given any genuinely *presuppositionless* empiricism, there is

in only narrow or incomplete ways, always preserving some form(s) of non-nominalist, rationalist belief in other areas.

Phenomenology is a generic term referring to the empirical investigation of the phenomena of experience. The philosophical use of the term was originated by the mathematician and scientist Johann Heinrich Lambert (*Neues Organon*, 1764), before being prominently used by Kant (*Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, 1786), Fichte, and Hegel (*The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807), and long before it was nearly monopolized by Edmund Husserl and those influenced by Husserl (clearly both Husserl's descriptive and transcendental phenomenologies are merely types of possible phenomenologies, not some sort of phenomenology-in-itself, as is too often implied). Stirner's innovation is to insist on a completely presuppositionless phenomenology or empiricism. Before Stirner, every attempt at empirical or phenomenological investigation presupposed the necessary existence of a (metaphysical or religious) conceptual context of one sort or another (including, especially, the whole range of ontologies – dogmatic theories of God, Being, Substance or Mind, along with a subject/object or mind/body dualism since Descartes). Stirner dispensed with this type of *conceptual* presupposition by rejecting a beginning from any *conceptual* context at all, leaving only himself (as

no possible way to prove the existence of any necessary, a priori entity. Every form of conceptual cognition cannot be more than a hypothesis or postulate which must be continually proven in practice. (Obviously, this also includes McQuinn's Law itself, which is why it actually is not a law at all! But what did you expect from an anarchist?)

This means that, as usually conceived, there is no non-dogmatic justification for the presumption of the existence of *any* natural law or timeless or a priori universal, absolute, number, necessity, reality, truth, value, being, beauty, gods, dogmas or any other fixed idea (rationalist reification) which is not discovered and interpreted in one's particular experience as it is lived. These entities may all be postulated, but they are never proven. Show me (I'm a Missouri empiricist!) any a priori or timeless postulate, and I will show that it cannot be proven to be a priori or timeless without begging the question. This may not actually be a law, but it certainly trumps all laws. Just as immanent, phenomenal anarchy trumps the existence of all historical states. (What existed before the first political state was created? Anarchy – the ground of all social existence!)

nonconceptual, lived experience, both pre-subjective and pre-objective) as foundation.⁴⁰ Beginning from the Unique, his phenomenally-lived experience beyond words, Stirner's descriptive phenomenology then proceeds from the most basic conceptual distinction between a completely insubstantial subjectivity ("creative nothing") and its object-world (its "property"). Not as some sort of absolutely given metaphysical distinction, but as a practical, finite, conceptual self-creation whose origin (self-constructed from out of the nonconceptual Unique) is never forgotten. Every phenomenal distinction which follows is a part of his self-creation, a fundamentally aesthetic project pursued for his own self-enjoyment (both appropriative and self-expressive), with no (possible) claim to any transcendental objectivity, absolute truth or reality beyond his own experience or power. Although often accused of solipsism for his refusal to believe in any imaginary (rationalist) conceptual guarantee that other individuals are somehow objectively, absolutely or ontologically real, Stirner then goes on (in a refutation of any possible solipsistic intention) to invite others to play the same type of game he does. Without any rules legislated from the outside, Stirner argues that we are each responsible for creating our own conceptual understanding of ourselves and our world, and for communicating as best we wish and are able with others to create our common social world. It should be no surprise that this often seemingly vertiginous choice of a free-falling self-creation in a world without conceptual limits has proven to be too much for most commentators to handle. For theologians, metaphysicians, epistemologists, moralists and ideologists it is simply inconceivable. (They instinctually grab for the nearest fixed idea and hang on for their lives, since they have convinced themselves that life is impossible without fixed ideas to guide them and anchor them in the void left if no external

40. Whereas most philosophers since Descartes have begun from thinking and thought or conceptual consciousness, Max Stirner begins from non-thought, from his nonconceptual life. Stirner calls himself "the Unique" or "the Unique One" ("der Einzige") to point to himself as an "empty concept," a concept without any content aside from the nonconceptual experience to which it points. An "empty concept" could also be termed a "nominal" or "nominalist concept," a type of concept that always necessarily corresponds perfectly to its object.

meanings are given from gods or masters!)

Stirner's logic is an analytics and dialectics released from the prison of metaphysics – Hegelian, Aristotelian or otherwise. It is humanly constructed rather than a priori, transcendent or absolute in any way.⁴¹ Analytic (or deductive) logic derives from analysis – the derivation of conclusions accord-

41. As it is usually formulated, belief in any a priori is necessarily always a belief in an unverifiable conceptual presupposition. After all, from the instant we create a conceptual understanding of our lives temporality in some form is already there, implied (if by nothing else) in the very act of creation of conceptual categories (of thinking). Prior to our memories of our own acts in the past (which are always memories within the present) and following our current acts (in a future which is only ever projected from the present), how can we possibly know if any particular concept or symbol existed or will exist? Certainly not based on any empirical, experiential evidence. The usual practice of rationalists is to consider thinking as outside of space and time (which is fine if you really believe you *are* fundamentally only a spirit or ghost, but isn't very convincing for those of us who empirically consider our bodies and worlds to be non-expendable), and therefore its contents as somehow a priori. However, if thinking is considered from a presuppositionless phenomenological perspective as merely an activity of a living person, whose actual essence (as Stirner would say) is nonconceptual, then the existence of any thoughts *prior* to that thinking and outside of experience (a priori concepts) will never be found – only asserted on no (or highly impeachable) empirical evidence. It is not likely that Stirner would have missed (among other similar statements from the philosophers of his time), in an introduction to his *Science of Knowledge* (Nabu Press edition, 2010, p. 26), Fichte stating – as part of a longer argument – that: “Philosophy anticipates the entirety of experience and *thinks* it only as necessary, and to that extent it is, by comparison with real experience, a priori. To the extent that it is regarded as given, the number is a posteriori; the same number is a priori insofar as it is derived as a product of the factors. Anyone who thinks otherwise, simply does not know what he is talking about.” What does a priori mean here except a statement that is already contained in some way in its premises (factors). Stirner easily recognized that either the premises themselves must already be a priori rather than empirical, in which case we have a vicious circle in which we will never reach any presuppositionless phenomenon from which we can derive an a priori (and it is obvious that the a priori is just a baseless presupposition), or the supposed a priori thought is really a given (an a posteriori) phenomenon (unless thinking is metaphysically considered somehow to be outside of experience, itself an a priori presupposition).

ing to (any accepted) rules of logical operation from premises (including the most often ignored, but required lived-context) within which these conclusions are already present. It produces an endless variation of the same thing, but said in different ways, which reveal the implications of particular symbolic relations according to the accepted rules of operation (rules of the game).⁴² Dialectical logic, on the other hand, derives initially from dialogue, questioning or argument, from the pragmatic play of different perspectives encountering each other, employing distinctions and removing contradictions, from which a larger, more encompassing perspective can be constructed and understood.⁴³ The keys to Stirner's use of dialectic are his re-

42. After standing largely intact for thousands of years, Aristotle's analytic, or syllogistic, logic (reconstructed in the *Organon*) was only replaced by modern formal deductive logics in the 19th and 20th centuries, largely after Stirner's death. During Stirner's lifetime there were, however, already hints at some of the major, imaginative changes on their way. For a much more detailed discussion of the implications of Stirner's analytic perspective, see note 42 in the earlier version of this essay in *Modern Slavery* #2/Spring-Summer 2012 (CAL Press, POB 24332, Oakland, CA 94623), pp. 177-178.

43. Developing from its earliest practices, Aristotle's formulation of dialectic (also reconstructed in the *Organon*) operates through a limited number of potential practical strategies of argumentation, depending upon the type of context and audience. From its beginnings, dialectic implied a logic of communicative (social) understanding embedded in time and history that became, especially within Hegel's conception of dialectic, increasingly explicit. In fact, dialectic is composed at its most basic phenomenal level of *all* the extra-analytical (contextual, interpretive, discursive and rhetorical) aspects of logic. However, whereas Hegel's dialectic ultimately remains (whatever Hegel's actual intention) no more than a self-alienated, rationalist objectification, Stirner's dialectic is his own self-creation as both self-expression and self-possession. It is a continually recreated and flexible process whose objectifications Stirner creates and consumes at his pleasure for his own purposes – for his self-enjoyment.

In practice, this means that since Stirner takes full responsibility for creating all aspects of his self-expression, he also can take full account (to the extent he wishes in any given particular instance) of every expressive move he makes. Thus, for each distinction Stirner employs, he always understands that it is *his* act of distinction, it occurs in a particular life *context* (including natural, social, historical and personal moments), and it is based upon and operates within – but also always

fusal of any rationalist metaphysical or epistemological claim to absolute or objective Truth and his complete openness with regard to the construction and use of categories, as long as all of the logical implications (the currently accepted rules of the logical game of conceptual understanding one is playing) are considered.

Traditional and modern philosophy have always been made up of (revealed or dogmatic, sometimes unacknowledged) rationalist presuppositions, along with phenomenal or empirical descriptions, developed analytically to reveal their implications and dialectically (pragmatically), according to a logic of argumentative assertion which takes a certain consideration of perspective and context in the use of categories in order to be convincing. Hegel's innovation was to collapse the rationalist premises into the phenomenological development of his dialectical logic, identifying his dialectical logic with an historical unfolding of Being. Stirner's refusal of all rationalist presuppositions including his adoption of a thoroughgoing nominalism amounts to a refusal of philosophy. And his critical self-theory

creatively beyond – social and historical systems of both preconceptual and symbolic communication. For each particular conceptual distinction he makes, then the symbolic distinction will nominally denote (or point to) a particular indication whose content is only part of a story that always includes its entire context. And that context will always include everything that the indication leaves out – its entire ground or background, all that is not indicated. This (more narrowly) includes everything that is not conceptually indicated, which would be the other conceptual side of any distinction (for example, the other side of every abstract, polar *evaluative* distinction like desirable/undesirable, good/bad, right/wrong, true/false, real/unreal, beautiful/non-beautiful, spiritual/non-spiritual and material/non-material or the other side of every *particular or universal, objective* distinction like table/non-table, Joan/non-Joan, sleep/awake, aware/unaware, eagle/non-eagle, dust mote/non-dust mote and god/non-god or blue-flying-elephant/non-blue-flying-elephant). According to Stirner's critique, since only particulars actually exist in our experiences, it becomes especially important to maintain an awareness of what is necessarily suppressed by (left out of) every rationalist (abstract, universal) distinction, since it is his goal to restore for himself – and to help all of us begin to restore for ourselves – every particular moment or aspect of life that we currently suppress through our rationalist self-alienations.

thus becomes a presuppositionless hermeneutical phenomenology developed through nominalist analytic and dialectical logic.

Stirner's dialectical phenomenology of self-creation ("ownness," "my power") is also a dialectical phenomenology of appropriation ("my property") and self-expression ("my self-enjoyment") in association with others ("my intercourse"). These are the remaining keys to understanding Stirner's critical self-theory. As Stirner puts it at one point:

"My power is *my* property
 My power *gives* me property.
 My power *am* I myself, and through it am I my
 property."⁴⁴

In his dialectical analysis of the phenomenon of the Unique, Stirner begins by making a purely phenomenal distinction between himself as "creative nothing" and as property as horizons of his life. The boundary or mediating relation between the two, which is also their unity, is his egoism or power. The conceptual distinction through which these two opposed terms are created brings forth an entire conceptual universe of further phenomenal distinctions and relations. Yet this entire conceptual universe is continually and fundamentally acknowledged to be an abstract, conceptual creation with no necessary validity beyond its appropriative and expressive contributions to his self-enjoyment! Its truth is always a function of its power as his self-created, self-expressive property, the artistic self-creation of his life. The extent to which he exercises power over and through his property is the extent of his life. As it is for ourselves our own.

* * * * *

Stirner already makes most of this quite clear in the text of

44. Max Stirner, edited by David Leopold, *The Ego and Its Own* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995), p. 166.

The Unique and Its Property, at least for any careful and perceptive readers. And it doesn't take all that much effort to fill in any of the few remaining blanks he has left for us. Yet, the history of Stirner's reception is largely a history of the incomprehension of – and unthinking antipathy to – his work. Where Stirner makes it clear that the “Unique” is *not* a concept in *The Unique and Its Property*, most of his readers – and especially his critics – insist against all evidence on interpreting him as speaking about not just a concept, but a concept of “the ego,” or even an “absolute ego,” at that. Where Stirner makes it clear that he speaks of egoism as the unavoidable phenomenal experience that appears wherever I and my world are conceptually brought into being, his critics merely see the various forms of philosophical egoism: ethical or moral, rational or psychological. And this, once again, despite all the abundant evidence to the contrary. When Stirner makes it clear that the egoism he describes is not an egoism of absolute, sacred or transcendent (“jenseits”) interest, or an egoism involving any sort of separation of his life and acts from any kind of imagined conceptual essence, his critics ignore all of this and proceed to instead mindlessly attribute various forms of isolated, anti-social, calculating, narrowly self-serving egoism to him. Though, as Stirner makes clear, his “Egoism ... is not opposed to love nor to thought; it is no enemy of the sweet life of love, nor of devotion and sacrifice; and it is no enemy of intimate warmth, but it also no enemy of critique, nor of socialism, nor, in short of any *actual interest*...” Instead, Stirner says, “The ‘exclusiveness’ of the egoist, which some want to pass off as isolation, separation, loneliness, is on the contrary full *participation* in the interesting by – exclusion of the uninteresting.” And, finally, despite the fact that Stirner subverts and destroys all of the pillars of philosophy, while only speaking of philosophy with contempt in *The Unique and Its Property*, his critics usually then insist on portraying him precisely *as a philosopher!*

In “Stirner's Critics” and “The Philosophical Reactionaries” Stirner takes these key points (with a few less key) and remakes them, at times in more detail than he did in his original text, and restates them in even more clear and unambiguous terms. In their critiques Szeliga, Feuerbach and Hess each insist on

mischaracterizing Stirner's figure of the "Unique" in various conceptual guises, which earns them in turn well-deserved ridicule from Stirner. They each self-congratulatingly portray their sacred conceptual ideals of the human essence as the True and Real, apparently totally unaware of Stirner's forceful and categorical critique of just that sort of mistake. And they each portray the egoist as a sinner against their preferred absolute external scales of value. Finally, when Kuno Fischer treats Stirner as a "reactionary" "sophist" inferior to the philosophers who have supposedly "overcome" sophism, Stirner laughs at his preposterously "earth-shattering thoughts."

* * * * *

Stirner's critical self-theory is fundamentally a practical, self-critical attitude towards self-understanding (which necessarily includes understanding of others and of one's world) and self-activity that is adopted by anyone who refuses to be pushed around by symbolic, conceptual or linguistic theoretical constructs or formations of any type. He has systematized one basic approach to an attitude which itself refuses any possible final systematizations, and has done so in a manner which closes off no other paths to self-creation except any easy return to the fitful, occasionally nightmarish, slumbers of religion and rationalism and their concomitant self-alienation and self-enslavement.⁴⁵

45. Stirner makes it hard to return to the self-alienating and self-defeating incoherence of religious-rationalist thought – the dogmatism of religion and the built-in nihilism of every form of modern religion, philosophy and ideology (in which frustrating, unreachably abstract Realities, Conceptions and Values are set up as the only acceptable objects or goals of life). This is because his critique is not only devastating for every form of religion, philosophy and ideology themselves, but also – when properly understood through his complete reversal of perspective – his critique reveals the path to the subversive completion of each religiously rationalist project, through completion of the hidden phenomenal, living core of each of these projects. This is the case for the particular projects of ancient philosophers, the project of Christianity, for the Cartesian project and the Kantian project, the Fichtean and Schellingian projects,

We each have the power to make our own phenomenal and dialectical distinctions and relations, in ways more or less nominal and presuppositionless, or more or less rationalistic. We each have the power of our own conceptual self-creation which we can use for purposes of constructing our ownness or constructing our self-alienation, our own self-possession or our own self-enslavement. If we refuse any and every dogma, there is no objective, absolute or transcendent reality or truth, beauty or morality⁴¹ which can stop us from being who we are and aiming at whatever we wish within the limits of our powers, including the power of our relationships within our worlds. If we accept any dogma, then according to that dogma we may still imagine that there is an objective, absolute or transcendent reality, truth, beauty or morality.⁴⁶ We can imagine and believe

for Schleiermacher's project, for the Hegelian project, the various Romantic projects of Novalis and others, all of the ideological projects the nationalists, socialists, communists and corporativists, and all the rest of the rationalist projects which have followed throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

Taking each of these projects individually, we can – from Stirner's critical, egoistic perspective – trace the particular forms of religious or rationalist dogma presupposed a priori in each case. (These presuppositions are always centered around the choice of an initial symbolic inversion, fetishizing a religious or rationalist (representational) mirror-image of our phenomenally-experienced lives, which is invested with the "reality" that is torn and self-alienated from the nonconceptual unity of our actual lives.) These presuppositions then logically lead further to more and more complex structures of self-alienation, more and more intricate excuses for self-enslavement, and more and more arcane attempts at explaining the resulting (ultimately inexplicable) self-contradictions which result from the assumption of the initial inversion of lived reality with its symbolic representations.

46. Max Stirner's critique of morality is one of the hardest things for his critics to stomach. Even when they seem to understand it in theory, his critics remain so wedded to the self-subordination of their own activities to moral rules in practice that they are for the most part unable to consistently step outside their own habitual commitments, even in their imaginations. This leads to a complete inability to understand why the fetishized belief in compulsory morality of any kind is absurd for those who refuse to live as slaves.

Stirner's whole critique is founded on the refusal of all forms of self-

alienation. And compulsory morality is one of the archetypal forms of self-alienation. It involves either creating before the fact, or (more often) claiming to find (or to have imposed on oneself), predetermined rules of conduct that must be followed regardless of one's situation. The absurdity of this becomes even clearer when we read the religious, political, economic, and social moralists, or moral philosophers, and discover that each seeks to find some way to claim that moral rules should always trump the existential choices of particular individuals, though none are ever able to make a logical case for this without introducing dogmatic presuppositions that already contain the justifications for requiring the moral rules. As soon as we disallow these dogmatic presuppositions, these moralists can only flop around like dying fish out of water, rehashing their baseless arguments but going nowhere.

Even though – with their dogmatic foundations removed – moralists can only operate with *no rational basis*, they still insist on claiming that the absence of morality either is – or else definitely leads to – the most heinous of crimes. The typical illogical argument is that the absence of morality means the absence of “moral responsibility,” and the absence of moral responsibility leads to heinous behavior. Yet, when moral responsibility is examined, it turns out that it consists of the “good German” rule of just following orders. Of course, it is the *correct* orders that are supposed to be followed, say the moralists. But few ever agree on which are the correct orders. There can never be any unquestionably true, universal criteria that lead us to the correct orders for everyone to follow. And those who yell the loudest that we need to follow *their* “correct” orders are usually the most ignorant and illogical of the bunch: Marxists, liberals, Nazis, racists, Christians, Islamics, Hindus, etc.

What is actually at stake with any submission to morality is the necessary abdication of any directly *personal* responsibility for one's actions, instead of accepting the inevitability that one always chooses one's actions and cannot escape this lived fact. Moral responsibility is an ideological mirage through which people can attempt to displace responsibility from the *actual* agent – themselves – on to the set of moral rules and its alleged source.

Genuine personal responsibility is only accepted when we make each decision for ourselves – unavoidably in our own interests. Unless you believe that your own interests are actually different from the interests involved in your own actions, a highly convoluted and illogical idea, but typical of the distorted thought processes required for the proper functioning of compulsory morality.

Although it is often implied by his critics, it is untrue that Stirner rejects all questions of ethics per se (or non-compulsory morality, should one wish to use that term). If an ethical question or a noncompulsory moral question involves determining what is the best way (according to one's own criteria of “best”) to achieve a particular goal, to what would

with all our power that we are ruled by God or Nature, subject to laws, compelled by morals, condemned to sin, controlled by our past, our psychic drives or our genes, alienated from Truth, Beauty and Justice, or puppets of any other half-plausible conceptual construction we can create. Our choice lies between these two visions. It is our choice and, for each of us, our choice alone: conscious self-creation or unself-conscious, self-alienated, enslavement to fixed ideas (and to the institutions which take advantage of them in order to aggregate and exercise people's self-alienated powers).

Over one hundred years following the initial publication of Steven Byington's English translation of Max Stirner's *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum* is one hundred years too long to have had to wait to be able to read an adequate translation of Stirner's own words in response to the major published critics of this work in his lifetime. Let's thank Wolfi Landstreicher for producing this highly readable and enjoyable translation not a moment too soon.

- **Jason McQuinn** (Originally written July-September 2011 and revised with additional notes added October 2011 and December 2012.)

Stirner object? It is only when an ethic is fixed, binding or compulsory in the sense in which morality is usually taken that Stirner could be said to reject ethics.

It should be clear that Stirner's entire argument here turns on the refusal to subordinate his actually lived activities to any self-alienated symbolic representations of himself and his activities. His egoism is an immanent, phenomenal, descriptive egoism and has no compulsory moral content. He has no desire to separate his lived interests from some sort of supposed "actual" or "real" self-interests that he should follow, just as he has no desire to somehow correctly isolate some sort of supposed "actual" or "real" external or heteronomous moral interests that he should follow. The desire to impose some sort of reified, rationalistic compulsory-moral mechanism between one's otherwise felt life choices and one's final actions functions as a fetishized (neurotic) repetition-compulsion preventing any exit from habitual self-alienation (see note 17, where I describe this "recursive nightmare" further). The choice of compulsory morality is necessarily the choice of self-enslavement to that morality – whether it is a supposedly "altruistic" or a supposedly "egoistic" morality. Moral altruism and moral egoism are two sides of the same phenomenon of self-alienation that Stirner consistently and conclusively rejects.

Translator's Preface

Working on this translation has been a pleasurable challenge for me. Stirner uses straightforward, even fairly simple language, filled with passion and sarcasm, to express ideas that are difficult, though more in the fact that very few people would want to accept their implications than in their complexity. In wrestling with this work, I have had to make decisions about how best to get Stirner's thinking across in English. The purpose of this preface is to explain some of those decisions.

One of the central terms in Stirner's thinking is "*der Einzige*." I have chosen to translate this as "the unique." Some have argued in favor of leaving this noun in German, and I understand their point, but in this text Stirner frequently connects the noun *Einzige* with the adjective *einzig*, and this connection would be lost if I left the noun in German. In addition, I think that leaving *Einzige* in German would give the text a more academic feeling, as if Stirner were inventing a specialized language, which he is not. For Stirner, *Einzige* is simply a name to use for something that is beyond definition, something that is unspeakable, so I decided not to translate it as "the unique one." Such a translation would imply that "unique" says something *definitive* about some *one*, rather than merely being a name pointing toward something unsayable. I think that, in "the unique," the fact that it is meant to be a mere name for something beyond language is made clearer. Because Stirner compares his use

of “*der Einzige*” to the way one uses proper names, such as “Ludwig,” knowing perfectly well that the word Ludwig tells you nothing about the person so designated, and yet indicates clearly *who* you are talking about if those to whom you speak know Ludwig, I considered capitalizing “unique” as a proper name is capitalized, but have chosen not to do so for fear that some would instead read it as presenting the unique as an ideal, a higher reality, rather than simply as you and I in the here and now. In light of all this, I choose to translate the title of Stirner’s book as *The Unique and Its Property*, a more correct translation than the current English title (*The Ego and Its Own*).

I decided to leave all references to page numbers of citations from *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum* as they were – reflecting the page numbers in the original edition of the book. I also translated these citations directly, rather than going to Byington’s translation either in its original form or in the version edited by David Leopold (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought). I did this because I wanted to maintain a consistency in language between what Stirner has written here and his citations from his earlier book and to guarantee that Stirner’s references to various philosophical, political and theological ideas of his time were not lost. I have also begun a new English translation of Stirner’s major work.

Though Stirner does not invent a specialized language, his writings spring out of the context of the debates of the young Hegelians and other German philosophical and social radicals of the times. Thus, Stirner uses certain terms in Hegelian (or anti-Hegelian) ways. I have chosen to translate these terms as consistently as a good, readable translation would allow.¹ I want to mention a few of these. In English

1. I made use of the following online glossaries of Hegelian terminology for this purpose: http://www.london.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/students/philosophy/ba_course_materials/ba_19thc_hegel_glossary_01.pdf; <http://www.class.uidaho.edu/mickelsen/texts/Hegel%20Glossary.htm>; <http://web.mac.com/titpaul/Site/>

translations of Hegelian works, "*Begriff*" is generally either translated as "notion" or "concept." I have chosen the latter translation, because it allows some of Stirner's word play to appear more clearly in English. I have translated "*Entfremden*" as "alienation" although "estrangement" is an equally acceptable translation. I felt that my choice has more meaning to those likely to read this translation, within the context of present-day radical theoretical endeavors. In Hegelian usage, "*Wesen*" is translated as "essence." In addition, in its frequent usage with "*Mensch*," which itself can be translated as "human being" or merely "human," it is clearly a reference to the species "essence" which Stirner's critics claim to be inherent in the human being. Stirner turns this idea on its head in an interesting way by arguing that the real essence of each individual is, in fact, his or her concrete, actual, inconceivable, unspeakable, unique being in the immediate moment, the very opposite of the way Hegel and the other young Hegelians conceived it. Although the word "*Meinung*" only appears four times in this text, it is significant in Hegelian thought. The word is often translated as "opinion," though it can also be translated as "view," "judgment," or "estimation." Hegel "often stresses the etymological link with *mein* ('mine'),"² and Stirner is likely to have found it amusing. For Hegel, *Meinung* was merely of use for distinguishing particulars and was thus of no significance to universal Reason or universal Thought. For Stirner, these universals were spooks, and particulars (and more specifically *myself* in particular) were what mattered. So *Meinung* is how you and I actually experience our world, or to put it more simply, each of us experiences it from our own *point of view*. To emphasize this, I have chosen to translate *Meinung* as "view" in this text.

[Phenomenology_of_Spirit_page_files/Notes%20on%20the%20translation%20and%20small%20glossary.pdf](#)

2. G. W. F. Hegel, Théodore F. Geraets (translator), Wallis Arthur Suchting (translator), Henry Siltou Harris (translator) *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze* (Indianapolis, 1991), in "Notes to Glossary," p. 351.

There are a few other choices I made in translation that I think need some comment. “*Mensch*” can be translated either as “person” or “human being.” In this text, Stirner uses it in the context of his critique of humanism, and so I decided it made the most sense to translate it as “human being.” In a couple of passages in this text, Stirner contrasts “*Mensch*” to “*Unmensch*.” In Byington’s translation of *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum*, he usually chose to simply translate the latter word as “unman.” But in German, the word refers to a “monster,” and knowing Stirner’s enjoyment of playing with words and ideas in ways that are likely to get the goat of his opponents, I think that he most likely meant just that. To further emphasize Stirner’s intent of contrasting this with the abstract, conceptual *human* being, I chose to translate the term as “*inhuman* monster.” This leads to such delightful statements as: “You are an inhuman monster, and this is why you are completely human, a real and actual human being, a complete human being.”

The German word “*Prädikat*” could be translated as “predicate” or “attribute” (among other possibilities). In this text, Stirner uses it specifically in reference to god or to humanity as the new god. Thus, he is using it in an anti-*theological* sense rather than a grammatical sense. I have thus chosen to use the theological term “attribute” rather than the grammatical term “predicate” to translate it.

The word “*Vorstellung*” only appears twice in this work, and in both instances it is in reference to the ways that Stirner’s opponents chose to depict egoism. Though “*Vorstellung*” is often translated into English as “representation,” it has a far more active connotation than this English word. It is more an active depiction or conceptualization that one is inventing. Certainly this what Stirner is saying about his opponents. Thus, I have translated the word as “depiction” here.

There is a passage in which Stirner criticizes “*Bedenken*.”

One can translate this word as “qualms,” “scruples,” “mis-giving,” or “doubts.” In this text, it is obvious that he is talking about moral scruples. In the context, Stirner uses a couple of other words in ways rather different from their usual present-day meanings. He uses “*Bedenklichkeit*” and “*Unbedenklichkeit*” in ways that in the context only make sense if they are translated as “scrupulousness” for the former word and “unscrupulousness” or “lack of scruples” for the latter. But in the present, “*Bedenklichkeit*” is usually translated as “seriousness,” “precariousness” or “anxiety”; and “*Unbedenklichkeit*” is usually translated as “harmlessness.” Since in this passage, Stirner plays a lot on “*Bedenken*,” “*Denken*” and “*Gedenken*” (wordplay sadly lost in translation), it is possible that he was also playing with these other two terms – implying that scrupulousness causes anxiety and that a lack of scruples is harmless compared to the moral dogmas of scrupulousness. In any case, I chose to translate the words in the way that would make sense in context, as “scrupulousness” for the first word, and “unscrupulousness” or “lack of scruples” for the second.

Finally, I want to say that translating this work has been an act of egoistic love. I wanted to see a full English translation of it, and took the tools and means in hand to create it. I have had much enjoyment in doing so.

-Wolfgang Landstreicher

Stirner's Critics

by Max Stirner

The following three notable writings have come out against *The Unique and Its Property*:

- 1) Szeliga's critique in the March edition of the "Northern German Gazette";
- 2) "On *The Essence of Christianity* in Relation to *The Unique and Its Property*" in the latest volume of *Wigand's Quarterly Review*;
- 3) A pamphlet, "The Last Philosophers" by M. Hess.

Szeliga presents himself as a critic, Hess as a socialist and the author of the second piece as Feuerbach.

A brief response might be useful, if not to the critics mentioned above, at least to some other readers of the book.

The three opponents are in agreement about the terms that draw the most attention in Stirner's book, i.e., the "unique" and "egoist." It will therefore be very useful to take advantage of this unity and first of all discuss the points mentioned.

Szeliga, after first having in all seriousness allowed the unique "to become" and identified it with a "man" (page 4: "The unique wasn't always unique, nor always a man, but was once a baby and then a young boy"), makes him an "individual of world history" and finally, after a definition of

spooks (from which it emerges that “a spirit lacking thought is a body, and that the pure and simple body is the absence of thought”), he finds that the unique is “*therefore* the spook of spooks.” It is true that he adds, “For the critic who doesn’t just see in universal history fixed ideas replacing each other, but creative thoughts continually developing, for the critic, however, the unique is not a spook, but an act of creative self-consciousness, which had to arise in its time, in *our* time, and fulfill its determined task”; but this act is merely a “thought,” a “principle” and a book.

When Feuerbach deals with the unique, he limits himself to considering it as a “unique individual,” chosen from a class or species and “opposed as sacred and inviolable to other individuals.” In this choosing and opposing “the essence of religion remains. This man, this unique, this incomparable being, this Jesus Christ, is only and exclusively God. This oak, this place, this bull, this day is sacred, not the others.” He concludes: “Chase the unique in Heaven from your head, but also chase away the unique on earth.”

Hess strictly only alludes to the unique. He first identifies Stirner with the unique, and then says of the unique: “He is the headless, heartless trunk, i.e., he has the illusion of being so, because in reality he doesn’t just lack spirit, but body as well; he is nothing other than his illusions.” And finally he pronounces his judgment on Stirner, “the unique”: “He is boasting.”

From this, the unique appears as “the spook of all spooks,” as “the sacred individual, which one must chase from the head” and as the “pale boaster.”

Stirner names the unique and says at the same time that “names don’t name it.” He utters a name when he names the unique, and adds that the unique is only a name. So he thinks something other than what he says, just as, for example, when someone calls you Ludwig, he isn’t thinking of

a generic Ludwig, but of *you*, for whom he has no word.

What Stirner *says* is a word, a thought, a concept; what he *means* is neither a word, nor a thought, nor a concept. What he says is not the meaning, and what he means cannot be said.

One flattered oneself that one spoke about the “actual, individual” human being when one spoke of the human being; but was this possible so long as one wanted to express *this* human being through something *universal*, through an attribute? To designate *this* human being, shouldn't one, perhaps, have recourse not to an attribute, but rather to a designation, to a name to take refuge in, where the view, i.e., the *unspeakable*, is the main thing? Some are reassured by “real, complete individuality,” which is still not free of the relation to the species; others by the “spirit,” which is likewise a *determination*, not complete *indeterminacy*. This indeterminacy only seems to be achieved in the unique, because it is given as the *specific* unique being, because when it is grasped as a *concept*, i.e., as an expression, it appears as a completely empty and undetermined name, and thus refers to a content *outside of* or *beyond* the concept. If one *fixes* it as a concept—and the opponents do this—one must attempt to give it a *definition* and will thus inevitably come upon something different from what was *meant*. It would be distinguished from other *concepts* and considered, for example, as “the sole complete individual,” so that it becomes easy to show it as nonsense. But can you define yourself; are you a concept?

The “human being,” as a concept or an attribute, does not exhaust *you*, because it has a conceptual content of its own, because it says *what* is human and *what* a human being is, i.e., because it is capable of being defined so that *you* can remain completely out of play. Of course, *you as a human being* still have your part in the conceptual content of the human being, but you don't have it *as you*. The unique, howev-

er, has no content; it is indeterminacy in itself; only *through you* does it acquire content and determination. There is no conceptual development of the unique, one cannot build a philosophical system with it as a "principle," the way one can with being, with thought, with the I. Rather it puts an end to *all conceptual development*. Anyone who considers it a principle, thinks that he can treat it philosophically or theoretically and inevitably takes useless potshots against it. Being, thought, the I, are only *undetermined* concepts, which receive their determinateness only through other concepts, i.e., through conceptual development. The unique, on the other hand, is a concept *that lacks determination* and cannot be made determinate by other concepts or receive a "nearer content"; it is not the "principle of a series of concepts," but a word or concept that, as word or concept, is not capable of any development. The development of the unique is your self-development and my self-development, an *utterly unique* development, because *your* development is not at all *my* development. Only as a concept, i.e., only as "development," are they one and the same; on the contrary, your development is just as distinct and unique as mine.

Since *you* are the content of the unique, there is no more to think about a *specific* content of the unique, i.e., a conceptual content.

What you are cannot be said through the word unique, just as by christening you with the name Ludwig, one doesn't intend to say what you are.

With the unique, the rule of *absolute thought*, of thought with a conceptual content of its own, comes to an end, just as the concept and the conceptual world fades away when one uses the empty name: the name is the empty name to which only the view can give content.

But it is not true, as Stirner's opponents present it, that in the unique there is only the "lie of what has been called

the egoistic world up to now"; no, in its nakedness and its barrenness, in its shameless "candor," (see Szeliga, p. 34) the nakedness and barrenness of concepts and ideas come to light, the useless pomposity of its opponents is made clear. It becomes obvious that the biggest "*phrase*" is the one that seems to be the word most full of content. The unique is the frank, undeniable, clear—phrase; it is the keystone of our phrase-world, this world whose "beginning was the *word*."

The unique is an expression with which, in all frankness and honesty, one recognizes that he is expressing nothing. Human being, spirit, the true individual, personality, etc. are expressions or attributes that are full to overflowing with content, phrases with the greatest wealth of ideas; compared with these sacred and noble phrases, the unique is the empty, unassuming and completely common phrase.

The critics suspected something of the sort about the unique; they treated it as a phrase. But they considered the unique as if it claimed to be a sacred and noble phrase, and they disputed this claim. But it wasn't meant to be anything more than a common phrase, and therefore actual, which the inflated phrases of its opponents can never be, and therefore a desecration of phrase-making.

The unique is a word, and everyone is always supposed to be able to *think* something when he uses a word; a word is supposed to have thought content. But the unique is a *thoughtless* word; it has no thought content. So then what is its content, if it is not thought? It is content that cannot exist a second time and so also cannot be *expressed*, because if it could be expressed, actually and wholly expressed, it would exist for a second time; it would exist in the "expression."

Since the content of the unique is not thought content, the unique cannot be thought or said; but since it cannot be said, it, this perfect phrase, is *not even a phrase*.

Only when *nothing* is said about you and you are merely *named*, are you recognized as you. As soon as *something* is said about you, you are only recognized as that thing (human, spirit, Christian, etc.). But the unique doesn't say anything because it is merely a name: it says only that you are you and nothing but you, that you are a *unique* you, or rather your self. Therefore, you have no attribute, but with this you are at the same time without determination, vocation, laws, etc.

Speculation was directed toward finding an attribute so *universal* that *everyone* would be understood in it. However, such an attribute wasn't supposed to express in each instance what each one *should* be, but rather what he *is*. So if "human" is to be this attribute, one must understand by this not something that everyone has to become, since otherwise all who have not yet become this would be excluded from it, but something that everyone is. Now, "human" also actually expresses *what* everyone is. But this *What* is an expression for what is *universal* in everyone, for what everyone has in common with each other, so it isn't an expression for "everyone," it doesn't express *who* everyone is. Are you thoroughly defined when one says you are a human being? Has one expressed *who* you are completely? Does the attribute, "human," fulfill the task of the attribute, which is to express the subject *completely*, or doesn't it, on the contrary, completely take subjectivity away from the subject, and doesn't it say what the subject is rather than saying who he is?

Therefore, if the attribute is supposed to include *everyone* in itself, everyone should appear as subject, i.e., not only as *what* he is, but as *who* he is.

But how can you present yourself as who you are, if you don't present yourself? Are you a doppelganger or do you exist only once? You are nowhere except in yourself, you are not in the world a second time, you are unique. You can emerge only if you appear *in the flesh*.

“You are unique,” isn’t this a sentence? If in the sentence “you are human,” you don’t come in as the one *who* you are, do you actually come in as you in the sentence “you are unique”? The sentence “you are unique” means nothing but “you are you,” a sentence that logic calls nonsense, because it doesn’t make judgments on anything, it doesn’t say anything, because it is empty, a sentence that is not a sentence. (In the book on page 232, the absurd sentence is considered as “infinite” or indeterminate; here however, after the page, it is considered as an “identical” sentence.)

What the logician treats with contempt is undoubtedly illogical or merely “*formally*” logical; but it is also, considered *logically*, only a phrase; it is logic dying in a phrase.

The unique is only supposed to be the last, dying expression (attribute) of you and me, the expression that turns into a view: an expression that is no longer such, that falls silent, that is mute.

You—unique! What thought content is here, what sentence content? None! Whoever wants to deduce a precise thought-content of the unique as if it were a concept, whoever thinks that with “unique” one has said about you *what* you are, would show that they believe in phrases, because they don’t recognize phrases as phrases, and would also show that they seek *specific* content in phrases.

You, inconceivable and inexpressible, are the phrase content, the phrase owner, the phrase embodied; you are the who, the one of the phrase. In the unique, science can dissolve into life, in which your *this* becomes *who* and this who no longer seeks itself in the word, in the Logos, in the attribute.

Szeliga takes the pain to show that the unique “measured by its own principle of seeing spooks everywhere becomes

the spook of all spooks.” He senses that the unique is an empty phrase, but he overlooks the fact that he himself, Szeliga, is the content of the phrase.

The unique in Heaven, which Feuerbach places beside the unique on earth, is the phrase without a phrase-owner. The unique *considered here* is God. This is the thing that guaranteed that religion would last, that it had the unique at least *in thought* and as a phrase, that it saw it *in Heaven*. But the heavenly unique is only a unique in which no one has an interest, whereas Feuerbach instead, whether he likes it or not, is interested in Stirner's unique, because he would have to treat it oddly, if he wanted to chase *his own unique* from his head. If the heavenly unique were one that existed in its own head rather than in Feuerbach's, it would be difficult to chase this unique from its head.

Hess says of the unique: “he's boasting.” Undoubtedly, the unique, this obvious phrase, is an empty boast; it is Feuerbach's phrase without the phrase-owner. But isn't it a pathetic boast to call a long and broad thing a boast only because one can't find anything in it but the boast? Is Hess, this *unique* Hess, therefore nothing but a boast? Most certainly not!

The critics display even more irritation against the “egoist” than against the unique. Instead of delving into egoism as Stirner meant it, they stop at their usual childish depiction of it and roll out to everyone the well-known catalogue of sins. Look at egoism, the horrible sin that this Stirner wants to “recommend” to us.

Against the Christian definition: “God is love,” critics in old Jerusalem could rise up and cry: “So now you see that the Christians are announcing a pagan God; because if God is love, then he is the pagan god Amor, the god of love!” What need do the Jewish critics have to deal with love and the God who is love, when they have spit on the love-god, on

Amor for so long?

Szeliga characterizes the egoist like this: "The egoist hopes for a carefree, happy life. He marries a rich girl—and now he has a jealous, chatterbox wife—in other words his hope was realized and it was an illusion."

Feuerbach says: "There is a well-founded difference between what is called egoistic, self-interested love, and what is called unselfish love. What? In a few words this: in self-interested love, the object is your courtesan; in unselfish love, she is your beloved. I find satisfaction in both, but in the first I subordinate the essence to a part; in the second I instead subordinate the part, the means, the organ to the whole, to the essence. Thus, I satisfy myself, my full, entire essence. In short, in selfish love, I sacrifice the higher thing to the lower thing, a higher pleasure to a lower pleasure, but in unselfish love, I sacrifice the lower thing to the higher thing."

Hess asks: "First of all, what is egoism in general, and what is the difference between the egoistic life and the life of love?" This question already reveals his kinship with the other two. How can one assert such a contrast between egoistic life and the life of love against Stirner, since for him the two get along quite well? Hess continues: "Egoistic life is the life of the animal world, which tears itself down and devours itself. The animal world is precisely the natural history of life that tears itself down and destroys itself, and all our history up to now is nothing but the history of the *social* animal world. But what distinguishes the *social* animal world from the animal world of the *forest*? Nothing but its *consciousness*. The history of the social animal world is precisely the history of the consciousness of the animal world, and as the *predator* is the final point of the natural animal world, so the *conscious predator* is the highest point of the social animal world. As egoism is mutual *alienation* of the species, so the consciousness of this alienation (egoistic consciousness) is *religious* consciousness. The animal world of the forest has

no religion, simply because it lacks *consciousness* of its egoism, of its *alienation*, i.e., *consciousness of sin*. The earliest consciousness of humanity is consciousness of sin.—When egoistic theory, egoistic consciousness, religion and philosophy had reached their peak, egoistic practice also had to reach its peak. It has reached it in the modern, Christian, *shopkeeper's world*. This is the ultimate point of the social animal world.—The free competition of our modern shopkeeper's world is not only the perfect form of modern *murder with robbery*, but is at the same time the *consciousness* of the mutual, human alienation. Today's shopkeeper's world is the mediated form of conscious and basic egoism, corresponding to its essence.”

These are quite popular characterizations of egoism, and one is only surprised that Stirner didn't make such simple reflections and let himself abandon the hateful monster, considering how stupid, vulgar and predatorily murderous egoism is. If he had thought, like Szeliga, that the egoist is nothing but a numbskull who marries a rich girl and ends up with a bickering wife, if he would have seen, like Feuerbach, that the egoist can't have a “sweetheart,” or if he would have recognized, like Hess, the human-beast in egoism or would have sniffed out the predatory murderer there, how could he not have conceived a “profound horror” and a “legitimate indignation” towards it! Murder with robbery alone is already such infamy that it really is enough for Hess to cry out this single phrase against Stirner's egoist in order to raise all honest people against him and have them on Hess's side: the phrase is well chosen—and moving for a moral heart, like the cry of “heretic” for a mass of true believers.

Stirner dares to say that Feuerbach, Hess and Szeliga are egoists. Indeed, he is content here with saying nothing more than if he had said Feuerbach does absolutely nothing but the Feuerbachian, Hess does nothing but the Hessian, and Szeliga does nothing but the Szeligan; but he has given them an infamous label.

Does Feuerbach live in a world other than *his own*? Does he perhaps live in Hess's world, in Szeliga's world, in Stirner's world? Since Feuerbach lives in this world, since it surrounds him, isn't it the world that is felt, seen, thought by him, i.e., in a Feuerbachian way? He doesn't just live in the middle of it, but is himself its middle; he is the center of *his* world. And like Feuerbach, no one lives in any other world than his own, and like Feuerbach, everyone is the center of his own world. World is only what he himself is not, but what belongs to him, is in a relationship with him, exists for him.

Everything turns around you; you are the center of the outer world and of the thought world. Your world extends as far as your capacity, and what you grasp is your own simply because you grasp it. You, the unique, are "the unique" *only together with "your property."*

Meanwhile, it doesn't escape you that what is yours is still itself *its* own at the same time, i.e., it has its own existence; it is the unique the same as you. At this point you forget yourself in sweet self-forgetfulness.

But when you forget yourself, do you then disappear? When you don't think of yourself, have you utterly ceased to exist? When you look in your friend's eyes or reflect upon the joy you would like to bring him, when you gaze up at the stars, meditate upon their laws or perhaps send them a greeting, which they bring to a lonely little room, when you lose yourself in the activity of the infusion of tiny animals under a microscope, when you rush to help someone in danger of burning or drowning without considering the danger you yourself are risking, then indeed you don't "think" of yourself, you "forget yourself." But do you *exist* only when you *think* of yourself, and do you dissipate when you forget yourself? Do you exist only through self-consciousness? Who doesn't forget himself constantly, who doesn't lose

sight of himself thousands of times in an hour?

This self-forgetfulness, *this* losing of oneself, is for us only a mode of self-enjoyment, it is only the pleasure we take in our world, in our property, i.e. world-pleasure.

It is not in this self-forgetfulness, but in forgetting that the world is *our* world, that unselfishness, i.e., duped egoism, has its basis. You throw yourself down before a “higher,” absolute world and waste yourself. Unselfishness is not self-forgetfulness in the sense of no longer thinking of oneself and no longer being concerned with oneself, but in the other sense of forgetting that the world is “ours,” of forgetting that one is the center or *owner* of this world, that it is our property. Fear and timidity toward the world as a “higher” world is cowardly, “humble” egoism, egoism in its slavish form, which doesn’t dare to grumble, which secretly creeps about and “denies itself”; it is self-denial.

Our world and the sacred world—herein lies the difference between straightforward egoism and the self-denying egoism that cannot be confessed and crawls about incognito.

What happens with Feuerbach’s example of the courtesan and the beloved? In the first case, one has a commercial relationship without personal interest (and doesn’t it happen in countless other, completely different cases of commercial relationships that one can only be satisfied if one has an interest in the *person* with whom one deals, if one has a personal interest?), in the second case one has a personal interest. But what is the meaning of the second relationship? Most likely mutual interest with the person. If this interest between the people disappears from the relationship, it would become *meaningless*, because this interest is its only meaning. So what is marriage, which is praised as a “sacred relationship,” if not the fixation of an interesting relationship despite the danger that it could become dull and meaning-

less? People say that one shouldn't get divorced "frivolously." But why not? Because frivolity is a "sin" if it concerns a "sacred thing." There must be no frivolity! So then there is an egoist, who is cheated out of his frivolity and condemns himself to go on living in an uninteresting but sacred relationship. From the egoistic association, a "sacred bond" has developed; the mutual interest the people had for each other ceases, but the bond without interest remains.

Another example of the uninteresting is work, which passes for one's lifework, for the human calling. This is the origin of the prejudice that one has to *earn* his bread, and that it is shameful to have bread without having worked a bit to get it: this is the *pride of the wage*. Work has no merit *in itself* and does no honor to anyone, just as the life of the idler brings him no disgrace. Either you take an interest in work activity, and this interest doesn't let you rest, you have to be active: and then work is your desire, your special pleasure without placing it above the laziness of the idler which is his pleasure. Or you use work to pursue another interest, a result or a "wage," and you submit to work only as a *means* to this end; and then work is not interesting in itself and has no pretension of being so, and you can recognize that it is not anything valuable or sacred in itself, but simply something that is now *unavoidable* for gaining the desired result, the *wage*. But the work that is considered as an "honor for the human being" and as his "calling" has become the creator of economics and remains the mistress of *sacred* socialism, where, in its quality as "human labor," it is supposed to "develop human capacities," and where this development is a human calling, an absolute interest. (We will have more to say about this further on).

The belief that something other than self-interest might justify applying oneself to a given thing, the belief that leaves self-interest behind, generates a lack of interest, "sin" understood as a tendencies towards one's own interest.

Only in the face of *sacred interest* does *one's own* interest become "private interest," abominable "egoism," "sin"—Stirner points out the difference between sacred interest and one's own interest briefly on page 224: "I can *sin* against the former, the latter I can only *throw away*."

Sacred interest is the uninteresting, because it is an *absolute* interest, or an interest for its own sake, and it's all the same whether you take an interest in it or not. You *are supposed* to make it your interest; it is not originally *yours*, it doesn't spring from you, but is an eternal, universal, purely human interest. It is uninteresting, because there is no consideration in it for you or your interest; it is an interest without interested parties, because it is a universal or human interest. And because you are not its owner, but are supposed to become its follower and servant, egoism comes to an end before it, and "lack of interest" begins.

If you take just *one* sacred interest to heart, you'll be caught and duped about *your own* interests. Call the interest that you follow now sacred, and tomorrow you will be its slave.

All behavior toward anything considered absolutely interesting, or valuable in and for itself, is religious behavior or, more simply, religion. The interesting can only be interesting through *your* interest, the valuable can only have value insofar as you give it value, whereas, on the other hand, what is interesting despite you is an uninteresting thing, what is valuable despite you is a valueless thing.

The interest of those spirits, like that of society, of the human being, of the human essence, of the people as a whole, their "essential interest," is an *alien* interest and *should* be your interest. The interest of the beloved *is* your interest and is of interest to you only so long as it remains *your* interest. Only when it stops being an interest of yours can it become a sacred interest, which *should* be yours although it is not

yours. The relationship that was interesting up to that point now becomes a disinterested and uninteresting relationship.

In commercial and personal relationships, *your interest* comes first, and all sacrifices happen only to benefit this interest of yours, while on the contrary, in the religious relationship, the religious interest of the absolute or of the spirit, i.e., the interest *alien* to you, comes first, and you should sacrifice *your* interests to this alien interest.

Therefore, duped egoism consists in the belief in an *absolute interest*, which does not spring from the egoist, i.e., is not interesting to him, but rather arises imperiously and firmly against him, an "eternal" interest. Here the egoist is "duped," because his own interest, "private interest," is not only left unconsidered, but is even condemned, and yet "egoism" remains, because he welcomes this alien or absolute interest only in the hope that it will grant him some pleasure.

This absolute interest, which is supposed to be interesting without interested persons, and which is also therefore not the unique's thing, but for which instead human beings are supposed to view themselves as "vessels of honor" and as "weapons and tools," Stirner calls simply "the sacred." Indeed, the sacred is absolutely uninteresting, because it has the pretension of being interesting even though no one is interested in it; it is also the "universal," i.e., the thing of interest that lacks a subject, because it is not one's own interest, the interest of a unique. In other words, this "universal interest" is more than you—a "higher" thing; it is also without you—an "absolute"; it is an interest for itself—alien to you; it demands that you serve it and finds you willing, if you let yourself be beguiled.

To stay with Feuerbach's touching definition of the courtesan, there are those who would gladly be lewd, because physical desire never gives them rest. But they are told, do you know what lewdness is? It is a sin, a vulgarity; it de-

files us. If they were to say we don't want lewd interests to cause us to neglect other interests that are even more important to us than the enjoyment of the senses, this would not be a religious consideration, and they would make their sacrifice not to chastity, but to other benefits of which they cannot deprive themselves. But if instead they deny their natural impulse for the sake of chastity, this occurs due to religious considerations. What interest do they have in chastity? Unquestionably, no natural interest, because their nature advises them to be lewd: their actual, unmistakable and undeniable interest is lewdness. But chastity is a *scruple* of their spirit, because it is an interest of the spirit, a spiritual interest: it is an absolute interest before which natural and "private" interests must remain silent, and which makes the spirit *scrupulous*. Now some throw off this scruple with a "jerk" and the cry: "How stupid!" because, however *scrupulous* or religious they may be, here an instinct tells them that the spirit is a grouchy despot opposed to natural desire—whereas others overcome this scruple by thinking more deeply and even reassure themselves theoretically: the former overcome the scruples; the latter—thanks to their *virtuosity* of thinking (which makes thinking a need and a thing of interest for them)—dissolve the scruple. Thus, lewdness and the courtesan only look so bad because they offend the "eternal interest" of chastity.¹

The spirit alone has raised difficulties and created scruples; and from this it seems to follow that they could only be eliminated by means of the spirit or thought. How bad it would be for those poor souls who have let themselves be talked into accepting these scruples without possessing the strength of thought necessary to become the masters of the

1. Throughout this passage and the following several paragraphs, Stirner is playing on the words "Bedenken" (scruples) and "Denken" (thinking or thought), a bit of wordplay lost in translation. It also helps to know that "Bedenken" can also translate as "reflection" or "doubt," and in some places, Stirner seems to play on all these meanings as well. (All notes in "Stirner's Critics" and "The Philosophical Reactionaries" are the translator's.)

same! How horrible if, in this instance they would have to wait until pure critique gave them their freedom! But sometimes these people help themselves with a healthy, home-made *levity*, which is just as good *for their needs* as *free thought* is for pure critique, since the critic, as a “virtuoso” of thought, possesses an undeniable impulse to overcome scruples through thought.

Scruples are as much an everyday occurrence as talking and chatting; so what could one say against them? Nothing; only everyday scruples are not sacred scruples. Everyday scruples come and go, but sacred scruples last and are *absolute*; they are scruples in the absolute sense (dogmas, articles of faith, basic principles). Against them, the egoist, the desecrator, rebels and tests his egoistic force against their sacred force. All “free thought” is a desecration of scruples and an egoistic effort against their sacred force. If, after a few attacks, much free thought has come to a stop, after a few attacks, before a new sacred scruple, which would disgrace egoism, nonetheless free thought in its freest form (pure critique) will not stop before any absolute scruple, and with egoistic perseverance desecrates one scrupulous sanctity after another. But since this freest thought is only egoistic *thought*, only mental freedom, it becomes a sacred power of thought and announces the Gospel that only in thought can one find redemption. Now even thought itself appears only as a sacred thing, as a human calling, as a sacred scruple: hereafter, only a scruple (a realization) dissolves scruples.

If scruples could only be dissolved through thought, people would never be “mature” enough to dissolve them.

Scrupulousness, even if it has achieved the pure scruple or purity of critique, is still only *religiosity*; the religious is the scrupulous. But it remains scrupulousness, when one thinks one is only able to put an end to scruples through scruples, when one despises a “convenient” *lack of scruples* as the “egoistic aversion to work of the mass.”

In scrupulous egoism, all that is missing for putting the emphasis on egoism rather than scrupulousness and seeing egoism as the victor is the recognition of the lack of scruples. So it doesn't matter whether it wins through thought or through a lack of scruples.

Is thought perhaps "rejected" through this? No, only its sanctity is denied, it is rejected as a *purpose* and a calling. As a *means* it is left to everyone who gains might through this *means*. The aim of thought is rather the *loss of scruples*, because the thinker in every instance starts out, with his thought on this, to finally find the right point or to get beyond thought and put an end to this matter. But if one sanctifies the "labor of thought," or, what is the same, calls it "human," one no less gives a calling to human beings than if one prescribed faith to them, and this leads them away from the lack of scruples, rather than leading them to it as the real or egoistic meaning of thought. One misleads people into scrupulousness and deliberation, as one promises them "well-being" in thought; weak thinkers who let themselves be misled can do nothing more than comfort themselves with some thought due to their weak thinking, i.e., they can only become believers. Instead of making light of scruples, they become scrupulous, because they imagine that their well-being lies in thought. (Footnote: The religious turmoil of our times has its reason in this: it is a immediate expression of this scrupulousness).

But scruples, which thought created, now exist and can certainly be eliminated through thought. But this thought, this critique, achieves this aim only when it is egoistic thought, egoistic critique, i.e., when egoism or self-interest is asserted against scruples or against the uninteresting, when self-interest is openly professed, and the egoist criticizes from the *egoistic viewpoint*, rather than from the Christian, socialist, humanist, human, free thought, spiritual, etc., viewpoint (i.e., like a Christian, a socialist, etc.), because the self-interest of the unique, thus your self-interest, gets trampled

underfoot precisely in the sacred, or human, world, and this same world, which Hess and Szeliga for example, reproach as being egoist, on the contrary has bound the egoist to the whipping post for thousands of years and fanatically sacrificed egoism to every "sacred" thing that has rained down from the realm of thought and faith. We don't live in an egoistic world, but in a world that is completely sacred down to its lowest scrap of property.

It might seem that it must, indeed, be left to every individual to rid himself of scruples as he knows how, but that it is still the *task of history* to dissolve scruples through critical reflection. But this is just what Stirner denies. Against this "task of history," he maintains that the history of scruples and the reflections that relate to them is coming to an end. Not the task of dissolving, but the capriciousness that makes short work of scruples, not the force of thought, but the force of a lack of scruples seems to come into play. Thinking can serve only to reinforce and ensure the lack of scruples. "Free thought" had its starting point in *unscrupulous* egoistic revolt against sacred scruples; it started from the *lack of scruples*. Anyone who thinks freely makes no scruples over the most sacred of scruples: the lack of scruples is the spirit and the egoistic worth of free thought. The worth of this thought lies not in the thinker, but in the egoist, who egoistically places *his own* power, the force of thought, above sacred scruples, and this doesn't weaken you and me at all.

To describe this lack of scruples, Stirner uses (p. 197) expressions like "jerk, leap, jubilant whoop," and says "the vast significance of unthinking jubilation could not be recognized in the long night of thinking and believing." He meant nothing less by this than, first of all, the hidden, *egoistic basis* of each and every critique of a sacred thing, even the blindest and most obsessed, but in the second place, the *easy form* of *egoistic* critique, which he tried to carry out by means of *his force of thought* (a naked virtuosity). He strove to show how a person without scruples could use thought as a critique

of scruples from his own viewpoint, as the unique. Stirner didn't leave the "deliverance of the world" in the hands of thinkers and the scrupulous anymore.

Jubilation and rejoicing becomes a bit ridiculous when one contrasts them with the mass and volume of deep scruples that still cannot be overcome with so little effort. Of course, the mass of scruples accumulated in history and continually reawakened by thinkers cannot be eliminated with mere rejoicing. Thinkers cannot get past it if their thinking does not receive full satisfaction at the same time, since the satisfaction of their thinking is their *actual interest*. Thought must not be suppressed by jubilation, in the way that, from the point of view of faith, it is supposed to be suppressed by faith. Anyway, as an actual interest and, therefore, your interest, you can't let it be suppressed. Since you have the need to think, you cannot limit yourself to driving scruples out through jubilation; you also need to think them away. But it is from this need that Stirner's *egoistic thought* has arisen, and he made a first effort, even if still very clumsy, to relate the interests of thought to unscrupulous egoism, and his book was supposed to show that uncouth jubilation still has the potential, if necessary, to become critical jubilation, an egoistic critique.

Self-interest forms the basis of egoism. But isn't self-interest in the same way a mere name, a concept empty of content, utterly lacking any conceptual development, like the unique? The opponents look at self-interest and egoism as a "principle." This would require them to understand self-interest as an *absolute*. Thought can be a principle, but then it must develop as absolute thought, as eternal reason; the I, if it is to be a principle, must, as the absolute I, form the basis of a system built upon it. So one could even make an absolute of self-interest and derive from it as "human interest" a philosophy of self-interest; yes, morality is actually the system of *human interest*.

Reason is one and the same: what is reasonable remains reasonable despite all folly and errors; "private reason" has no right against universal and eternal reason. You should and must submit to reason. Thought is one and the same: what is actually thought is a logical truth and despite the opposing manias of millions of human beings is still the unchanging truth; "private" thought, *one's view*, must remain silent before eternal thought. *You* should and must submit to truth. Every human being is reasonable, every human being is human only due to thought (the philosopher says: thought distinguishes the human being from the beast). Thus, *self-interest* is also a *universal* thing, and every human being is a "self-interested human being." Eternal interest as "human interest" kicks out against "private interest," develops as the "principle" of morality and sacred socialism, among other things, and subjugates *your* interest to the law of eternal interest. It appears in multiple forms, for example, as state interest, church interest, human interest, the interest "of all," in short, as *true interest*.

Now, does Stirner have his "principle in this interest, in *the* interest? Or, contrarily, doesn't he arouse *your unique* interest against the "eternally interesting" against—the uninteresting? And is *your* self-interest a "principle," a logical—thought? Like the unique, it is a phrase—*in the realm of thought*; but in you it is unique like you yourself.

It is necessary to say a further word about the human being. As it seems, Stirner's book is written against *the human being*. He has drawn the harshest judgments for this, as for the word "egoist," and has aroused the most stubborn prejudices. Yes, the book actually is written against *the human being*, and yet Stirner could have gone after the same target without offending people so severely if he had reversed the subject and said that he wrote against *the inhuman monster*. But then he would have been at fault if someone misunderstood him in the opposite, i.e., the emotional way, and placed him on the list of those who raise their voice for the "true

human being.” But Stirner says: the human being is the inhuman monster; what the one is, the other is; what is said against the one, is said against the other.

If a concept lacks an essence, nothing will ever be found that completely fits that concept. If you are lacking in the concept of human being, it will immediately expose that you are something individual, something that cannot be expressed by the term human being, thus, in every instance, an *individual human being*. If someone now expects you to be completely human and nothing but human, nonetheless you wouldn't be able to strip yourself of your individuality, and precisely because of this individuality, you would be an inhuman monster, i.e. a human being who is not truly human, or a human being who is *actually* an inhuman monster. The concept of human being would have its reality only in the inhuman monster.

The fact that every actual human being, measured by the concept of human being, is an inhuman monster, was expressed by religion with the claim that all human beings “are sinners” (the consciousness of sin); today the sinner is called an egoist. And what has one decided in consequence of this judgment? To redeem the sinner, to overcome egoism, to find and realize the true human being. One rejected the individual, i.e., the *unique*, in favor of the concept; one rejected the inhuman monster in favor of the human being, and didn't recognize that the inhuman monster is the true and only possible reality of the human being. One absolutely wanted a truly human reality of human beings.

But one aspired to an absurdity. The human being is real and actual in the inhuman monster; every inhuman monster is—a human being. But you are an inhuman monster only as the reality of the human being, an inhuman monster only in comparison to the *concept of human being*.

You are an inhuman monster, and this is why you are

completely human, a real and actual human being, a complete human being. But you are even *more* than a complete human being, you are an individual, a *unique* human being. Human being and inhuman monster, these contrasts from the religious world lose their divine and diabolical, and thus their sacred and absolute, meaning, in you, the *unique*.

The human being, which our saints agonize so much to recognize, insofar as they always preach that one should recognize the *human being* in the human being, gets recognized completely and actually only when it is recognized as the inhuman monster. If it is recognized as such, all religious or "human" *impositions* cease, and the domination of the *good*, the hierarchy, comes to an end, because the unique, the altogether *common human being* (not Feuerbach's virtuous "common man"²), is at the same time the complete human being.

While Stirner writes against the human being, at the same time and in the same breath, he writes against the inhuman monster, as opposed to the human being; but he doesn't write against the human being who is an inhuman monster or the inhuman monster who is a human being—i.e., he writes for the utterly common unique, who is a complete human being for himself anyhow, because he is an inhuman monster.

Only pious people, sacred socialists, etc., only "saints" of every kind prevent the human being from being recognized and appreciated in the human being. They alone paralyze pure human intercourse, as they have always limited common egoistic intercourse and strive to limit it. They have introduced a *sacred* intercourse, and where possible they would like to make it the *Holy of Holies*.

2. This is the single instance where I have chosen to translate "Mensch" as man, in order to emphasize the distinction Stirner is making. He is emphasizing that what is actually "common" to every human being is that he or she is *unique*, as opposed to Feuerbach's idealized concept of the "common man."

Actually, Szeliga also says various things about what the egoist and egoism are, but he has exhausted the topic with his example of the rich girl and the nagging wife. He depicts the egoist as having a horror of work, as a man who “hopes that roasted pigeons will fly into his mouth,” who “*preserves* nothing worthy of the name of hope,” etc. By this he means a man who wants to live comfortably. If instead he’d defined the egoist as a sleepyhead, it would have been even clearer and simpler.

Just as Szeliga betrays that his egoist can only be measured by an absolute, insofar as he measures him by “real hopes,” Feuerbach, who is generally more the master of the appropriate word, repeats the same thing in an even more determined way, saying of the selfish person (the egoist) that “he sacrifices what is higher to what is lower”; and of the unselfish person that he “sacrifices the lower thing to the higher thing.” What is “higher and lower”? Isn’t it something which is directed toward you and of which you are the measure? If something was worthwhile for you, and precisely for you in this moment—because you are you only *in the moment*, only *in the moment* are you actual; as a “universal you,” you would instead be “another” in each moment—if it counted for you at this moment as somewhat “higher” than something else, you would not sacrifice it to the latter. Rather, in each moment, you sacrifice only what in that precise moment seems “lower” or less important to you. Thus, if Feuerbach’s “higher thing” is supposed to have a meaning, it has to be a higher thing separate and free from you, from the moment; it has to be an absolute higher thing. An *absolute* higher thing is such that you are not asked if it is the higher thing for you; rather it is the higher thing *despite you*. Only in this way can one speak of a higher thing and a “more elevated enjoyment” that “is sacrificed.” In Feuerbach, such a “higher thing” is the enjoyment of the beloved in contrast to the enjoyment of the courtesan, or the lover in contrast to the courtesan; the first is higher, the second lower. If for you perhaps the courtesan

is the higher pleasure, because for you in the moment, she is the only pleasure you desire, what does this matter to great noble hearts like Feuerbach, who take pleasure only in the "beloved" and decree, with the measure of their pure hearts, the beloved must be the higher thing! Only the one who is attached to a beloved, and not a courtesan, "satisfies his full, complete essence." And in what does this full, complete essence consist? Certainly not in your essence of the moment, in what you are right now in essence, nor even in the essence that *you* are generally, but rather in the "human essence." For the human essence the beloved is the highest.—So who is the egoist in Feuerbach's sense? The one who *sins* against "the higher thing" against the absolute higher thing (i.e., higher in spite of your opposing interest), against the uninteresting; thus, the egoist is—the *sinner*. The same would be true of Szeliga's egoist, if he had more power over his expressions.

Hess is the one who says most unequivocally that the egoist is the sinner. Of course, in saying this, Hess also confesses in a complete and undisguised way that he has not, even distantly, understood what Stirner's book is getting at. Doesn't Stirner deny that the egoist is the sinner and that conscious egoism (conscious is the sense that Hess intends it) is the consciousness of sin? If a European kills a crocodile, he acts as an egoist against crocodiles, but he has no scruples about doing this, and he is not accused of "sin" for it. If instead an ancient Egyptian, who considered the crocodile to be *sacred*, had nonetheless killed one in self-defense, he would have, indeed, defended his skin as an egoist, but at the same time, he would have committed a sin; his egoism would have been sin,—he, the egoist, a sinner.—From this, it should be obvious that the egoist is necessarily a *sinner* before what is "sacred," before what is "higher"; if he asserts his egoism against the sacred, this is, as such, a sin. On the other hand, though, that is only a sin insofar as it is measured by the criterion of the "sacred," and the only egoist who drags the "consciousness of sin" along with him is the one who is possessed at the same time by the consciousness

of the sacred. A European who kills a crocodile is aware of his egoism in doing this, i.e., he acts as a conscious egoist; but he doesn't imagine that his egoism is a sin and he laughs at the Egyptian's consciousness of sin.

Against the "sacred," the egoist is always a sinner; toward the "sacred," he can't become anything other than—a *criminal*. The *sacred* crocodile marks the human *egoist* as the human *sinner*. The egoist can cast off the sinner and the sin from himself only if he desecrates the sacred, just as the European beats the crocodile to death without sin because His Holiness, the Crocodile, is for him a crocodile without holiness.

Hess says: "Today's mercantile world is the conscious and basic mediated form of egoism, corresponding to its essence." This present world, which is full of philanthropy, completely agrees with socialism *in principle* (see, for example, in the *Gesellschaftsspiegel* [Society Mirror] or the *Westphälischen Dampfboot* [Westphalian Steamboat]³, how socialist principles are completely the same as the "Sunday thoughts" and ideals of all good citizens or bourgeois)—this world in which the great majority can be brought to give up their advantages in the name of sacred things and where the ideals of brotherhood, philanthropy, right, justice, the ideals of being and doing for others, etc., don't just pass from one person to another, but are a horrible and ruinous seriousness—this world that yearns for true humanity and hopes to finally find true redemption through socialists, communists, philanthropists of every sort—this world in which socialist endeavors are nothing but the obvious sense of the "shop-keeper's soul" and are well-received by all right-thinking people—this world whose principle is the "welfare of all people" and the "welfare of humanity," and that only dreams of this welfare because it doesn't yet know how it is supposed to produce this welfare and does not yet trust in the so-

3. Two socialist/left democratic publications of the time. Moses Hess published the first of these.

cialist actualization of its pet idea—this world that lashes out violently against all egoism, Hess vilifies as an “egoistic” world. And yet, he is right. Because the world is agitating against the devil, the devil sits on its neck. Only Hess should have counted *sacred* socialism along with this egoistic, sin-conscious world.

Hess calls free competition the complete form of murder with robbery and also the complete consciousness of the mutual human alienation (i.e., egoism). Here again, egoism is still supposed to be guilty. Why then did one decide on competition? Because it seemed *useful* to each and all. And why do socialists now want to abolish it? Because it doesn't provide the hoped-for *usefulness*, because the majority do badly from it, because everyone wants to improve his position and because the abolition of competition seems advisable for *this purpose*.

Is egoism the “basic principle” of competition, or, on the contrary, haven't egoists just *miscalculated* about this? Don't they have to give it up precisely because it doesn't satisfy their egoism?

People introduced competition because they saw it as *well-being for all*; they *agreed* upon it and experimented *collectively* with it. This thing, this isolation and separation, is itself a product of association, agreement, shared convictions, and it didn't just isolate people, but also connected them. It was a *legal* status, but this law was a common tie, a social federation. In competition, people come to *agreement* perhaps in the way that hunters on a hunt may find it good for the hunt and for each of their respective purposes to scatter throughout the forest and hunt “in isolation.” But what is most *useful* is open to argument. And now, sure enough, it turns out—and, by the way, socialists weren't the first ones to discover it—that in competition, not everyone finds *his profit*, his desired “private advantage,” his value, his actual interest. But this comes out only through egoistic or selfish

calculations.

But meanwhile, some have prepared their own depiction of egoism and think of it as simply "isolation." But what in the world does egoism have to do with isolation? Do I become an egoist like this, by fleeing from people? I may isolate myself or get lonely, but I'm not, for this reason, a hair more egoistic than others who remain among people and enjoy contact with them. If I isolate myself, this is because I no longer find pleasure in society, but if instead I remain among people, it is because they still offer me a lot. Remaining is no less egoistic than isolating oneself.

Of course, in competition everyone stands alone; but if competition disappeared because people see that cooperation is *more useful* than isolation, wouldn't everyone still be an egoist in association and seek *his own* advantage? Someone will object that one seeks it at the expense of others. But one won't seek it at the expense of others, because others no longer want to be such fools as to let anyone live at their expense.

But "the egoist is someone who thinks only of himself!"—This would be someone who doesn't know and relish all the joys that come from participation with others, i.e., from thinking of others as well, someone who lacks countless pleasures—thus a *poor sort*. But why should this desolate loner be an egoist in comparison to richer sorts? Certainly, for a long time, we were able to get used to considering poverty a disgrace, as a crime, and the sacred socialists have clearly proven that the poor are treated like criminals. But sacred socialists treat those who are in *their* eyes contemptibly poor in this way, just as much as the bourgeoisie do it to *their* poor.

But why should the person who is poorer with respect to a certain interest be called more egoistic than the one who possesses that interest? Is the oyster more egoistic than the

dog; is the Moor more egoistic than the German; is the poor, scorned, Jewish junkman more egoistic than the enthusiastic socialist; is the vandal who destroys artworks for which he *feels* nothing more egoistic than the art connoisseur who treats the same works with great love and care because he has a feeling and interest for them? And now if someone—we leave it open whether such a one can be shown to exist—doesn't find any "human" interest in human beings, if he doesn't know how to appreciate them as human beings, wouldn't he be a poorer egoist with regard to this interest rather than being, as the enemies of egoism claim, a model of egoism? One who loves a human being is richer, thanks to this love, than another who doesn't love anyone. But there is no distinction between egoism and non-egoism in this at all, because both are only pursuing their own interest.

But everyone should have an interest in human beings, love for human beings!

But see how far you get with this "should," with this *law of love*. For two millennia this commandment has led people by the heart, and still today, socialists complain that our proletarians get treated with less love than the slaves of the ancients, and yet these same socialists still raise their voices quite loudly in favor of this – law of love.

If you want people to take an interest in you, draw it out of them and don't remain uninteresting sacred beings holding out your sacred humanity like a sacred robe and crying like beggars: "Respect our humanity, that is sacred!"

Egoism, as Stirner uses it, is not opposed to love nor to thought; it is no enemy of the sweet life of love, nor of devotion and sacrifice; it is no enemy of intimate warmth, but it is also no enemy of critique, nor of socialism, nor, in short, of any *actual interest*. It doesn't exclude any interest. It is directed against only disinterestedness and the uninteresting; not against love, but against sacred love, not against thought,

but against sacred thought, not against socialists, but against sacred socialists, etc.

The “exclusiveness” of the egoist, which some want to pass off as isolation, separation, loneliness, is on the contrary full *participation* in the interesting by—exclusion of the uninteresting.

No one gives Stirner credit for his global intercourse and his association of egoists from the largest section of his book, “My Intercourse.”

* * * * *

With regard to the three opponents specifically mentioned it would be a tedious task to go through all the twisted passages of their writings. In the same way, I have little intention at this time of more closely examining the principles that they represent or would like to represent, specifically Feuerbach’s philosophy, pure critique and socialism. Each of these deserves a treatise of its own, for which another occasion may well be found. Therefore, we add only a few considerations.

SZELIGA

Szeliga starts this way: “Pure critique has shown, etc.,” as if Stirner hadn’t spoken about this subject (e.g., on page 469 of *The Unique*). In the first two pages, Szeliga presents himself as the “critic whom critique leads to sit down as one with the object being observed, to recognize it as mind born of mind, enter into the innermost depths of the essence he is to fight, etc.” Szeliga hasn’t in the least entered into the innermost depths of Stirner’s book, as we’ve shown, and so we would like to consider him here not as the pure critic, but simply as one of the mass who wrote a review of the book. We’ll look to see if Szeliga does what he would have critique do, without noting whether critique would do the same thing,

and so instead of saying, for example, this “critique will follow the life course of the unique,” we will say: “Szeliga will follow, etc.”

When Szeliga expresses one of his thoughts in a completely conceptual way with the word “ape,” one could say that pure critique expresses a similar thought with a different word; but words aren’t indifferent for either Szeliga or critique, and one would be doing wrong to critique if one tried to impose Szeliga’s “ape” upon its thought which might be differently nuanced: the ape is the true expression of thought only for Szeliga.

From page 24 to page 32, Szeliga expressly takes up the cause of pure critique. But wouldn’t pure critique perhaps find this poetic manner of taking up its cause quite awkward?

We don’t welcome his invocation of the Critical Muse, which is supposed to have inspired or “given rise to” him, and pass over everything that he says in praise of his muse, even “the new action of self-perfecting for which the unique (i.e., Stirner, whom Szeliga, Feuerbach and Hess call the “unique”) gives him the opportunity.”

One can see how Szeliga is able to keep up with the life course of the unique if one compares, for example, the first paragraph on page 6 of his writing with pages 468-478 of *The Unique* [in “My Self-Enjoyment”]. Szeliga opposes the courage of thinking to Stirner’s “thoughtlessness”⁴ as if to a kind of cowardice. But why doesn’t he “enter into the innermost depths of the essence he is to fight”; why doesn’t he examine whether this thoughtlessness doesn’t get along quite well with the courage of thinking? He should have precisely “sat down as one with the object being observed.” But

4. Or “mindlessness,” giving further evidence of Stirner’s familiarity with eastern philosophy. However, in context, “thoughtlessness” works better.

who could ever enjoy sitting down as one with an object as despicable as thoughtlessness. The mere need to name it makes one want to spit it out.

Stirner says of pure critique: "From the standpoint of thought, there is no force at all that can be higher than your own, and it is a pleasure to see how easily and playfully this dragon devours every other worm of thought⁵." Since Szeliga presents the thing as if Stirner were also acting as a critic, he thinks that "the unique (like an ape) entices the Dragon—critique—and spurs it to devour the worms of thought, starting with those of freedom and unselfishness." But what critique does Stirner apply? Most likely not pure critique, because this, according to Szeliga's own words, only fights against "particular" freedom in the name of "true" freedom, in order to "educate ourselves to the idea of true, human freedom in general." What does Stirner's *egoistic*, and so not at all "pure," critique have to do with the "idea of unselfish, true, human freedom," with the freedom "which is not a fixed Idea, because (a very pointed reason) it is not fixed in the state or in society or in a creed or in any other particularity, but is recognized in every human being, in all self-consciousness, and leaves to everyone the measure his freedom, but at the same time measures him according to its measure?" (The idea of freedom, which recognizes *itself* and measures every human being according to the mass, in which he is included. Just as God recognizes *himself* and measures human beings according to the mass, giving each their measure of freedom as he divides them into the unrepentant and the elect.)

On the other hand, "the unique has let loose the dragon, critique, against another worm of thought, right and law." But again, this is not pure critique, but self-interested critique. If Stirner practiced pure critique, then he would have

5. "Worm" here is being used in its archaic sense of a specific type of dragon... In the original Stirner uses "Drachen" and "Würm." I have used the corresponding terms in my translation.

to, as Szeliga expresses it, "demand the renunciation of privilege, of right based on violence, the renunciation of egoism"; thus, he would have to lead "true, human" right in the struggle against that "based on violence," and admonish people that they should adhere to the true right. Stirner never uses pure critique, never goads this dragon to do anything, has no need of it and never achieves his results by means of the "progressive purity of critique." Otherwise, he would also have to imagine like Szeliga, for example, that "love must be a new creation which critique tries to lead to the heights." Stirner doesn't have such Szeligian magnificence, as "true freedom, the suppression of egoism, the new creation of love," in mind at all.

As we said, we'll pass over the passages in which Szeliga really campaigns against Stirner for the cause of critique, as one would have to attack nearly every sentence. "Work avoidance, laziness, idle essence, corruption" play a particularly lovely role in these passages; but then he also speaks of the "science of human beings" which the human being must create from the concept of "human being," and on page 32 he says: "The human being to discover is no longer a category, and therefore not something particular outside of the human being." If Szeliga had understood that since the unique is a completely empty term or category, it is therefore no longer a category, he might have acknowledged it as "the name of that which for him is still nameless." But I fear he doesn't know what he's saying when he says: "no longer a category."

Finally, "the new act of self-perfection, in which the unique gave opportunity to pure critique," consists in this, that "the world, which the unique completes, has in him and through him given its fullest denial," and that "critique can only bid farewell to it, to this old exhausted, shattered, corrupted world." Such a courteous *self*-perfection!

Feuerbach

Whether Stirner read and understood Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* could only be demonstrated by a specific critique of that book, which shall not be set forth here. Therefore, we'll limit ourselves to a few points.

Feuerbach believes that he is speaking in Stirner's sense when he says: "This is precisely a sign of Feuerbach's religiosity, of his restriction, that he is still infatuated with an *object*, that he still wants *something*, still loves something—a sign that he has still not risen to the absolute idealism of egoism." But has Feuerbach even looked at the following passages from *The Unique*? The meaning of the law of love "will be something like this: Every man must have a something that is more to him than himself." (p. 381). This something of *sacred* love is the *spook*. "whoever is full of sacred (religious, moral, humane) love loves only the spook, etc." (p. 383). A bit later, on pages 383-395, for example: "Love is a case of being possessed not as my feeling ... but through the alienness of the object, ... the *absolutely lovable object*, etc." "My love is my own only when it consists altogether in a selfish and egoistic interest, and so the object of my love is actually my object or my property." "I ... stick with the old sound and love my object," thence *my* "something."

Where Stirner says: "I have based my cause on nothing," Feuerbach makes it "*the Nothing*," and so concludes from this that the egoist is a pious atheist. However, the Nothing is a definition of God. Here Feuerbach plays with a word with which Szeliga (on page 33 of the "*Nordeutsche Blätter*") struggles in a Feuerbachian way. Furthermore, Feuerbach says on page 31 of *The Essence of Christianity*: "The only true atheist is the one for whom the attributes of the divine essence, like love, wisdom, justice are nothing, and not the one for whom only the subject of these attributes is nothing." Doesn't Stirner achieve this, especially if the Nothing is not loaded on him in place of nothing?

Feuerbach asks: "How does Feuerbach allow (divine) attributes to remain?" and answers: "Not in this way, as attributes of God, no, but as attributes of nature and humanity, as natural, human properties. When these attributes are transferred from God into the human being, they immediately lose their divine character." Stirner answers against it: Feuerbach allows the attributes to exist as *ideals*—as essential determinations of the species, which are "imperfect" in individual human beings and only become perfect "in the mass of the species," as the "essential perfection of perfect human beings," thus as ideals for individual human beings. He doesn't allow them to continue to exist as divine attributes, insofar as he doesn't attribute them to their subject, God, but as *human attributes*, insofar as he "transfers them from God to the *human being*." Now Stirner directs his attack precisely against the human, and Feuerbach ingenuously comes back with the "human being" and means that if only the attributes were made "human," or moved into the human being, they would immediately become completely "profane and common." But human attributes are not at all more common and profane than divine attributes, and Feuerbach is still a long way from being "a true atheist" in the way he defines it, nor does he want to be one.

"The basic illusion," Feuerbach says, "is God as subject." But Stirner has shown that the basic illusion is rather the idea of "essential perfection," and that Feuerbach, who supports this basic prejudice with all his might, is therefore, precisely, a true Christian.

"Feuerbach shows," he continues, "that the divine is *not* divine, God is *not* God, but only the human essence loving itself, affirming itself and appreciating itself to the highest degree." But who is this "human essence"? Stirner has shown that this human essence is precisely the spook that is also called the human being, and that *you*, the unique essence, are

led to speak as a Feuerbachian by attaching the delusion⁶ of this human essence to “self-affirmation.” The point of contention that Stirner raised is thus again completely evaded.

“The theme, the core of Feuerbach’s writing,” he continues, “is the abolition of the split into an essential and non-essential I—the deification of the human being, i.e., the positioning, the recognition of *the whole human being* from head to foot. Isn’t the divinity of the *individual* specifically announced at the end as the shattered secret of religion?” “The only writing in which the slogan of modern times, the personality, individuality, has ceased to be a senseless phrase is precisely *The Essence of Christianity*.” But what the “whole human being” is, what the “individual, personality, individuality” are, is shown in the following: “For Feuerbach, the individual is the absolute, that is, the *true, actual* essence. But why doesn’t he say: this exclusive individual? Because, in that case, he wouldn’t know what he wanted—from that standpoint, which he denies, he would sink back into the religious standpoint.”—So “the whole human being” is not “this human being,” not the common, criminal, self-seeking human being. Of course, Feuerbach would fall into the religious standpoint that he rejects if he described *this* exclusive individual as the “absolute essence.” But it wouldn’t be because he was saying something about *this* individual, but rather because he describes him as something religious (the “absolute essence”) or rather uses his religious attributes for this, and secondly because he “sets up an individual” as “sacred and untouchable by all other individuals.” Thus, with the words cited above, nothing is said against Stirner, since Stirner does not talk about a “sacred and untouchable individual,” nor of an “incomparable and exclusive individual that is God or can become God”; it doesn’t occur to him to deny that the “individual” is “communist.” In fact, Stirner

6. The German word here is “*Sparren*,” literally “rafter,” but used in the phrase: “*zu haben einen Sparren*” which means to be nuts, to have bats in one’s belfry. Stirner used this phrase in *Der Einzige*... and is clearly referring back to that here.

has granted validity to the words "individual" and "particular person" because he lets them sink into the expression "unique." But in doing so, he does what he recognizes specifically in the part of his book entitled "My Power," saying on page 275: "In the end, I still have to take back half the style of expression that I wanted to make use of only so long as, etc."

When later, against Stirner's statement, "I am more than a human being," Feuerbach raises the question: "Are you also more than male?," one must indeed write off the entire masculine position. He continues like this: "Is your essence or rather—since the egoist scorns the *word* essence, even though he uses it—[Stirner inserts:] perhaps Stirner only cleanses it of the duplicity it has, for example, in Feuerbach, where it seems as if he is actually talking of you and me when he speaks of our essence, whereas instead he is talking about a completely subordinate essence, namely the human essence, which he thus makes into something higher and nobler. Instead of having *you* in mind—the essence, you, you who are an essence, instead he concerns himself with the human being as "your essence" and has the human being in mind instead of you. Stirner uses the word essence, for example on page 56, saying: "You, yourself, with *your* essence, are of value to me, for your essence is not something higher, it is not higher and more universal than you. It is unique, as you are, because it is you."—[end of Stirner's insertion] is your I not *masculine*? Can you sever masculinity from what is called mind? Isn't your brain, the most sacred and elevated organ of your body, definitively masculine? Are your feelings, your thoughts unmanly? Are you merely a *male animal*, a dog, an ape, a stallion? What else is your unique, incomparable, and consequently sexless I, but an undigested residue of the old Christian supernaturalism?"

If Stirner had said: You are *more* than a living essence or *animal*, this would mean, you are *still an animal*, but animality does not exhaust what you are. In the same way, he says:

“You are more than a human being, therefore you are *also* a human being; you are more than a male, but you are *also* a male; but humanity and masculinity do not express you exhaustively, and you can therefore be indifferent to everything that is held up to you as ‘true humanity’ or ‘true masculinity.’ But you can always be tortured and have tortured yourself with these pretentious duties. Still today, holy people intend to grab hold of you with them.” Feuerbach is certainly no mere animal male, but then is he nothing more than a human male? Did he write *The Essence of Christianity* as a male, and did he require nothing more than to be a male to write this book? Instead, wasn’t this *unique* Feuerbach needed for that, and could even another Feuerbach, Friedrich, for example—who is still also a male—have brought it off? Since he is *this* unique Feuerbach, he is also, at the same time, a human being, a male, a living essence, a Franconian, etc. But he is more than all this, since these attributes have reality only through his uniqueness. He is a unique male, a unique human being, etc.; indeed, he is an *incomparable* male, an *incomparable* human being.

So what does Feuerbach want with his “*consequently* sexless I”? Since Feuerbach is *more* than male, is he consequently sexless? Feuerbach’s holiest, most elevated organ is undoubtedly manly, definitively manly, and it is also, among other things, Caucasian, German, etc. But all this is only true, because it is a *unique thing*, a distinct, unique thing, an organ or brain which will not come forth a second time anywhere in the world, however full the world may be of organs, of organs as such or of absolute organs.

And is this unique Feuerbach supposed to be “an undigested residue of old Christian supernaturalism”?

From this, it is also quite clear that Stirner does not, as Feuerbach says, “separate his I in thought from his sensible, male essence” just as the refutation Feuerbach makes on page 200 of [Wigand’s] *Quarterly* would collapse if Feuerbach

didn't depict the unique wrongly, as lacking individuality, just like he describes it as lacking sex.

“To realize the species means to actualize an arrangement, a capacity, a determination for human nature generally.” Rather, the species is already realized through this arrangement; whereas what you make of this arrangement is a realization of your own. Your hand is fully realized for the purposes of the species, otherwise it wouldn't be a hand, but perhaps a paw. But when you train your hands, you do not perfect them for the purposes of the species, you do not realize the species that is already real and perfect, because your hand is what the species or the species-concept of “hand” implies, and is thus a perfect hand—but you make of them what and how you want and are able to make them; you shape your will and power into them; you make the species hand into your own, *unique*, particular hand.

“Good is what accords with the human being, what fits it; bad, despicable, what contradicts it. Ethical relationships, e.g., marriage, are thus not sacred for their own sake, but only for the sake of human beings, because they are relationships between human beings, and thus are the self-affirmation, the self-enjoyment of the human essence.” But what if one were an inhuman monster who didn't think these ethical relations were fitting for *him*? Feuerbach will demonstrate to him that they are fitting for the human being, the “actual sensual, individual human essence,” and so also must fit *him*. This demonstration is so thorough and practical that already for thousands of years, it has populated the prisons with “inhuman monsters,” i.e., with people who did not find fitting *for them* what was nonetheless fitting for the “human essence.”

Of course, Feuerbach is not a materialist (Stirner never says he is, but only speaks of his materialism clothed with the property of idealism); he is not a materialist, because, although he imagines that he is talking about the actual human

being, he doesn't say a thing about it. But he is also not an idealist, because though he constantly talks about the human essence, an idea, he makes out that he is talking about the "sensual human essence." He claims to be neither a materialist nor an idealist, and I'll grant him this. But I'll also grant what he himself wants to be, and passes himself off as, in the end: he is a "common man, a communist." Stirner has already seen him as such, e.g., p 413.

About the point upon which alone this all would hang, namely Stirner's assertion that the human essence is not Feuerbach's or Stirner's or any other particular human being's essence, just as the cards are not the essence of the house of cards; Feuerbach circles about this point, indeed, he doesn't get it at all. He sticks with his categories of species and individual, I and thou, human being and human essence, with complete complacency.

Hess

Hess has the "historical development of German philosophy behind him" in his pamphlet, "The Last Philosophers," but has before him "the development of the philosophers Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer and Stirner, disengaged from life" and knows from his own development, not exactly disengaged from life, that the development of these philosophers "had to turn into nonsense." But is a development disengaged from life not "nonsense," and is a development not disengaged from life not likewise "nonsense"? But, no, he has sense, because he flatters the sense of the great masses which imagine that underneath the philosopher there is always one who understands nothing of life.

Hess begins this way: "It never occurs to anyone to maintain that the astronomer is the solar system that he has understood. But the individual human being, who has understood nature and history, is supposed to be the species, the all, according to our last German philosophers." But how, if the latter also never occurs to anyone? Who has ever said

that the individual human being is the species because he has “understood” nature and history? Hess has said this and no one else. He even cites Stirner as a reference, here: “As the individual is all nature, so is he also the whole species.” But did Stirner say that the individual first had to *understand* in order to be able to be the entire species? Rather, Hess, this individual, actually is the entire “human” species and can serve, with skin and hair, as a source for Stirner’s statement. What would Hess be if he were not perfectly human, if he lacked even the smallest thing for being human? He could be anything except a human being;—he could be an angel, a beast or a depiction of a human being, but he can only be a human being if he is a perfect human being. The human being can be no more perfect than Hess is, there is no more perfect human being than—Hess. Hess is the perfect human being, or if one wants to use the superlative, the most perfect human being. Everything, all that belongs to the human being is in Hess. Not even the smallest crumb of what makes a human being human is missing in Hess. Of course, the case is similar for every goose, every dog, every horse.

So is there no human being more perfect than Hess? As a human being—none. As a human being, Hess is as perfect as—every human being, and the human species contains nothing that Hess does not contain; he carries it all around with him.

Here is another fact, that Hess is not just a human being, but an utterly *unique* human being. However, this uniqueness never benefits the human being, because the human being can never become more perfect than it is.—We don’t want to go into this further, since what is said above is enough to show how strikingly Hess can find Stirner guilty of “nonsense” simply with an “understood solar system.” In an even clearer way, on page 11 of his pamphlet, Hess exposes Stirner’s “nonsense” and shouts with satisfaction: “This is the logic of the new wisdom!”

Hess's expositions on the development of Christianity, as socialist historical intuitions, don't matter here; his characterization of Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer is utterly the sort that would have to come from one who has "laid philosophy aside."

He says of socialism that "it carries out the realization and negation of philosophy seriously and speaks not only of that, but of philosophy as a mere apprenticeship to negate and to realize in social life." He could have also added that socialism wants to "realize" not only philosophy, but also religion and Christianity. Nothing easier than this, when, like Hess, one knows life, in particular the misery of life. When the manufacturer, Hardy, in *The Wandering Jew*, falls into misery, he is completely open to the teachings of the Jesuits, particularly when he could hear all the same teachings, but in a "human," melodious form, from the "human" priest Gabriel. Gabriel's lessons are more pernicious than Rodin's.

Hess quotes a passage from Stirner's book, page 341, and deduces from it that Stirner has nothing against "practically existing egoism, except the lack of consciousness of egoism." But Stirner doesn't at all say what Hess makes him say, that "all the errors of present day egoists consist in not being conscious of their egoism." In the passage cited, Stirner says: "If only the consciousness of this existed." Of what? Not of egoism, but of the fact that grabbing is not a sin. And after twisting Stirner's words, Hess dedicates the entire second half of his pamphlet to the struggle against "conscious egoism." Stirner says in the middle of the passage that Hess quotes: "One should only know this, the method of seizing is not contemptible, but manifests the clear action which some egoists agree together to take." Hess omits this, because he has no more understanding of egoists agreeing *together* than what Marx already said earlier about shopkeepers and universal rights (for example in the *Deutsch-Französischen Jahrbüchern*); Hess repeats this,

but with none of the keen skill of his predecessor.—Stirner's "conscious egoist" doesn't merely not adhere to the consciousness of sin, but also to the consciousness of law, or of universal human rights.

Hess finishes with Stirner like this: "No, you precocious child, I don't at all create and love in order to enjoy, I love from love, I create from a creator's desire, from a vital instinct, from an immediate natural desire. When I love in order to enjoy, then I not only do not love, but I also do not enjoy, etc." But does Stirner challenge such trivialities anywhere? Doesn't Hess rather attribute "nonsense" to him in order to be able to call him a "precocious child"? In other words, "precocious child" is the final judgment to which Hess comes, and he repeats it in the conclusion. Through such final judgments, he manages to put "the historical development of German philosophy *behind him*."

On page 14, Hess lets "the species break up into individuals, families, tribes, people, races." This disintegration, he says, "this alienation is the first form of the existence of the species. To come into existence, the species has to individualize itself." From whence only Hess knows all that the species "has to" do. "Form of existence of the species, alienation of the species, individualization of the species," he gets all this from the philosophy that he has put *behind him*, and to top it off, commits his beloved "robbery with murder" insofar as he "robs" this, for example, from Feuerbach and at the same time "murders" everything in it that is actually philosophy. He could have learned precisely from Stirner that the pompous phrase "alienation of the species" is "nonsense," but where could he have gotten the weapons against Stirner if not from philosophy, which he has put behind him, of course, through a socialist "robbery with murder"—?

Hess closes the second part of his book with the discovery that "Stirner's ideal is bourgeois society, which takes the state to itself." Hegel has shown that egoism is at home in

bourgeois society. Whoever has now put Hegelian philosophy behind him, also knows, from this philosophy behind him, that anyone who “recommends” egoism has his ideal in bourgeois society. He will later take the opportunity to speak extensively about bourgeois society; then it will seem that it is no more the site of egoism than the family is the site of selflessness. The sense of bourgeois society is rather the *life of commerce*, a life that can be pursued by saints in sacred forms—as happens all the time today—as by egoists in an egoistic form—as happens now only in the activity of a few acting clandestinely. For Stirner, bourgeois society does not at all lie at the heart, and he doesn't at all think of extending it so that it engulfs the state and the family. So Hess could suspect such a thing about Stirner only because he came to him through Hegelian categories.

The selfless Hess has become accustomed to a particular, gainful and advantageous phrase by noting repeatedly that the poor Berliners get hold of their wisdom from the Rhine, i.e., from Hess and the socialists there, and also from France, but unfortunately through stupidity, these beautiful things get ruined. So, for example, he says: “Recently, there has been talk of the embodied individual *among us*; the actual human being, the realization of the idea, so it can be no surprise to us if tidings of this have reached Berlin and there moved certain philosophical heads from their bliss. But the philosophical heads have understood the thing *philosophically*.”—We had to mention this so much to spread what is, for us, a well-deserved reputation; we add also that already in the *Rhenish Gazette*, although not in “recent times,” the actual human being and similar topics were *spoken* about a lot, and exclusively by Rhenish correspondents.

Immediately thereafter, Hess wants “to make what he means by the actual, living human being conceivable to philosophers.” Since he wants to make it *conceivable*, he reveals that *his* actual human being is a *concept*, thus not an actual human being. Rather, Hess himself is an actual human

being, but we want to grant him what he *means* by an actual human being, since on the Rhine (“among us”), they *speak* about it enough.

Stirner says: “If you consume what is sacred, you have made it property! You digest the host and you get rid of it!” Hess answers: “As if we haven’t consumed our sacred property for a long time!” Of course, we consumed property as a sacred thing, a *sacred* property; but we did not consume its sacredness. Stirner says: “If you consume *what is sacred* (Hess doesn’t take this with much precision and makes Stirner say “sacred property” instead of “what is sacred”), you make it property, etc.,” i.e., something (dirt, for example) that you can throw away. “Reason and love are generally without reality,” Hess makes Stirner say. But doesn’t he speak of *my* reason, *my* love? In me they are real, they have reality.

“We may not develop our essence from the inside out,” Stirner is supposed to say. Of course, you may develop your essence, but “our essence,” “the human essence,” that is another thing, which the whole first part of the book deals with. Anyway, Hess again makes no distinction between your essence and our essence, and in doing so, follows Feuerbach.

Stirner is accused of knowing only the beginnings of socialism, and even these only through hearsay, otherwise he would have to know, for example, that on the political terrain communism has already been divided for quite some time into the two extremes of egoism (*intérêt personnel*⁷) and humanism (*dévouement*⁸). This contrast is important to Hess who may possibly know a thousand things more *about* socialism than Stirner, though the latter has seen through socialism better; to Stirner this contrast was secondary and could only have seemed meaningful to him if his thinking

7. “Personal interest,” in French in the original.

8. “Devotion,” in French in the original.

about egoism was as thoroughly unclear as that of Hess.

The fact that Stirner, by the way, “knows nothing of society” is something that all socialist and communists understand, and there is no need for Hess to prove it. If Stirner had known anything about it, how could he have dared to write against Your Holiness, and what’s more, to write so ruthlessly, in so much detail!

Anyone who hasn’t read Stirner’s book immediately recognizes without question how precisely Hess judged and how little he needed to justify the following judgment: “Stirner’s opposition to the state is the utterly common opposition of the liberal bourgeoisie who put the blame on the state when people fall into poverty and starve.”

Hess reprimands Stirner like this: “Oh, unique, you are great, original, brilliant! But I would have been glad to see your ‘association of egoists’, even if only on paper. Since this isn’t granted to me, I will allow myself to characterize the real *concept* of your association of egoists.” He wants to characterize the “concept” of this association, indeed, he does characterize it; saying authoritatively that it is “the concept of introducing now in life the most uncouth form of egoism, *wildness*.” Since the “concept” of this association is what interests him, he also explains that he wants to see it on paper. As he sees in the unique nothing but a concept, so naturally, this association, in which the unique is the vital point, also had to become a concept for him. But if one repeats Hess’s own words to him: “Recently, there has been talk of the unique among us, and tidings of it have also reached Köln; but the philosophical head in Köln has understood the thing philosophically,” has a concept been preserved?

But he goes further and shows that “all our history up to now has been nothing but the history of egoistic associations, whose fruit—ancient slavery, medieval bondage and modern, fundamental, universal servitude—are known to us

all." First of all, here Hess puts "egoistic association"—because he needs to take it in precisely this way!—in place of Stirner's "association of egoists." His readers, who he wants to persuade—one sees in his preface what type of people he has to persuade, namely people whose works, like those of Bruno Bauer, derive from an "incitement to reaction," in other words, exceptionally smart and political heads)—these readers, of course, immediately find it correct and beyond doubt that nothing but "egoistic associations" has ever existed.—But is an association in which most of those involved are hoodwinked about their most natural and obvious interests, an association of egoists? Have "egoists" come together where one is the slave or serf of the other? There are, it's true, egoists in such a society, and in this sense, it might in some aspects be called an "egoistic association"; but the slaves have not really sought this society from egoism, and are instead, in their egoistic hearts, against these lovely "associations," as Hess calls them.—Societies in which the needs of some get satisfied at the expense of others, in which, for example, some can satisfy their need for rest only by making others work until they are exhausted; or lead comfortable lives by making others live miserably or perhaps even starve; or live the high life because others are so addle-brained as to live in want, etc.—Hess calls such societies egoistic associations, and since he is free "of the secret police of his critical conscience," impartially and against police orders, he identifies this egoistic league *of his* with Stirner's association of egoists. Stirner probably also needs the expression "egoistic association," but it is explained first of all through the "association of egoists," and secondly, it is explained correctly, whereas what Hess called by this name is rather a religious society, a community held in sacred respect through rights, laws and all the formalities or ceremonies of justice.

It would be another thing indeed, if Hess wanted to see egoistic associations not on paper, but in life. Faust finds himself in the midst of such an association when he cries: "Here I am human, here I can be human"—Goethe says it in black

and white. If Hess attentively observed real life, to which he holds so much, he will see hundreds of such egoistic associations, some passing quickly, others lasting. Perhaps at this very moment, some children have come together just outside his window in a friendly game. If he looks at them, he will see a playful egoistic association. Perhaps Hess has a friend or a beloved; then he knows how one heart finds another, as their two hearts come together egoistically to delight (enjoy) each other, and how no one “comes up short” in this. Perhaps he meets a few good friends on the street and they ask him to accompany them to a tavern for wine; does he go along as a favor to them, or does he “associate” with them because it promises pleasure? Should they thank him heartily for the “sacrifice,” or do they know that all together they form an “egoistic association” for a little while?

To be sure, Hess wouldn't pay attention to these trivial examples, they are so utterly physical and vastly distinct from sacred society, or rather from the “fraternal, human society” of sacred socialists.

Hess says of Stirner: “he remains constantly under the secret police of his critical conscience.” What is he saying here, if not that when Stirner criticizes, he doesn't want to go on a binge of critique, to babble, but really just wants to criticize? Hess, however, would like to show how right he is in not being able to find any difference between Stirner and Bruno Bauer. But has he ever generally known how to find any difference other than that between sacred socialists and “egoistic shopkeepers”? And is even this difference anything more than histrionics? What need does he have to find a difference between Bruno Bauer and Stirner, since critique is undoubtedly – critique? Why, one might ask, does Hess have to concern himself with such strange birds, in whom, only with great difficulty, will he ever find sense except by attributing *his own* sense to them, as he did in his pamphlet, and who, therefore, (as he says in his preface) “had to turn into nonsense”—why since he has such a wide human field of the

most human action before him?

* * * * *

To close, it might not be inappropriate to remind the critics of Feuerbach's *Critique of the Anti-Hegel*, page 4.⁹

9. Perhaps a reference to this appropriate passage: "He always has other things than his opponent in his head. He cannot assimilate his ideas and consequently cannot make them out with his understanding. They move in confusion like Epicurian atoms in the empty space of his own self. And his understanding is the accident that brings them together with special external expedient accents into an apparent whole."

The Philosophical Reactionaries

A Response to Kuno Fischer's "The Modern Sophists"
by G. Edward (Max Stirner)

A prolific painter, working in his studio, was called to lunch by his wife. He answered: "Wait just a moment; I only have twelve life-size apostles, a Christ and a Madonna to paint." Such is the way of the philosophical reactionary Kuno Fischer – I chose this phrase, because one must not appear in the drawing room of philosophy without the tailcoat¹ of a philosophical phrase – he deals in broad brushstrokes with the difficult titan's work of modern criticism, which had to storm the philosophical heaven, the last heaven under the heavens. He depicts one after the other. It is a joy to see. Strauss, Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, Stirner, the Greek sophists, the Jesuits, the sophists of Romanticism, all get depicted using the same stencil.

The good man goes after sophists the way that our *Lichtfreunde*² and German Catholics go after Jesuits. He posts a warning against them; vilify someone as a "sophist!" and every respectable philosopher will make a cross before him. Already Hegel has drawn attention to the fact that what

1. For those who miss this sarcastic reference, think of a "white tie and tails" affair.

2. A Protestant group aiming to create a rationalist version of Christianity as opposed to the dogmatic evangelical version that dominated at the time in Germany. Literally "Friends of the Light."

little is still left to us from the Greek sophists shows how far superior they were to Greek idealism whose full glory we get from Plato's works. In the end, Hegel is also a "sophist." Bring your stencil, Mr. Kuno Fischer, I have the urge to call Hegel a "sophist." But let's hear our glorious sophist-hunter himself: "Sophistry is the mirror-image of philosophy – its inverted truth." Thus, wholly the same truth, but in the opposite position? Oh, the position doesn't matter to us. We look at the picture from above and call it a "sophist"; we look at it from below and call it a "philosopher" "*tel est notre plaisir*."³

"The sophistic subject, which makes itself into the master, the despot of thought, and with it reveals the *tel est mon plaisir* to the objective powers of the world, can't possibly be the thinking subjectivity." "Master, despot of thought," whose thought? My thought? Your thought? Or thought in itself? If the "sophistic subject" makes itself the master of my thought, or of thought in itself, a thing that makes no sense, nonetheless, it is probably more powerful and so entitled to it; for it can only seize thought for itself by thinking, and that is still certainly an honorable, gentlemanly weapon. But if it is master of its own thought, this is nothing special. If you aren't, then you're a lunatic, the plaything of your fixed idea. However slowly, here come the "objective powers of the world," a sublime bunch. Who are you? Are you the light, "that breaks through stained-glass windows," and colors my nose blue whether I like it or not, when I'm standing in a Gothic church? Yes, even my praying neighbor, filled with the objectivity of the present God, has to laugh at the blue nose. Or are you the destructive power of a falling body, discharged electricity, the quick expansion of evaporating material?

No! Not all that. I see the philosopher smile. Should mindless nature be an objective power of the world? Nature,

3. In French in the original. Literally, "such is our pleasure," in other words, "as it pleases us."

which “is” not, when I don’t “think” it, which is only a “thing of thought.” No! Because up to now, this is mightier than the philosopher, and therefore he disavows it; but his phrase-adorned God, that garlanded golden calf, is an “objective power of the world.” Past history is null and void, insofar as it doesn’t show the dialectical process of his distinctive thinking, and the future – he has already “designed” it. Thus, “the sophistic subject,” “the despot of thought,” “can’t possibly be the thinking subjectivity.” “The thinking subjectivity!” If it were still called “the thinking subject,” then the simple nonsense of this sentence would be laid bare, that “the sophistic subject is not thereby the thinking subject, that it is master of thought, and therefore thinks, but perhaps because it is thought by a thought, because it is the will-less organ of the absolute Spirit, or however these wise definitions may otherwise fall out.” But so the “thinking subjectivity” has become a many-headed hydra of nonsense.

“The subject, who distinguishes himself as independent from his thought, is rather the particular, the random subject, who sees nothing in thought but a plausible means for his purposes, and only understands the natural and moral world under this category.”

I distinguish myself from my thoughts, and I do not distinguish myself from them; there my thoughts fulfill me so much that no feeling, no sensation can produce a difference between me and my thoughts. – But I’m using the clumsy language of my opponent – so then can I speak of “thought” at all? A “thought” is something finished, something thought, and I always distinguish myself from such things, like the creator from the creature, the father from the son. I most certainly distinguish myself from my thoughts which I have thought or will come to think. The former are objects to me, the latter – unlaidd eggs. Therefore, I am just “the particular, the random subject.” But the one who seems to be the “necessary subject” to himself, legitimizes himself as such. He may get the legitimation from the moon. An absurd question,

whether a subject is random or necessary, whether it is “a” subject or “the” subject. It is necessary, because it is there, and if it makes itself necessary; random, because no rooster would crow at it if it were not there. The greatest conceivable necessity of a world conqueror, a scholar controlling the time, or a statesman, is still only illusory. For “particular” interests, as “plausible means to their purposes,” all of them bind the passions and ideas of the time to their triumphal chariots. Their “purpose” may be something *more real*, or an *idea*; it is always *their* idea, a particular idea, which they love, with which they hurl the anathema on the one in whose contrariness and unbroken character they clearly discern that they are still only “random, particular subjects.” As concerns the understanding “of the natural and moral world,” I confess that I don’t understand how one can grasp the natural world other than as a natural, “particular” subject. I gladly leave your “moral world” to you; this always only stood on paper, is the perennial lie of society, and will always shatter on the rich variety and incompatibility of strong-willed individuals. We leave this “lost paradise” to the poets.

Now, in a flash, our hero takes a ride through history. “Hurrah! the dead ride fast.”

“The idealism of thought of the Eleatics⁴ stimulated Greek sophistry.” Oh, that is great praise for the Eleatics. As if no head-shrinker was ever stimulated by “the idealism of thought” of his lunatics, especially if there is “method in their madness.”

“The sophistry of Catholic Christianity was Jesuitism. Catholic dogma, that stands outside the believing subject, brought the same, thus, outwardly into its power.” “Outwardly” probably, but also in actual fact? Or haven’t Loyola’s students perhaps always controlled the Vatican?

4. A school of pre-Socratic philosophers who rejected the validity of sense experience as a source of knowledge and instead took logic and mathematics as the basis for truth.

Legitimists in Austria and Bavaria, *Sans-culottes* in Belgium, communists⁵ in France, the skillful always pull the masses along on the fool's rope of a popular idea. Even in the interior of Asia, where the hunger of the desert and the superior strength of the wild nomads made all expeditions fail, their intrepid foot has wandered through. Today a Jesuit pupil sits on the papal throne and governs in the spirit of religious and political liberalism; and Catholics and Protestants cheer for him.

“In romantic sophistry the particular subject stormed the absoluteness of the Fichteian I.” Hear, hear! You Romantics, you art-enthused Schlegel and Tieck, you brilliant theosophist, Novalis, hear it in your graves, you are also only utterly common “particular” subjects. Indeed! With phrases one can make everything into everything. “Sophistry emancipates the subject from the power of thought; so – the sophistic subject is *the thoughtless*, the crude, particular subject, that crawls away behind thought's back to keep its power at bay.” So because *I* have thoughts and thoughts don't have *me*, because I think freely and don't ape a thought already thought, am I a “thoughtless,” “particular,” even “crude” subject? Certainly not! The sophists are not “thoughtless,” they are even “philosophical” more or less “the mirror-image of philosophy,” but in what way? “The clumsy subject breathes philosophical air; that gives it this peculiar oxygen, from which it gets dialectically inspired to a formal eloquence.” Do you philosophers actually have an inkling that you have been beaten with your own weapons? Nothing but an inkling. What retort can you hearty fellows make against it, when I again dialectically demolish what you have just dialectically put up? You have shown me with what “eloquence” one can make all into nothing and nothing into all, black into white and white into black. What do you have against it, when I turn your neat

5. Though these are obvious references to radical movements of the time, I could find no information about the *Legitime* of Austria and Bavaria and very little about the Belgian *Sans-culottes* (only that there is a brewery in Belgium that uses that name in honor of them).

trick back on you? But with the dialectical trick of a philosophy of nature, neither you nor I will cancel the great facts of modern natural research, no more than Schelling and Hegel did. Precisely here the philosopher has revealed himself as the "clumsy" subject; because he is as ignorant in a "clumsified" sphere in which he has no power, as a witless Gulliver among the giants.

The "sophist" is the "stable," the "random" Subject and belongs to the "reactionary" "already conquered viewpoints in philosophy," and is "depicted" yet again in Kuno Fischer's abundance. It has probably not understood the philosophers, since "the natural man knows nothing of the Spirit of God." But we would like to see how Mr. Fischer has understood these ones that he has philosophically depicted, so that we can at least admire his "eloquence." "In this process, 'pure critique' does not bring the subject to an actual sense of its sovereignty; it remains in illusion, against which it fights, relating to it critically." Only this absurd accusation hereby made against "pure critique," that it is merely critique; because how could someone criticize a thing without "relating to it critically"? The question is surely only to whose advantage this relationship is settled, i.e., whether the critic critically overcomes the thing or not. "This critical relationship demolishes the subject; it is the definitive nothing of all world-shaking thoughts; they have expired in the absolute egoism of the unique. Peter Schlemihl⁶ has lost his shadow."

How unfortunate, when someone chooses an image by which he is most clearly defeated. Peter Schlemihl's shadow is the image of his uniqueness, his individual contour, used metaphorically, the knowledge and sense of himself. Precisely when he loses this, he becomes the unfortunate prey of gold into which he has transferred his essence, of

6. The central character of story about a man who sells his shadow to the devil for a bottomless wallet, only to find that a person without a shadow is shunned by everyone.

the opinion of the mob that he doesn't know how to despise, of the love of a foolish girl that he doesn't know how to renounce; he is the plaything of a demon, who is only terrifying to him so long as he fears him, so long as he remains in a contract relationship with him. He could just as well be the prey of philosophy.

But let's leave the images. In the same way as Mr. Fischer above, Bauer's literary paper talks about it in the eighth volume.

"What clumsiness and frivolity, to want to solve the most difficult problems, carry out the most comprehensive tasks, through *demolition*."

To this Stirner replied:

"But do you have tasks if you do not set them for yourself? As long as you set them, you will not forsake them, and I have nothing against the fact that you think and in thinking create a thousand thoughts."

Does "the unique" *demolish* the thought process here? No! He lets it quietly run its course; but also doesn't let it *demolish* his uniqueness, and he laughs at criticism as soon as it tries to force him to help solve a problem that he has not posed, laughing at your "earth-shattering thoughts." The world has languished long enough under the tyranny of thought, under the terrorism of ideas; she is waking from the heavy dream, and the day of joyful *self-interest* follows. She is ashamed of the contradiction in which the church, the state and the philosopher held her captive, the contradiction they placed between *self-interest* and *principle*. As if one could have a principle in which he had no interest, an interest that didn't become for the moment a principle. But you should, you must have a "pure" principle, self-interest is "dirty." You must only behave "philosophically" or "critically"; otherwise you are a "clumsy," "crude," "random," "particular"

subject.

Listen, naturalist, when you observe with pleasure the becoming of the chicken in the incubating egg, and don't think to criticize it; listen, Alexander, when you chop apart the Gordian knot that you did not tie. You have to die as a young man at Sais⁷ at the hands of the priests, because you have "thoughtlessly" dared to lift the holy veil of serious thought⁸; and the priests still have the impudent gall to say, "the sight of the Godhead has killed you."

But one sample of the ideal, ethereal manner of language, which brings a not "clumsy," "necessary," "world-shattering" subject.

"The sophistic subject, which from its despotic arrogance feels itself degraded to a eunuch over and over again, *finally withdraws behind the foreskin of its individuality*," etc.

After Kuno Fischer honored with such a broad exposition "the philosophical prerequisites of modern sophistry, Hegel, Strauss, Bruno Bauer, Feuerbach," a process of philosophy that has already become historical, but that is still too close to be exposed in such a trivial way as a bit of news, he comes to speak about Max Stirner himself. As for Stirner's inclusion among the sophists, a name by which he would neither be insulted nor flattered, it may be enough to set an opinion of his about the Greek sophists against it. "Certainly the principle of sophistry had to lead to this, that the blindest and most dependent slave of his desires might still be an excellent sophist, and, with intellectual sharpness, lay out

7. A reference to Novalis' book, *The Disciples at Sais*.

8. I have here translated "*unbedanklich*" as "thoughtlessly" and "*Bendanklichkeit*" as "serious thought," to emphasize Stirner's wordplay on thought and thinking. Generally, "*Bedanklichkeit*" means simply seriousness or, in other contexts, dubiousness. Knowing how Stirner plays with words, this last meaning might also hold some significance here.

and prune everything in favor of his crude heart. What could there be for which one couldn't find a 'good reason,' and which one wouldn't let oneself struggle through?"⁹

I have already often observed that critics who have examined and analyzed the objects of their critique with great talent and keen understanding, indeed get crazy about Stirner, and every one has often been carried away by the different consequences of their misunderstandings to genuinely stupid mistakes.

Thus, Kuno Fischer makes the useless effort to display Stirner's egoism and uniqueness as a consequence of Bauer's self-consciousness and "pure critique." The subject that "in this process, pure critique does not bring to an actual sense of sovereignty," becomes in Stirner the "definite nothing of all world-shaking thought." And this trick is accomplished through the "demolition of the critical relationship with the illusions against which it fights."

But the trick is just one of Kuno Fischer's tricks; in Stirner's book itself one finds nothing of this. Stirner's book was already completed before Bruno Bauer had turned his back on his theological critique as something that had been settled, and every proclamation of "absolute critique" in the public literary paper only mentions Stirner in an addendum, that doesn't, of necessity, belong in the structure of the complete work. Feuerbach's humanism, which had achieved a more general influence among German communists and socialists, was much closer to a realization that clearly enough the "inhuman" of "humanism" brought to light the underlying contradictions in the system. Hence Stirner devoted the greatest effort to the battle against humanism. Feuerbach replied in Wigand's quarterly journal, 1845, volume III, and Stirner refuted this response. Kuno Fischer seems to know and be aware of nothing of all this; otherwise he would have spared himself the effort of making the following ingenious

9. *The Unique and Its Property*, "The Ancients."

discovery.

“The egoism of the unique is not just any thought; rather it is objective; it exerts a dogmatic violence; it is a bat in the belfry, a spook, a hierarchical thought, and Max Stirner is its priest.” “Stirner is the dogmatist of egoism.” “In the objectivity that Stirner gives to *absolute* egoism,” (not a trace of any “absolute” egoism is to be found in Stirner’s book) “there is a conceptualization that has become a dogma.”

If Mr. Fischer had read the article¹⁰, he would not have come to this comical misunderstanding, finding in Stirner’s “egoism” a dogma, a seriously meant “categorical imperative,” a seriously meant “should,” like the one “humanism” provoked: you should be “human being” and not “inhuman monster,” and thereon constructed the moral catechism of humanity. There Stirner referred to “egoism” itself as a “phrase”; but as the last possible “phrase,” it is appropriate for bringing the rule of phrases to an end. If we cut the categorical imperative, i.e., the positive intention, out of Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity* and his lesser works, even out of his “philosophy of humanity”: that means, we understand his “species ideal” with its mysterious “powers”: “reason,” “will,” “heart” and its realizations: “knowledge,” “character,” “love,” as psychological representations of the skills and qualities which are immanent in the *real* human species as such, in human organization, apart from historical changes and complications, then tremendous progress is already made in Feuerbach; he shows, going back to the simple, large lines of our organization, already sufficient, how absurd it is to give so much weight to one aspect, to one characteristic, such as the intellect, or thought, that it threatens to devour the others; in short, he wants *the whole of humanity* in equal entitlement to all of its characteristics, including the senses and willpower. But having gotten this far, he forgets that “the human being” doesn’t exist, that it is an arbitrary abstraction. He sets it up as an ideal. It’s no

10. “Stirner’s Critics.”

wonder, when it becomes an impersonal, mysterious species being, that it behaves as polytheistically as the Greek gods of Zeus. Consequently, a “*should*” comes in; you should be *the human being*. The “inhuman monster” operates against the “human being.” But no one holds that an “unbestial monster” is not a “beast.” It would be just as difficult for Feuerbach to prove that an “inhuman monster” is not an actual “human being.” An “inhuman monster” is and remains an actual “human being,” encumbered with a moral anathema, cast out with a feeling of disgust by the human community – which calls him “inhuman monster.”

Stirner opposes this phrase “humanism” with the phrase “egoism”: How? Do you demand of me that I should be a “human being,” more precisely, I should be a “man”? Well! I was already a “human being,” a “naked little human being,” and a “man” in the cradle; I am indeed that; but I am more than that, I am what I have become through me, through my development, through appropriation of the outside world, of history, etc.; I am the “unique.” But that’s not what you really want. You don’t want me to be an actual human being. You don’t give a damn about my uniqueness. You desire me to be “the human being” as you have depicted it, as a model for all. You want to make the “principle of vulgar equality” into the norm for my life. Principle upon principle! Demand after demand! I oppose you with the principle of egoism. I only want to be myself; I despise nature, humanity and its laws, human society and its love, and I cut off all universal relationships with them, even that of language. To all the impressions of your duties, all the expressions of your categorical judgments, I oppose the “ataraxia”¹¹ of my I; I’m already quite accommodating when I make use of language, I am the “inexpressible.” “I only show myself.” And aren’t I just as right with the terrorism of my I, which pushes back everything human, as you with your terrorism of humanity, which immediately brands me as an “inhuman monster” if I sin against your catechism, if I don’t let myself be disturbed

11. Emotional tranquility.

in my self-enjoyment?

Is it therefore said that Stirner with his “egoism” wants to deny everything universal, to make out as nonexistent all the characteristics of our organism which no individual can take away, to clear them away through mere denial? That he wants to give up all companionship with human beings, and suicidally hide himself in his cocoon? Certainly, this misunderstanding is no less awkward than that of the German liberals and conservatives who still today are outraged by Börne’s¹² remark: “If you don’t like your king’s nose, then drive him out for it,” as if it had ever occurred to Börne to make a king’s nose into a crime against democracy. One must actually be ashamed, to make that sort of thing comprehensible to the lord-councilors of confusion.

But there is a weighty “therefore,” a powerful implication in Stirner’s book, often, indeed, to be read between the lines, but which entirely escaped the philosophers, because they don’t know actual human beings, or themselves as actual human beings, because they always only deal with “humanity,” “the spirit” in itself, *a priori*, always only with the name, never with the thing and the person. This Stirner speaks in a negative way with his sharp, irresistible critique, with which he analyzes all the illusions of idealism, and reveals all the lies of unselfish devotion and sacrifice. Indeed his glorious critics have understood this critique as the epitome of blind self-interest, of “duped egoism,” which brings an entire people under its possession, to win a few pennies from it. Stirner himself described his book as a sometimes “awkward” expression of what he wanted. It is the painstaking work of the best years of his life; and yet he called it sometimes “awkward.” He had to struggle so much with a language that was corrupted by philosophers, abused by believers in the state, in religion, in whatever else, and which had made ready a boundless confusion of ideas.

12. Karl Ludwig Börne (1786-1837), a German political writer and satirist.

But back to our critic. When Stirner says: “Love is my feeling, my property,” etc., or “My love is only my own when it exists completely within a selfish and egoistic interest; consequently the object of my love is actually *my* object or my property” and assumes the same in a love affair, from the one who loves back, the declared love object, so our idealist triumphantly rises: “Thus, really, the Dalai Lama cult! that is, consuming twice. I eat my own being-eaten.” “Thus, Max and Marie¹³ belong in the natural history of love for ruminants.”

Well, since Mr. Kuno Fischer is so personal and picturesque, we would also like to turn the thing around. Kuno loves Kunigunde¹⁴ and Kunigunde loves Kuno. But Kuno does not love Kunigunde, because he finds his enjoyment in this love, he does not enjoy his mistress for his own pleasure, but rather out of pure self-sacrifice, because she wants to be loved; he doesn't allow any suffering in her love, because love for her is thus adequate compensation for him, not for these selfish reasons, but all without taking them into account, out of pure altruism. Kunigunde does the same with Kuno. So we have the perfect couple for a fools' marriage, who have taken it into their heads to love each other out of pure devotion, without even enjoying each other. Kuno Fischer can keep such a sublime philosophical love for himself, or search for his counterpart in a madhouse. We other “raw,” “particular” subjects want to love, because we feel love, because love is pleasing to our hearts and to our senses, and in the love of another being, we experience a greater self-enjoyment.

13. Marie Dähnhardt, to whom Max Stirner was married at the time and to whom he dedicated *The Unique and Its Property*.

14. This is the German version of *Cunégonde*, a character from Voltaire's *Candide*. As spelled in French, the name is a pun on the Latin and French words for the female genitals. I strongly suspect that Stirner had this in mind in this passage.

Furthermore, our critic gets entangled in his own contradictions. The “state-eliminating egoism of the unique” is at the same time “the most reasonable association of moderation,” “in truth the grounds of the most shameless despotism,” whose “clanging, fateful sword” the critic already hears. The “clanging sword” would no longer be “fateful” for us, if we did not make it our fate, and entrench ourselves in this steel shibboleth through foolish enterprises, giving the sword power, wanting to enslave ourselves to the “idea.”

We can't follow this further. We hope that one can be honest enough not to expect us to read more than one page from a book like *Rationality and the Individual*,¹⁵ let alone to listen to a critique of it. But we want to bring it to Mr. Kuno Fischer's attention that the author of *Rationality and the Individual* has written a critique of himself in the Protestant church newspaper. But perhaps Mr. Kuno Fischer is more familiar than we are with this burlesque behavior of a man, who wants to become famous at any price.

“The Philosophical Reactionaries” was published under the name of G. Edwards in *Die Epigonen*, volume 4, Leipzig, 1847, pp. 141-151.

15. A reference to Karl Schmidt's *Das Verstandesthum Und Das Individuum*, a work that attempted to trace the history of the philosophical movement of the young Hegelians from beginning to end in order to be done with it. By considering Stirner as a philosopher, he inevitably misunderstood Stirner.

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