

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.

-Wolfi Landstreicher