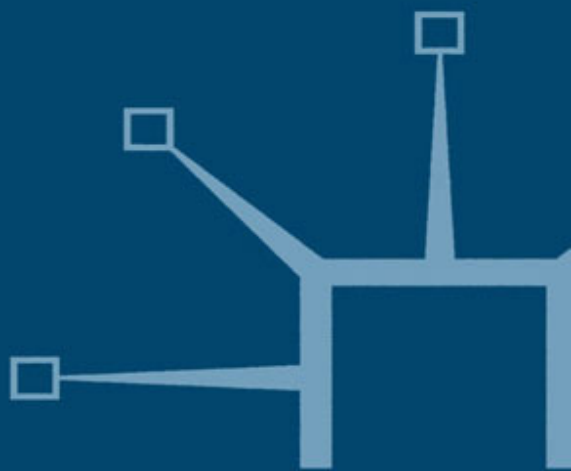


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Max Stirner

Saul Newman



Max Stirner

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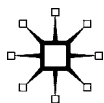
Max Stirner

Edited by

Saul Newman

*Reader in Political Theory, Department of Politics,
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This book is dedicated to the 'class of the unstable, restless, changeable, of the proletariat, and, if they give voice to their unsettled nature, are called "unruly heads".'

Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*

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Introduction: Re-encountering Stirner's Ghosts

Saul Newman

In 1844, Max Stirner, a little-known figure in German philosophical circles at that time, presented to the world a nuclear bomb in the form of a book. *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (*The Ego and its Own*) was described as the 'most revolutionary book ever written'.¹ It is certainly the most dangerous. In marking a break with all established categories and traditions of thought – Hegelianism, humanism, rationalism – and in demolishing our most deeply entrenched notions of morality, subjectivity, humanity and society, Stirner takes a wrecking ball to the philosophical architecture of our Western tradition, leaving only ruins in his path. All our beliefs are dismissed by Stirner as so many ideological abstractions, 'spooks', 'fixed ideas': our faith in rationality is shown to be no less superstitious than faith in the most obfuscating of religions; Man is simply God reinvented; secular institutions and discourses are alive with spectres of Christianity; universalism is spoken from a particular position of power. Stirner tears up the paving stones of our world, revealing the abyss of nothingness that lies beneath. 'All things are nothing to me', he declares. All that is left standing after this frenzy of destruction is the Ego – the only reality – smiling at us enigmatically, like Stirner himself, across the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to our present day.

After an encounter with *The Ego and Its Own* – Stirner's only major work – it is simply impossible to see the world in the same way. Perhaps this is why it provoked, and continues to provoke, such extreme reactions. It is a book that is intensely troubling and disconcerting to many. Some hold it up as the emblem of personal liberation and rebellion; others hold it in contempt for that very reason. Even anarchists, amongst whom one would expect to find a clear affinity with Stirner's anti-statism and affirmation of individual freedom, are ambivalent

about his place within that revolutionary tradition: while Stirner had an enormous impact on the development of anarchist thought and, indeed, radical politics from the nineteenth century up to May 1968, his work has also been criticized as a paean to nihilism and immoralism.²

Others see Stirner as an ideologue of the petite bourgeoisie, or as a proponent of a sort of Ayn Rand-like individualism and economic self-interestedness, ignoring the way that Stirner's libertarianism – if indeed it can be called that – is far more radical than anything that could be dreamt up by the neo-liberal Right. Stirner is certainly a thinker who defies easy categorization. He has been described as a nihilist, existentialist, anarchist, individualist, liberal, psychological egoist – but all such labels are inadequate. Just as we think we have Stirner in our conceptual grasp, just as we think we have him pinned down, he slips away again like one of his own spectres. This makes it difficult to align Stirner with any particular political tradition – he criticizes with equal vigour liberalism, socialism and communism, to say nothing of more conservative doctrines, and greets with scepticism ideas of freedom, rights and equality, not because they are too radical, but because they are not radical enough, because they are still attached to essentialist notions and religious modes of thought. It is hard to know where to place Stirner: he simply explodes all political categories. But, at the same time, this makes his political thought all the more interesting and provocative.

What cannot be doubted is his impact – his often shattering impact – on the trajectory of social and political theory. Marx recognized in Stirner – notwithstanding some initial enthusiasm from Engels about Stirner's philosophy of egoism³ – a genuine enemy of considerable importance, and one with whom an encounter was inevitable. Indeed, so much did Marx regard Stirner as a threat that he devoted the largest section of *The German Ideology* to a relentless and sarcastic parody of 'Saint Max'. It has been suggested that Stirner's persuasive rejection of the humanist philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach as a hangover from Christianity and idealism had tarnished Marx with the same brush – and the possibility that there was an unacknowledged idealism latent within his own notion of 'species being' was an allegation serious enough to prompt Marx to turn his heavy artillery against Stirner. Can *The German Ideology* be seen, then, as a kind of moment of catharsis, in which Marx tries to exorcize the spectre of idealism from his own thought by claiming to find it in Stirner's? If, as Jacques Derrida claims, Marx and Stirner are both obsessed with ghosts⁴ – antagonists, brothers and fellow ghost hunters on the trail of idealism – then we have to ask what there was in Stirner that so troubled Marx and set him on this

quest. Whatever there was, it impelled Marx to use all the rhetorical powers in his arsenal to drive this spectre from his midst. The encounter with Stirner shook Marx out of the last remnants of humanism and idealism that lingered on in his thought.

Stirner's work has also been enormously influential on other strands of philosophy and social and political theory, including anarchism and existentialism, as well as on avant-garde art movements – such as Surrealism and Dadaism – closely allied to anarchists. One also finds striking resemblances between Stirner's thought and that of post-structuralists like Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze and Guattari. Indeed, Gilles Deleuze recognized Stirner's importance in the history of (anti-) dialectical thought. Stirner is seen as a sort of precursor to Nietzsche in revealing nihilism as the truth of the dialectic: 'In the history of the dialectic Stirner has a place apart, the final, extreme place'.⁵ Many of the motifs central to postmodern and post-structuralist thought – the subject as flux and becoming, the instability of all identities, the critique of humanism and the rejection of the metaphysics of presence – find their original and most forceful articulation in Stirner, even though his proximity is never really acknowledged.⁶ If one begins to dig up these layers of thought one uncovers a complex rhizomatic root system called 'Stirner'.

And yet, despite – or is it because of? – his impact, Stirner remains opaque and enigmatic to us, as if there were a deliberate silence surrounding him, as if his very name was disavowed and unutterable. Aside from scornful dismissals from various quarters, there is relatively little serious scholarship on Stirner – in the English language, at least – a few scattered works here and there. It is as if we have yet to come to terms with Stirner and do not quite know what to do with a thinker who so radically challenges our established philosophical coordinates. Stirner has never ceased to be a ghost.

But let him linger in the shadows for a while longer. The effect of his thought is more devastating that way and, besides, we have no pretensions of establishing, once and for all, the identity of the *real* Stirner – an enterprise that Stirner himself would only treat with disdain. Michel Foucault once said, 'I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write.'⁷ Stirner himself might have said the very same. So we resist the temptation to confine Stirner to a single identity, to a 'fixed idea', and instead acknowledge that there are many Stirners – a multitude of spectres, jostling together

boisterously. We prefer to see Stirner as a tool to be used, as a means of forcing apart the tectonic plates of our world and destabilizing the institutions and identities that rest upon them. Deleuze once characterized Foucault's thought as 'thought from the outside', something that resists stratification and constitutes a genuine emergence of forces that disturbs the stability of the interior: 'Thinking does not depend on a beautiful interiority that would unite the visible and the articulable elements, but is carried under the intrusion of an outside that eats into the interval and forces or dismembers the internal.'⁸ The same might be said of Stirner: his thought is that of what he calls the 'un-man' who speaks from the (non-)place outside the discourse of humanism and rationalism. Indeed, Stirner maintains that the only way to think differently, to think *outside* established categories of thought – so degraded have they become by Christianized idealism and abstraction – is to promote a kind of 'thoughtlessness', by which he understands a radical freedom of thought: 'And only by this *thoughtlessness*, by this unrecognized "freedom of thought", or freedom from thought, are you your own.'⁹

But why conjure up Stirner's ghost (or ghosts) now, at this present juncture? Does Stirner have anything new to say to us today? Indeed, could one not say that in our so-called 'postmodern' or 'late modern' times we no longer in any case believe in the metanarratives of modernity that Stirner so thoroughly demolished; we no longer believe – as we might have done in the nineteenth century – in universal reason and Humanity. These are the discourses whose latent religiosity Stirner clearly perceived, and whose eventual demise he seemed to forecast. But in that case, why read Stirner today? Do we not already live in post-Stirner times, in which his critique of humanism and Hegelianism might be said to have lost its critical edge? Does Stirner have anything new to offer us today, or should he simply be considered a curiosity in the history of political thought?

It would appear, however, that there are still plenty of ghosts around for Stirner to dispel. Indeed, in these so-called post-ideological times, all we seem to do is *believe*: for some of us, in the market, for others, in our inevitable emancipation from it; for some of us, in the hedonism and ecstasy of consumption (another form of *possessedness*, as far as Stirner was concerned), and for others, in the austerities of religion and conservative values. Indeed, the uncanny 'return' of fundamentalisms of all kinds is only the other side of the age of so-called 'postmodern cynicism'. Stirner's point was not that religion was finished, but, on the contrary, that it had taken on a strange afterlife in the guise of secular humanism and rationalism: 'The human *religion* is only the

last metamorphosis of the Christian religion.¹⁰ The fact that religion in its older, cruder form has again reared its head only verifies Stirner's claim. Stirner's innovation lay in showing that belief in secularism and rationality is no less fundamentalist or superstitious than belief in God: what is the same in both cases is our subjective attachment to an abstract *idea*, an idea that burns within our consciousness and comes to define us; an idea that takes a hold over us. In Stirner's words,

Man, your head is haunted; you have wheels in your head! You imagine great things, and depict to yourself a whole world of gods that has an existence for you, a spirit-realm to which you suppose yourself to be called, an ideal that beckons to you. You have a fixed idea [*fixe Idee*]!¹¹

And even if we remain cynical, the point is that we continue to *act as though we believe*. As Louis Althusser recognized, we believe through our daily rituals and practices, whose performance sustains the symbolic universe in which live and through which we derive our identity.¹² Or, in Slavoj Žižek's terms, cynicism itself has become a form of ideology.¹³ We know, on one level, that capitalism is already dead, and yet we continue to invest in its afterlife at the level of our daily activities of work and consumption. We know that the state is not all-powerful, and yet we act as though it is – sustaining it and legitimizing it through our continued obedience and through symbolic rituals such as voting. Stirner recognized that the state was simply an abstraction of our own power, and that *its* power was dependent on *our* abandonment of our own autonomy and our voluntary servitude:

States last only so long as there is a *ruling will* and this ruling will is looked upon as tantamount to the own will... What do your laws amount to if no one obeys them? What your orders, if nobody lets himself be ordered? The state cannot forbear the claim to determine the individual's will, to speculate and count on this. For the state it is indispensable that nobody have an *own will*...¹⁴

The state, in other words, is our creation, and it is based on the relinquishment of our own will. Its radical transcendence, therefore, involves a reclaiming of this will ('The *own will* of me is the state's destroyer'¹⁵). This does not mean that the state has no material existence or be can simply be wished away, a claim that Marx was too quick to attribute to Stirner as evidence of his 'idealism'. What it does mean

is that the power of the state is sustained by our belief in it and our wilful acquiescence to it. So, what needs to be interrogated – and this is where Stirner's critique of 'fixed ideas' is more relevant than ever – is our subjective, 'passionate attachment' to the power and authority that binds us; the ideological fantasies, desires and beliefs that underpin the structures and practices of domination.

Stirner's critique also allows us to discern the theological dimension underlying all political institutions. God lives on in the secular, democratic state, conditioned as it is by the theological principle of sovereignty. This is the uncanny ghost in the machine. Sovereignty is always the rule of One, the moment of unicity, indivisibility, absolutism and the singular exception. As Carl Schmitt said, in words that seem to directly conjure and invoke Stirner's, 'All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts...'¹⁶ Liberal institutions and discourses, formally set up and promulgated to keep religion at bay, are alive with spectres of Christian idealism and are founded upon the same subordination of the individual to abstract generalities, ideals and alien forms.

The perverse trick of liberalism, as Stirner perceived, was to sell us servitude in the name of freedom and individual rights. Stirner traces a genealogy of liberalism, seeing it as a rationality of power and government which clothes itself in the language of freedom and equality. What lies behind it is a kind of moralistic injunction, a fundamentalist impulse to subjugate the concrete individual while claiming to liberate him. In the discourse of 'political liberalism', for instance, people are ostensibly liberated from other traditional social structures and bonds – but to what end? So that they can now become subjects of the state alone, so that the state now has direct and unmediated access to the individual. In other words, just as Marx showed that 'religious liberty' or 'freedom of religion' meant precisely not freedom *from* religion but, on the contrary, the freedom *of* religion to further entrench itself in civil society, so, for Stirner, 'political liberty' mean not liberty from the state, but, rather, the state's liberation from social bonds, and thus its freedom to directly subjugate the individual through the category of citizenship: "Political liberty", what are we to understand by that? Perhaps the individual's independence from the state and its laws? No; on the contrary, the individual's *subjection* in the state and to the state's laws.'¹⁷ Whether it is to the State, Society or Humanity itself (in later articulations of liberalism), the individual, while purportedly emancipated, is instead increasingly subordinated to a generality that robs him of his uniqueness. In Stirner's time, liberalism was

still a revolutionary ideology, bearing the freedom of the individual as its emblem. Stirner peered behind its edifice and saw instead a sophisticated machine for the coercion and subordination of the individual. In our day, in Western societies, where liberalism has long been the hegemonic political and ideological 'metanarrative', is it any surprise that this discourse now seems to be unravelling and devolving into a sort of (post-)liberal authoritarianism, where we are increasingly caught between the twin totalitarianisms of biopolitical security and the neo-liberal market?

It is necessary here to put paid to a common allegation – often made by those who have never read Stirner, or never read him properly – that his philosophy of 'egoism' glorifies a model of 'possessive individualism', a selfish, utility-maximizing idea of subjectivity which fits perfectly with these times of nihilistic neo-liberal capitalism and the cult of the consumer. Yet, aside from Stirner's forthright rejection of liberalism in all its forms, he also calls on us to refuse the fetishism of money and material possessions, and to break apart existing understandings of private property. His notion of 'property' is far too broad to be assimilated into the normal understanding of private property, an institution which Stirner exhorts us to no longer respect and, indeed, to violently transgress. Property, for Stirner, refers to a notion of self-possession or self-ownership, something which the established notion of private property – in supporting capitalist exploitation – disallows to a majority of people. Therefore, according to Stirner, if we respect the private property of others we are subordinating ourselves yet again to a sacred ideal which, in reality, has no legitimacy. If we respect and desire 'possessions', then we do not possess; on the contrary, we are 'possessed' (by them), we subordinate egoistic desire to a fetishism of commodities, allowing them to exert a magical power over us. The egoist, therefore, does 'not step shyly back from your property, but look[s] upon it always as *my* property, in which I need to "respect" nothing. Pray do what you like with what you call my property!'¹⁸ How can capitalist relations survive amidst this complete destabilization of the concept of property? Moreover, Stirner's conception of the subject certainly cannot be reduced to that of the self-interested bourgeois individual: not only does the *owner* (in Stirner's terms) seek to free himself from the order of capitalism, consumption and private property – in which we are sold mass servitude in the name of individual freedom – but also exceeds all attempts to confine subjectivity within stable identities and predictable patterns of behaviour. The 'anarchy' of capitalism is an ordered anarchy, anarchy within limits – those established by respect

for private property and through the coercions and laws of the state. Stirner's ontological anarchy is something far more dangerous.

If, like the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, Stirner declares war on God and the State – or the persistence of God *in* the State – and if he unmasks the ideological vestments which clothe the State – like secularism and liberalism – he is even more concerned to dislodge the subjective thresholds which bind us to power. Before any sort of political liberation from the external forms that oppress us can take place, we must first dispense with the internalized forms of domination and subjectification whereby we cling to fixed, established identities, and where we are induced to seek within ourselves a stable essence in which we see a reflection of universal Humanity and the God-like image of Man. Stirner's fundamental critique of humanism shows such identities to be mere apparitions or 'spooks'; and yet, these spooks have a powerful effect on the individual, incarcerating him within a discursive prison, reducing his difference and uniqueness to abstract, totalizing uniformity, and sacrificing his autonomy on the altar of Man. That is why the individual must distance himself from Man and Humanity, why he must free himself from essence: 'I am neither God nor *man*, neither the supreme essence nor my essence, and therefore it is all one in the main whether I think of the essence as in me or outside me.'¹⁹ Stirner gives us, then, a new way of thinking about the subject – the subject is no longer defined by essential properties and characteristics that are said to mirror broader humanity, but rather should be thought of as a mode of subjectivation that is open, indefinable and freely determined by the egoist. The subject is no longer a fixed identity, but rather an open field of action, flux and becoming: 'I do not presuppose myself, because I am every moment just positing or creating myself'.²⁰ This is what Stirner means by *ownness*, which is a much more radical form of freedom than the narrow, marketized conception dished up to us by liberalism. It is freedom understood in terms of self-ownership, autonomy and freedom to determine one's own identity; it is freedom from all 'fixed ideas' and socially (and economically) determined conceptions of what the self should be. So Stirner not only gives us a new conception of the subject, but also points to alternative strategies of freedom, in which the self's micro-political relation to power can be ethically interrogated, and where a discursive space is opened up for experimentation in different and more autonomous ways of living and relating to others. This also means that politics can no longer be based on fixed identities and the struggle for recognition; to do so is to once again narrow our political horizons and to constrain the radical possibilities of the subject.

Stirner, therefore, has crucial implications for radical political theory. In his own time, Stirner put forward a heretical critique of not only liberalism, but communism and socialism as well, perceiving in these discourses latent forms of domination. In our time, radical politics is confronted with the collapse of revolutionary grand narratives and utopian projects. Did these projects disintegrate because, as Stirner predicted, they sacrificed the individual to the collective, because they subordinated the Ego to the Universal Idea, thus authorizing a revolutionary leadership who claimed to speak on behalf of this Idea and interpret it to us? Stirner does not offer us an alternative political program; rather, he calls on us to be suspicious of *all* programs – of all revolutionary promises of emancipation, equality, rights, freedom – as their proclaimed universalism always belies a particular position of power and interest. In other words, it is always someone's particular idea of emancipation or equality that is being foisted upon us, and this makes it dangerous and potentially authoritarian: 'The craving for a *particular* freedom always includes the purpose of a new *dominion*'.²¹ There is nothing wrong with these ideas of emancipation, equality and freedom as far as they go, as long as they are freely determined and fought for by concrete individuals themselves as an expression of their own power and will, rather than imposed upon them as part of some revolutionary program. If Stirner's thinking could take a distinct political form, it would be as a politics of autonomy in which struggles are engaged in directly by people themselves rather than through representatives, and in which people, whether individually or in groups (Stirner talks about 'unions of egoists'), freely determine for themselves their own practices, relations and ways of living outside the control of centralized institutions. It might be seen as a sort of anarchist politics that resonates in many ways with contemporary alter-globalization struggles – struggles which, unlike Marxist and Leninist forms of politics, are characterized by the absence of parties and centralized leadership structures, and experiment with practices of direct decision-making and autonomous forms of organization. Stirner's 'union of egoists' – the only form of alliance he permits the genuine egoist to enter – perhaps finds its closest expression today in the anti-capitalist 'affinity group'.²²

Yet, we should be a little cautious here about aligning Stirner too closely with any particular political or economic struggle, and less still with any Cause. The problem with causes is that, unless they are freely determined and assumed by the egoist himself – unless they become an *egoistic* cause – they have a tendency to consume and sacrifice the individual. Fidelity to a political cause can become exactly like religious

conviction, and this is what Stirner is opposed to. If we can draw a political ethic from Stirner, it would be to be on our guard against revolutionary piety – the sort of moralism and Puritanism that often characterizes radical politics. We are reminded here of the ethical sensibility that Foucault finds in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, which counsels, amongst other things: 'Do not think that one has to be sad in order to be militant, even though the thing one is fighting is abominable.'²³ The sad, pious militant is the opposite of the egoist – but there is no reason why the egoist cannot also be militant, as long as militancy is transformed into joyous struggle.

Stirner, therefore, makes possible a radical rethinking of key political categories – the subject, agency, sovereignty, universalism, freedom and ethics – thus opening the way for alternative forms of political action. Indeed, with his demolition of all essential identities and metaphysical foundations, Stirner makes a crucial contribution to the development of post-foundational political thought. We can perhaps see him as the vital missing link in this tradition that extends from Nietzsche through to Heidegger, Bataille (the 'sovereign individual'), French post-structuralism and the post-foundational politics of thinkers like Jean-Luc Nancy and Ernesto Laclau.²⁴ Stirner shows us that our political reality can no longer be founded on the universal grand narratives that we have inherited from the Enlightenment and humanist discourses; it can no longer be embodied in notions of Man or universal reason, and, moreover, all attempts to re-invent this foundationalism – in the form, for instance, of Habermas's model of rational communication – are a flawed enterprise. This destabilization of ontological foundations means, on the one hand, that politics is a riskier venture – it is no longer guided by fixed moral and rational coordinates; and, on the other hand, it means that the political horizon is for us to determine. Some might say that this leads to nihilism – and indeed, Stirner's philosophy of egoism is often condemned as nihilistic. I would say, on the contrary, that this leads to a kind of radical ethical responsibility, and, above all, a responsibility to think and act without essentialist conditions and absolute guarantees. Stirner engages in a kind of ontological anarchism which forces an encounter with the constitutive openness of the political.

This is the first ever edited book on Max Stirner published in the English language. In its untimely timeliness it seeks to make possible a re-encounter – or series of re-encounters – with this long neglected figure. The contributors to this volume engage with Stirner's ghosts in different ways. They focus on different aspects of Stirner's thought and

its political implications, or on key debates around his work and the historical context in which he lived and wrote, or in which his ideas permeated and influenced artistic, intellectual and avant-garde circles. Despite our different approaches, however, we are agreed about the vitality and influence of this irrepressible spectre. We fear him a little, as one should with ghosts. But we are generally not superstitious, and we seek to use Stirner in our own ways and for our own ends. Stirner would not want it any other way.

We are introduced to Stirner – whose real name was Johann Caspar Schmidt – by David Leopold in the first chapter. The details of this man's life in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century are largely unexceptional, although he did move in distinguished philosophical circles, drinking in and adding to the intellectual ferment of the Young Hegelians. Here we might be tempted to recall Heidegger's lecture on Aristotle, in which, by way of introduction to the ancient philosopher's life, he had merely to say, 'he was born, he worked and he died'.²⁵ Stirner produced only one major philosophical work, and died in poverty and obscurity. It is hard to imagine this somewhat nondescript, seemingly inoffensive man producing this work of philosophical dynamite. Who knew what fires and violence raged beneath his placid brow? His whole existence, with its mundane, petty tribulations and its solitude, seemed nothing but a life-support system for his philosophical enterprise. *Der Einzige* was Stirner's only major work, as though he had said it all (an admirable thing when compared to some professional academics these days, who have nothing to say yet keep on writing). Once the book was published, Stirner enjoyed some brief notoriety and then receded back into the shadows. It is as if he lived his life as a ghost. Yet we cannot help but feel tender and a little ashamed, as well as awe-struck, as we laugh at this little life lived by a man with explosives in his hands.

Leopold insists on a correct and thorough reading of Stirner, and we are given an introduction to Stirner's key notion of egoism: egoism must be distinguished from the mere pursuit of self-interest and appetite; it is much more sophisticated than that, and implies a position of self-mastery, internal freedom and autonomy. Leopold also has the decency to avoid drawing too close a link between Stirner's life and personality and his philosophy, as though the latter were merely a reflection of the former. The notion of a true, authentic self, of which all thoughts and actions are simply a reflection, is thoroughly alien to Stirner, who invites us instead to experiment with our subjectivity, to consume and recreate it at will. So, with Stirner, we witness the immolation and

disappearance of the author behind the text, like, as Foucault once said, a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.²⁶

And yet, as Ruth Kinna shows in Chapter 2, Stirner's ideas lived on in a spectral form, filtering into and influencing debates and controversies amongst anarchists, revolutionaries and literary avant-gardes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She focuses on Stirner's reception by two of his keenest exponents, John Henry Mackay, a collector of Stirner's work, and Dora Marsden, a feminist and individualist anarchist who was deeply influenced by Stirner. Here we enter the restive, ebullient world of turn-of-the-century Stirnerism, before the intellectual and ideological divisions between radical traditions were solidified, where one could be an individualist-egoist and an anarchist, and where discussions were heady with radical ferment and experimental ideas. Indeed, we are reminded that Stirner's philosophy was once central to this intellectual universe and had a strong influence on the literary avant-garde. For Mackay, in his Stirner-inspired critique of anarcho-communism, the biggest danger to emerge (aside from utopianism) was the self-sacrifice of the individual to a revolutionary cause – a form of 'possessedness' any genuine egoist should resist. For Marsden, the problem with anarchism was that it was unable to recognize and affirm its *own* egoism and to acknowledge that it, like every other political movement, is guided by a certain will to power. Moreover, it was this failure to come to terms with its egoism that would lead anarchism to reproduce the same social and political structures it claimed to overthrow. Stirner is used here as the critical gadfly of anarchism; he is its anarchic unconscious. He is the spectre who wakes the revolutionist out of his political dreams and reminds him of his own inevitable proximity to the power he opposes. And it is *because* of Stirner's critical, 'anarchic' distance from anarchism that his centrality and importance to that tradition is affirmed.

From the historical contextualization of Stirner's ideas, we turn to a radically different way of interpreting his key work. In Chapter 3, Riccardo Baldissone affirms – in a way that would please Stirner himself – the autonomy of the text from the author. It is more than a question of the author no longer determining how his works are interpreted; rather, it is a question of the text no longer determining the identity of the author. Stirner, in other words, refuses to chain his identity to his text. Thus, Baldissone gives us a 'postmodern', 'perspectival' (or perhaps Stirnerian) way of reading Stirner, which is to refuse to see his writings as an objectified source of meaning, as historically set in stone – but rather to see them as an assemblage, a discursive machine, a rhizome

that can be used and deployed in different ways, and that can take on new meanings and resonances while contaminating and illuminating other thinkers and philosophies. Stirner becomes a sort of floating apparition, retroactively reconstructing the meaning of later philosophical approaches such as deconstruction and post-structuralism, while at the same time shedding new light on *earlier* thinkers – thus becoming their uncanny predecessor. Thus, Hegel is shown to be contaminated by Stirner, and Stirner in turn is contaminated by Foucault. Stirner haunts both his descendents and his antecedents. Moreover, what is revealed through this heretical and unruly reading of Stirner is not only the inevitability of philosophy's encounter with Stirner, but also what Baldissoni calls the 'multiplicity of nothingness': Stirner's figure of the Ego as an absolute singularity, is not, as some have alleged, a new essence or ultimate subject substituted for the desiccated Man of humanism, but rather a kind of radical moment of decentralization that acts to break the chain by which one centre is substituted for another. Above all, Stirner's rejection of essentialist ideas amounts to a monstrous challenge to accepted categories in political theory, and opens the way to alternative conceptions of political association and activity.

Behold! Right here in the middle of the book (Chapter 4) Stirner himself suddenly materializes and makes his presence felt on our academic Ouija board. He has been watching over us all this time, it seems, and now wants to intervene. But he does not do so in person – this would be too gauche. Rather, he is channelled through the mysterious person of Mr. G. Edward, who up till now has been sitting silently at our séance table. We are convinced that Edward 'speaks' for Stirner, that what he says are indeed Stirner's words. His style and tone, at once sardonic and humorous, are unmistakable. And what does Stirner say? In a little-known polemical essay – translated into English for the first time by Widukind De Ridder – 'Edward' (evidently Stirner's pseudonym) responds to what he calls the 'Philosophical Reactionaries', namely a certain Kuno Fischer, who accuses Stirner, along with some of his contemporaries, of 'sophistry'. Fischer clearly doesn't understand that such a barb – with its implicit demand for some sort of authentic essence and objective truth – has not the slightest purchase when it comes to Stirner. On the contrary, Stirner – or should I say 'Edward'? – uses this as an occasion to reaffirm, in the boldest possible terms, his radical break with all existing philosophical categories, categories that Fischer himself is still apparently trapped in. A man from some distant future deigning to speak to a man mired in the banalities of the present and the paradigms of the past. 'Edward' says, furthermore, that Stirner

has admitted that his own words in *The Ego and Its Own* are 'clumsy'. But that is because Stirner had given himself the arduous task of inventing a new language for philosophy – a new conceptual armoury – and had struggled, awkwardly yet determinedly, with the constraints of the existing language of the philosophers, a language corrupted by statist and religious thought.

In the Chapter 5, Paul Thomas investigates the debate between Stirner and Marx. Indeed, this encounter with Stirner, reflected in Marx and Engels' notorious attack on 'Saint Max' – a campaign waged over hundreds of pages of *The German Ideology* – had a major impact on the trajectory of Marx's thought. Thomas shows, in his detailed account of this dispute, that repudiating Stirner was central to Marx's concerns and, furthermore, that it formed the basis for Marx's confrontation with anarchism. Indeed, understanding this dispute with Stirner is key to understanding the development of Marx's thought and his critique of German philosophy, as well as other competing revolutionary political theories. We see how Stirner's understanding of the state, and his critique of social collectivities and revolutionary politics, draws Marx's fire. Indeed, many of the questions and themes that would come to define Marxist theory and characterize major debates in radical political theory – such as revolutionary subjectivity, the division of labour, individualism and individual freedom, and the meaning of communism – were prefigured in this dispute between Marx and Stirner. Could it be that Stirner, even as he was violently renounced by Marx, is nevertheless the prism through which the development of Marx's thought is to be viewed? Marx's repudiation of Stirner at the same time conjures his ghost.

In Chapter 6, Widukind De Ridder explores another major debate, this time between Stirner and his contemporary, Bruno Bauer, a conflict in which the full significance of Stirner's break with the philosophical categories of his time begins to emerge. Stirner's intervention is situated within the context of the debates in Germany around the *Vormärz*, the period preceding the 1848 Revolutions in which, amidst the tumult of the time, the Young Hegelian philosophers were intensely engaged with questions of freedom, social emancipation, universalism and the self, in the face of an increasingly absolutist state and an increasingly atomized civil society. By investigating these early debates, De Ridder sheds new light on Stirner's (anti-)philosophy of 'egoism', which dispenses with the activity of 'criticism', and leads to a dissolution of the subject/object dichotomy that was so central to the philosophical tradition. Indeed, egoism, or what Stirner calls 'ownness', is the attempt to cancel

the distance between subject and object so as to prevent objects taking on an autonomous, alien existence over and above the individual. Furthermore, in this process the subject is radically transformed – it is no longer the Man of humanism or some kind of essential identity, but a contingent field of action and becoming. This rethinking of the category of the subject is applied to radical political theory – necessitating a reconsideration of the concept of revolution as an emancipation of the subject (instead Stirner proposes the ‘insurrection’), as well as making possible a new form ideology-critique which has to contend with the realization that the subject, who was to be traditionally emancipated from the distortions of ideology, is himself a product of ideology.

Not only does Stirner provide us with a new basis for the critique of ideological systems, he also warns us about the dangers of idealism and fundamentalism lurking within specific political ideologies. It seems that in every political ideology there are self-proclaimed gate-keepers and border agents, keepers of the faith who want to purify the tradition, purge it of its troublesome elements and rigidify its theoretical borders. We see this sort of fundamentalism, at times, in anarchism itself, the tradition we would expect would be most hospitable to dissenters. There are those who want to transform anarchism from a heterodox, living assemblage of ideas, movements and desires, into a narrow, dogmatic doctrine. In her critique (Chapter 7) of Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt’s recent book on anarchism, *Black Flame*, Kathy Ferguson explores this fundamentalist impulse – one that is thoroughly hostile to the spirit of anarchism. Schmidt and van der Walt found their investigation into the global history of anarchist movements on an explicit disavowal and exclusion of a number of thinkers – including Stirner – from membership of what they want to turn into an exclusive club. So, Bakunin and Kropotkin are anointed as the legitimate fathers of anarchism, and, like dutiful (and, for this, all the more faithless) sons eager to prove their love, Schmidt and van der Walt conduct a spring-cleaning operation, sweeping the family hearth of anarchism’s bastard and miscreant progeny. These self-appointed high priests of a revolutionary religion simply cannot tolerate heretics like Stirner, whom they accuse of abandoning the cause of revolutionary politics. They cannot bear the uncomfortable, troubling proximity of Stirner to the anarchist tradition, and so they conduct an exorcism to drive out this spectre. Yet they risk leaving behind a purified corpse of anarchism. Ferguson sees this purifying impulse as part of a tendency amongst radicals to deify a Fixed Idea (of Revolution, for instance) and stake their identity to it – allowing themselves, as Stirner would put it, to become *possessed* by the

Idea. This attachment to the ‘sublime object’ – to use Žižek’s term – has the function of providing a point of imaginary identification, while sustaining the fantasy of revolution. This is precisely what Stirner warned us about – the perils of revolutionary piety, with its latent authoritarianism. Ferguson counters this by reminding us not only of Stirner’s historical influence on the anarchist tradition and on avant-garde art circles associated with anarchism, but also of his ongoing importance to anarchist politics. If anarchism is to remain relevant today, it must interrogate rather than rigidify its conceptual and theoretical boundaries – and here an engagement with Stirner’s thought is vital.

My own contribution to this conjuring of ghosts lies in showing how Stirner sheds new light on one of the central and most enigmatic problems of radical politics – the phenomenon of voluntary servitude, by which we voluntarily submit to the power that subjugates us. In Chapter 8, I suggest that Stirner’s radical critique of the abstractions of humanism, rationalism and morality, as well as the liberal discourses and institutions that rest on them, can be seen as a response to our subjective attachment to, and idealization of, the power that dominates us. Thus, Stirner’s affirmation of ‘ownness’ as a form of autonomy can be understood in terms of a micro-political and ethical strategy of freedom – akin to Foucault’s thinking in this area – that is intended to wake us up from our stupor and allow us to realize the power that was ours all along. So, far from leading to nihilism, I contend that Stirner provides us with a new ethics of freedom and autonomy. It is here that I believe Stirner can have a particular importance to contemporary radical political theory, and I show that his politics of ‘egoism’ cannot be expressed in terms of a simple individualism but, rather, opens the way to new forms of collective association – indeed, the release from voluntary servitude works at the level of the ‘transindividual’, or collective singularities. Stirner’s politics and ethics might be understood as a form of anarchism. Yet, at the same time, they effect a certain transformation of anarchism along post-foundationalist lines – what I refer to as postanarchism.

Notes

1. See James Hunecker (1909) *Egoists. A Book of Supermen* (New York), p. 350. Cited in Introduction to M. Stirner (1995) *The Ego and Its Own*, ed. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. xi
2. See for instance, R. W. K. Paterson (1971) *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 138.

3. In a letter to Marx (November 1844) Engels wrote: 'And it is certainly true that we must first make a cause our own, egoistic cause, before we can do anything to further it - and hence that in this sense, irrespective of any eventual material aspirations, we are communists out of egoism also, and it is out of egoism that we wish to be *human beings*, not mere individuals. Or to put it another way, Stirner is right in rejecting Feuerbach's "man", or at least the "man" of *Das Wesen des Christentums*. Feuerbach deduces his "man" from God, it is from God that he arrives at "man", and hence "man" is crowned with a theological halo of abstraction. The true way to arrive at "man" is the other way about. We must take our departure from the Ego, the empirical, flesh-and-blood individual, if we are not, like Stirner, to remain stuck at this point but rather proceed to raise ourselves to "man".' Marxists.org archive: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Engels_Correspondence.pdf (accessed 2 March 2011).
4. See J. Derrida (1994) *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge).
5. See G. Deleuze (1983) *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: The Athlone Press), p. 159.
6. My own work has sought to explore these connections between Stirner and post-structuralist thought. See, for instance, (2001) *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield); (2003) 'Empiricism, Pluralism and Politics in Stirner and Deleuze', *Idealistic Studies*, 33/1; (2002) 'Max Stirner and the Politics of Post-Humanism', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 1/2.
7. M. Foucault (2002) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge), p. 19.
8. G. Deleuze (1999) *Foucault* (London: Continuum), p. 72.
9. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 306.
10. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 158.
11. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 43.
12. See L. Althusser (1972) 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press).
13. See S. Žižek (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso).
14. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 174.
15. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 175.
16. C. Schmitt (2005) *Political Theology, Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 36.
17. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 96.
18. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 220.
19. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 34.
20. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 150.
21. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 145.
22. See Simon Tormey's discussion of Stirner and the politics of collective action in (2007) 'Consumption, Resistance and Everyday Life: Ruptures and Continuities', *Journal of Consumption Policy*, 30: 263–280.
23. See M. Foucault 'Preface' in G. Deleuze and F. Guattari (2004) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum), p. xv.

24. See Olivier Marchart's survey of this line of continental philosophy in (2007) *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).
25. I cite this from T. Sheehan, ed. (2010) *Heidegger: Man and Thinker* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers), p. 3.
26. M. Foucault (2002) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge), p. 422.

Part I

Historical Context

1

A Solitary Life

David Leopold

(i)

Der Einzige und sein Eigentum is an unusual and intriguing text.¹ It is perhaps the unconventional character of both the substantive content and literary form of the book that leads so many readers to wonder about its author, Max Stirner (1806–1856), and about the kind of life that he might have lived. In this chapter, I provide some biographical information about Stirner, and, rather more tentatively, broach some questions about the relationship between his life and work – in particular, the relationship between his life and the singular book with which he is closely identified.

I will start with his life, but should preface the account that follows with an acknowledgement and an admission. First, much of the factual information reproduced here was originally unearthed by the poet and anarchist John Henry Mackay (1864–1933).² The latter's work (discussed further in the last section of this chapter) is not without weaknesses, but the debt of any biographical account of Stirner to Mackay's original labours deserves recognition. Second, after some agonizing, I have chosen to use the name 'Stirner' to refer to my subject at all stages of his life. Strictly speaking, the name 'Stirner' only appeared much later, initially as a student nickname, based on his 'remarkably high forehead [*Stirn*]', which was exaggerated further by the way in which he parted his thin, light hair.³ 'Stirner' was subsequently used as a pseudonym, a 'nom de guerre' in his writings, and often as his preferred name in everyday life. In addition, 'Stirner' is now the name by which he is usually known. As a result, I have chosen to risk anachronism here by using it even when writing about his earlier life.

(ii)

The bare facts of Stirner's life are easily told. He was born on 25 October 1806, in Bayreuth (in northern Bavaria).⁴ He was the first and only child of Albert Christian Heinrich Schmidt (1769–1807), an instrument-maker by trade (he made flutes), and Sophia Eleonora Schmidt (née Reinlein) (1778–1859). He was baptized into the Lutheran church, and named Johann Caspar Schmidt after his godfather – Johann Caspar Martin Sticht (1769–1838) – who was married to his father's sister, Anna Marie.

Those early family circumstances were almost immediately disrupted. His father died when Stirner was barely six months old, and his mother remarried in 1809. His stepfather, Heinrich Friedrich Ludwig Ballerstedt (1761–1837), was an apothecary, and the couple eventually settled in Kulm on the Vistula.⁵ After some delay, Stirner joined them in 1810. He gained a half-sister, but she died in 1812 when she was less than three years old. In 1818, for reasons that are not certain, the twelve-year-old Stirner returned to Bayreuth, where he joined his aunt and godfather (who was a guarantor and foreman at a hosiery works). Stirner's guardians had no children of their own, and he lived with them for the next eight years until he started university.

We know little about Stirner's youth, but academic pursuits seem to have played a predominant role in his life at this time. At the Gymnasium and, initially at least, at university, he applied himself diligently and was rewarded with noticeable (if not outstanding) success. Bayreuth had an especially reputable Gymnasium, whose director at the time was the Hegelian Georg Andreas Gabler (1786–1853). Stirner was a very good, although not exceptional, pupil, obtaining a first class mark ('very worthy [*sehr würdig*]') on his school leaving certificate.

In 1826, Stirner enrolled in the faculty of Philosophy at the University of Berlin. At first, he studied hard, attending the lecture courses of several distinguished scholars including those of the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). The aspect of his education usually, and plausibly, considered to be of greatest importance to his intellectual evolution is his attendance at a number of lecture series delivered by the philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), in particular, the latter's lectures on the philosophy of religion, on the history of philosophy, and on the philosophy of 'subjective spirit'. In addition, it should be noted that Stirner was taught by a variety of other contemporary Hegelians including, for example, the theologian Philipp Marheineke (1780–1846) and (later) the philosopher Christian Kapp (1790–1874). The extent and

character of this Hegelian influence is a complex and much discussed question.⁶ What is not in doubt is that Stirner's academic contact with Hegel and Hegelianism was both first-hand and extensive.

Stirner subsequently enrolled at the University of Erlangen (in 1828) and the University of Königsberg (in 1830). (Moving between universities was a common practice amongst German students at this time.) However, his academic motivation and application seem to have declined at each of these stages, and at Königsberg he attended no lectures whatsoever. Indeed, shortly after registering, Stirner abandoned academic study completely, devoting time and energy instead to what was described as 'family affairs' – possibly a euphemism for his mother's declining mental health.

In 1832, at the age of 26, Stirner decided to return to Berlin in order to complete his studies. Two years later, rather than advance to doctoral study, he chose to register for the extensive and demanding professional examinations required to qualify as a *Gymnasium* teacher. (Not actually having a doctorate did not inhibit Stirner from subsequently using the title of 'doctor of philosophy' on a variety of official and unofficial documents.)⁷ Illness delayed the process, but Stirner eventually sat the examinations with mixed, but satisfactory, results overall. He was granted the qualified *facultas docendi*, and did some probationary teaching at the *Königliche Realschule* in Berlin.

Stirner's mother also moved to Berlin during this period. She spent time in Die Charité, the university hospital, but in 1837 moved to a private mental asylum, also in Berlin. She would stay in that asylum for the rest of her life, not only outliving the other adults from Stirner's childhood – his godfather died in 1835, his stepfather in 1837, and his aunt in 1838 – but also outliving Stirner himself by some three years.

It was during this same period that Stirner came to know Agnes Clara Kunigunde Burtz (1815–1838), who was part of his landlady's family, and who became his first wife. They seem to have first met in 1833 and were married in 1837. Both his wife and their first baby died in childbirth in 1838. Little is known of the character of the relationship between Stirner and his first wife, although one rare personal anecdote has become a matter of public record. Edgar Bauer (1820–1886) later reported that Stirner had confessed 'that he had acquired an aversion for his first wife as soon as he had caught sight of her naked. She had once unconsciously uncovered herself during sleep, and from this he was never able to touch her again'.⁸

In 1839, having failed to get a position within the *Gymnasium* system, Stirner began teaching at a private school in Berlin run by Madame

Gropius, providing for the 'education and cultivation' of young ladies. The post – teaching history and German language and literature – gave him a modest but regular income for the next five years. He seems to have developed a reputation as a polite and reliable teacher. He was remembered as a slim man of average height with clear blue eyes who, at least when teaching, wore thin steel glasses with small lenses. Edgar Bauer would later characterize his appearance as: 'Completely that of the best sort of a teacher for young ladies. Behind silver glasses a gentle look without any lust, normal size, clean clothes, easy mannered, inoffensive, not in the least ragged or silly'.⁹ Stirner left this teaching position shortly before the publication of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (resigning with effect from 1 October 1844), and would never again be in regular paid employment.

In the early 1840s this mild-mannered teacher of young ladies began to mix with some of the informal and overlapping associations of free-thinking intelligentsia that were increasingly flourishing in *Vormärz* Berlin. The contemporary *Konditerei*, for instance, were known as much for their newspapers and political discussion as their coffee and cake, and Stirner became a regular afternoon visitor to the 'red room' of the Café Stehely on the Gendarmenmarkt. The most important, and best-known, of the associations with which Stirner was linked was the bohemian group of journalists, teachers, students, writers, and others, known as 'The Free'.¹⁰ They met in the evenings – most often settling at Hippel's Weinstube on Friedrichstrasse – for unconventional and excitable discussion, increasingly under the intellectual leadership of the Left Hegelian Bruno Bauer (1809–1882), newly dismissed (in the spring of 1842) from the Theology faculty of the University of Bonn for the unorthodoxy of his work on the New Testament. In addition to Bruno Bauer and Stirner, the intellectual core of the group included: Bruno's brother Edgar Bauer; the writer and translator Ludwig Buhl (1818–1880); the Gymnasium teacher Karl Friedrich Köppen (1808–1863); the journalist Eduard Meyen (1812–1870); and the academic Karl Nauwerck (1810–1891). The periphery of the group included several journalists – for instance, Gustav Julius (1810–1851) and Julius Faucher (1820–1878) – and a number of poets, not least Rudolf Gottschall (1823–1909) and Wilhelm Jordan (1818–1904). Well-known visitors, including the poet Georg Herwegh (1817–1875), the publisher Otto Wigand (1795–1870), and the prominent Left Hegelian Arnold Ruge (1802–1880), were occasionally attracted by the vigorous discussion that took place. Despite occasional claims in the secondary literature, I am aware of no evidence that Stirner met Karl Marx (1818–1883) at this or any other time.

Certainly, Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) later maintained that Stirner ‘didn’t know Marx’, and confirmed that by the time the former began associating with the Berlin Hegelians Marx had already left for Bonn.¹¹

Interestingly, the only two pictures that we have of Stirner are both sketches by Engels. The first of these is a contemporary group drawing of ‘The Free’, which features Stirner in seemingly characteristic pose, standing reflectively smoking a cigar in the middle of a chaotic dispute – possibly based on a meeting, held on 10 November 1842 and attended by Arnold Ruge, at which the idea of a ‘free university’ was discussed.¹² The second of these was drawn from memory, seemingly in response to Mackay’s request for information in 1892, and is a simple line drawing of Stirner’s head in profile.¹³ The accuracy of these sketches has been questioned, but they are broadly consistent with contemporary descriptions and they are all we have by way of a visual record.¹⁴ Other pictures of Stirner may have existed – for example, it seems that the artist Ludwig Pietsch (1824–1911) agreed to Bruno Bauer’s request to draw Stirner between the latter’s death and burial – but none of these are known to have survived.

Stirner also appeared in one of the young Engel’s contemporary literary efforts. Together with Edgar Bauer, Engels penned a humorous, if overlong, mock epic poem (dating from June–July 1842) which gently parodied the leading Hegelian intellectuals of the day. Stirner appears three times in the narrative, and is characterized as combining restraint in his manners and extremity in his views, quietly reflective in appearance but provoking others with his ideas (not least, about the state). The best-known passage reads:

*Seht Stirner, seht ihn, den bedächt’gen Schrankenhasser,
Für jetzt noch trinkt er Bier, bald trinkt er Blut wie Wasser.
So wie die andern schrein ihr wild: à bas les rois!
Ergänzet Stirner gleich: à bas aussi les lois!*

See *Stirner* too, the thoughtful moderation-hater,
Though still on beer, he’ll soon be drinking blood like water.
And if the others shout a wild: *à bas les rois* [down with the king]!
Stirner is sure to add: *à bas aussi les lois* [down with the laws as well]!¹⁵

Engels was one of the associates of ‘The Free’, and many years later (in October 1889) he was contacted by Max Hildebrand regarding his memories of Stirner. Engels explained that he ‘knew Stirner well’ during the year of 1842 (‘we were on *Du* terms’), and recalled a likeable person with

'a slight suggestion of pedantry', with whom he had discussed Hegelian philosophy a great deal.¹⁶ Stirner was said to have been preoccupied at the time with his 'discovery' that the famous conceptual triad which opens Hegel's *Logic* – of 'being', 'nothing', and 'becoming' – was based on an error.¹⁷

It was probably amongst the periphery of 'The Free' that Stirner met Marie Dähnhardt (1818–1902), who would become his second wife. She was an educated and emancipated woman from a wealthy Lutheran family, in possession of what was (then) a considerable fortune (of at least 10,000 talers, and possibly much more). They were married on 21 October 1843, an occasion which furnished perhaps the most frequently recounted anecdote from Stirner's life. The account varies according to the source, but – emphasizing what I suspect modern readers are liable to view as somewhat self-conscious and modest efforts to *épater la bourgeoisie* – usually includes the distinguished pastor arriving to find some of the small group of guests playing cards, the couple dressed in more or less ordinary clothes, and two brass rings (from Bruno Bauer's purse) having to substitute for the absent wedding rings. The official witnesses to the marriage were Bruno Bauer and Ludwig Buhl.

The marriage does not appear to have been a happy one. Stirner and his second wife separated in April 1846, after only two and a half years together. The causes of the marital breakup are uncertain, although Stirner's role in helping his wife squander her inheritance may have been a factor. Most of her money seems to have been lost on his ill-fated scheme for a milk delivery business in Berlin (the reasons for its failure are disputed, but the speed and finality of its collapse are not), although that failure may have been compounded by an involvement in stock exchange speculation.¹⁸

Marie Schmidt subsequently moved to London (where she would call herself Mary Smith), although she also lived for many years in Australia (travelling there in either 1852 or 1853, and returning to London around 1871). She converted to Catholicism, probably during that interval in Australia, and became increasingly devout in later life. In 1897, Mackay managed to trace her in London, but she declined to meet with him and was reluctant to act as a witness to the life of a man that she had 'never loved or respected'.¹⁹ She did answer (in part) a few written questions, but her unwillingness to elaborate or to be more positive about Stirner (together, it seems, with her religiosity) displeased and frustrated Mackay. She characterized Stirner as a 'very sly' (in English in the original) person who was too selfish to have genuine friends, and she described their own relationship as 'more a living together in the

same house than a marriage'.²⁰ (It is hard not to recall Edgar Bauer's anecdote about Stirner's first marriage.) She made very clear her wish not to enter into any more correspondence on the issue.²¹ Mackay was sufficiently irritated that he made the (editorially unforgivable) suggestion that future editions of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* should omit Stirner's original dedication: 'To my darling Marie Dähnhardt'.²²

All of Stirner's known writings are from a ten or eleven year period, which starts with his involvement in radical intellectual circles in Berlin in the early 1840s. As a body of work it is scarcely extensive, and without *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* Stirner would surely have remained a very minor figure on the margins of Left Hegelianism, of little interest even to specialists. As it is, those other writings attract interest, and gain significance, largely from their role in adumbrating or illuminating his magnum opus.

Stirner's early publications date from 1841, and can be seen as falling into two categories.²³ There is some slight and not especially illuminating journalism, the bulk of it consisting of twenty-seven articles in the *Rheinische Zeitung* between March and October 1842 (at which point Karl Marx took over the editorship) and thirty-three articles in the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* between May and December of the same year.²⁴ The contemporary subjects covered are diverse; they include the freedom of the press, Bruno Bauer's dismissal from the University of Bonn, and the trial for treason and lèse-majesté, of Johann Jacoby (1805–1877). In addition, there are some longer and more independent articles, which are of interest because, and to the extent that, they foreshadow *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. These include *Das unwahre Princip unserer Erziehung* (1842);²⁵ *Kunst und Religion* (1842);²⁶ *Einiges Vorläufige vom Liebesstaat* (1844);²⁷ and a review of (a German translation of) *Les mystères de Paris* (1844), a popular novel by Eugène Sue (1804–1875).²⁸

Edgar Bauer would later locate Stirner's motivation for writing *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, not in ambition – which he maintained the author did not possess – but in 'a hidden imp, which whispered to him that he was more clever than all the critics and believers of his time'.²⁹ It is hard to be too precise about the genesis of the book. Internal evidence might suggest that the basic idea emerged in 1842, with the bulk of the constituent work taking place between the beginning of 1843 and the middle of 1844. Stirner does not seem to have established any close friendships amongst 'The Free', and he gave little away about his life to acquaintances. Nonetheless, he would occasionally claim to be working on a great work, and would even point to the desk where the manuscript was said to be stored. However, since no one had ever seen

the manuscript, it seems that few (if any) believed in its existence before publication.³⁰ *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* was published by Otto Wigand in Leipzig, Saxony. The published volumes were dated 1845, but the book seems to have entered circulation towards the end of October 1844. As a work over twenty 'printers' sheets' (that is, 'signatures' of sixteen pages each) it was free of preliminary censorship. After publication the Leipzig *Kreisdirektion* seized some 250 copies of what was probably a print run of no more than 1000 copies. (The received practice amongst radical publishers was to distribute early copies as speedily as possible, in order to mitigate the impact of any subsequent seizure.) However, the confiscation of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* was soon lifted by the Saxon Ministry of the Interior on the grounds that the book was 'too absurd' to be dangerous.³¹

Der Einzige und sein Eigentum was not a popular success, but it provoked an excited critical reaction, especially from the Left Hegelians who formed one of its central targets. There were significant responses, not least by 'Szeliga' who defended Bauerian critical criticism, by Moses Hess (1812–1875) who defended socialism, and by Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) who defended himself. Stirner replied to these three critics in an interesting article entitled '*Recensenten Stirners*', published in 1845, which illuminates several threads in the original book.³² Stirner would have been unaware of what is, in many ways, the most interesting of the contemporary critical responses, namely, Marx and Engels' extensive discussion of the book in the group of texts that have become known as *Die deutsche Ideologie* and which remained unpublished at the time. In addition, it is not clear whether Stirner was aware of the surprising criticism of his work as *insufficiently* individualistic in *Das Verstandestum und das Individuum*, published in 1846, and written (pseudonymously) by Karl Schmidt (1819–1864).

This is not the place to offer an extensive account of the impact of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, but any such account ought to recognize the longevity and variety of its historical influence. At the time, the book played a clear and decisive role as an impulse to, and reflection of, the collapse of Left Hegelianism as a coherent intellectual movement. It has subsequently been variously portrayed: as a formative influence on the intellectual formation of Marxism (not least, accelerating and shaping Marx's emergence from a period of Feuerbachian enthusiasm); as a founding text of individualist anarchism; as prefiguring the intellectual avant-garde of several subsequent generations (including those of Nietzschean, Existentialist, and Postmodern sensibilities); and as propounding a distinctive critique of modernity.³³

After *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (and his associated replies to critics), Stirner did not stop writing, but his published work seems to have been motivated primarily by financial considerations. He appears to have had little left to say to the world. Between 1845 and 1847 Wigand published translations by Stirner – of Jean Baptiste Say (1767–1832) and Adam Smith (1723–1790) – in a collection of *Die Nationalökonomien der Franzosen und Engländer*. However, the original plan to offer a Stirnerian commentary on these texts was never realized, and the translations were published on their own.³⁴ In 1848, Stirner may also have sought to supplement his finances with some unsigned and unremarkable journalism for the *Journal des österreichischen Lloyd*. Mackay claimed to have identified eight articles on topics including federalism, overpopulation, and the navy.³⁵ And, in 1852, Stirner contributed some slight introductory and connecting material to a two volume *Geschichte der Reaction*, which was mainly composed of excerpts from the writings of others including Edmund Burke (1729–1797), Auguste Comte (1798–1857), and Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg (1802–1869).

After his brief and intense period of literary notoriety, Stirner's life settled down into a pattern dominated by social isolation and financial precariousness. He did not live an eremitical existence, but his personal relationships seem to have been few in number and distant in character. It was said that good cigars were 'the only things dear to him'.³⁶ In 1846, he took out an advertisement in the *Vossische Zeitung* requesting a loan of 600 talers for the author of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (with what success is not known). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the revolutionary year of 1848 seems to have left no significant mark on either his austere domestic routine or his dwindling literary output.

Stirner moved residence several times in the early 1850s, with the intention – it has been suggested – of evading creditors. If that was the reason, the strategy failed to enable him to avoid two short periods of incarceration in a debtors' prison (between 5–26 March 1853, and 31 December 1853–4 February 1854, respectively). It may also have been at this time that Marx heard the unsubstantiated rumour (from an unknown source) that Stirner 'had almost literally starved to death'.³⁷

Stirner eventually found more settled lodgings – with a widow named Weiss on Phillipstrasse – and also came up with an imaginative solution (of sorts) to his financial problems. He initiated a complicated arrangement to sell off the house and land that his mother owned in Kulm (her main inheritance from her second husband) before it became his legal possession. His advance payments from this scheme made the following year or two less financially precarious, although

his lifestyle seems to have remained as materially austere and socially isolated as ever.

Stirner's death was unexpected. He had fallen ill in May 1856, developing a serious 'nervous fever' and a carbuncle on his neck, possibly following a sting from a winged insect. Despite a brief remission, he died on 25 June, aged forty-nine years and eight months. He was buried three days later in the *Sophien-Friedhof II*, in Berlin.³⁸ Bruno Bauer and Ludwig Buhl were among the few mourners in attendance.

The extent and condition of Stirner's *Nachlass* – his notes, manuscripts, correspondence, and so on – is not recorded, but what papers there were at his death seem to have been passed to Ludwig Buhl. They appear to have subsequently disappeared, along with Buhl's own papers following the latter's death in 1880. (They do not form part of the *Stirner-Archiv* collected by Mackay, and discussed further below.)

(iii)

I turn now to the thorny issue of the relationship between the life and work, between Stirner's biography and the singular book with which he is closely identified. What I have to say here is both tentative and sceptical. I want to express some reservations about the tendency to presume a close unity between, on the one hand, the intellectual position outlined and defended in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, and, on the other, the psychology and habits of its author.

The idea that the life and work of an individual philosopher are likely to be related in an illuminating way is an ancient and tempting one. Such a connection seems most plausible where we have some significant information about the individual's life, and where the work in question is concerned with ethical and political issues, broadly understood. Although no amount of information about an author's life could make their arguments better (or worse), it might well enable us to gain, for example, a clearer sense of the intentions behind those arguments, or the spirit in which they are offered. In short, I am not unsympathetic to the general idea that there might be illuminating links between the life and the work of an author.

Moreover, Stirner encourages the idea that there exists an especially close connection between the author and the work in his own individual case. In *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, he not only offers a general defence of egoism, but also explicitly identifies himself as an egoist throughout.³⁹ Interestingly, given the present context, one of these

self-descriptions occurs in his discussion of the structure of 'a human life [*Ein Menschenleben*]'.⁴⁰

Stirner offers an archetype of individual development consisting of progress through three stages: 'childhood' 'youth', and 'adulthood'. He portrays *childhood* as a stage of 'realism', in which the individual is pre-occupied with, and dominated by, 'things'. In particular, the child is initially in thrall to the external forms of parental authority, embodied, for example, in 'the rod' and 'the father's stern look'.⁴¹ This parental domination is slowly undermined by the child's sure instinct for discovering weak points in the world (reflected in their enthusiasm for breaking objects and finding what adults have sought to hide). In particular, the child discovers in their own 'trickery, shrewdness, courage, obduracy' the means to free themselves from parental and other forms of external authority.⁴² This first self-discovery of '*mind*' [*Geist*], liberates the individual from the rule of things, but delivers them, in turn, into a new and more powerful enslavement.⁴³ Stirner portrays *youth* as a stage of 'idealism', in which the individual is preoccupied with, and dominated by, 'ideas, conceptions, *faith*'.⁴⁴ The youth is frightened not by external powers (such as 'the rod' which scares the child), but by the internal master of conscience, the fear that they might themselves do something that is 'unreasonable, un-Christian, unpatriotic', and so on.⁴⁵ The domination of 'ideas' is more complete than the domination of 'things', but can be overthrown by a second self-discovery, namely that individuals are 'corporeal', 'flesh-and-blood', entities with fundamental interests of their own.⁴⁶ Stirner portrays *adulthood* as a stage of 'egoism', in which the individual finally escapes the domination of both 'things' and 'ideas', treating both as they wish, and setting their personal satisfaction above all else. Despite this language, Stirner's concept of egoism is best thought of not in terms of the pursuit of self-interest (as conventionally understood), but rather in terms of the kind of self-mastery that he calls 'ownness [*Eigenheit*]'.⁴⁷ The egoistic ideal of self-mastery has, we might say, both internal and external dimensions; self-owning individuals must avoid not only subjugating their will to that of another person, but also being dragged along by their own appetites.⁴⁸

It is important to realize that these stages – *childhood*, *youth*, and *adulthood* – are developmental rather than chronological in character. They are defined not by an age range, but by a changing relationship between 'self' and 'other'. Stirner explicitly links this archetype to his own life. The egoist is the character type which he admires and identifies with; having learnt the developmental lessons here, he explicitly resolves 'to be the egoist myself'.⁴⁹ The development of others might be

arrested at the stages of 'realism' or 'idealism', but Stirner the 'egoist' refuses to be enslaved either by the demands of other people or by his own appetites.

This authorial conceit – that Stirner's life and work form a close unity – seems open to question. In particular, confirming the veracity of such a self-description surely requires detailed evidence (about psychology and relationships) of the kind that, in this particular case, we simply lack. Stirner was a reserved person who led a solitary life, and left behind little evidence of this kind. Moreover, by the time that anyone showed an interest in collecting it, much of that little evidence had presumably disappeared. The bulk of what was subsequently unearthed looks like a list of the kind of formal elements that accompany, but do not really constitute, a life. (Readers might ask themselves how well I would know them, if what I mainly knew about their lives was the names of relatives, their employment record, the addresses they had lived at, the results of their examinations, and so on.)

And yet this conceit – that Stirner's life and work form a close unity – continues to appear in much of the surrounding literature. Few commentators seem able to resist the romantic idea that Stirner's life is simply the biographical expression of his magnum opus. In what follows, I provide two distinguished examples, both of which identify Stirner's life and work, but, in doing so, give very different accounts of their subject.

John Henry Mackay was initially disappointed at the contours of the life that he had helped unearth. He was committed to the view that Stirner's life and work formed a unity, and since he considered *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* to be a remarkable book – indeed, an 'immortal' work whose consequences would one day rival those of the Bible – he had expected its author's life to be somewhat richer in dramatic episodes and great events.⁵⁰ However, rather than abandon the idea that Stirner's life was 'the clear and simple expression of his final doctrine', he looked around for something other than drama and excitement to form the link.⁵¹ What he came to emphasize was the *necessity* that Stirner had lived out his life 'simply and uneventfully'.⁵² Mackay's argument in support of such a claim is not wholly clear, but the main line of reasoning appeals to what we might call the 'ataraxic' dimension of the egoism which is outlined and defended in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. He interpreted Stirner's life as an authentic embodiment of the emotional detachment that the egoist must cultivate in order to avoid being enslaved by their own passions and commitments. Stirner's lack of friends and his failure to obtain 'honour, wealth, and

power' (as conventionally understood), reflected not a failure to follow his own teachings, but rather the purest embodiment of egoistic self-sufficiency.⁵³ Even the pathos of his (perhaps avoidable) demise is seen to reflect the egoist's consistent refusal to love life or fear death 'excessively'.⁵⁴

There is much that one might say about this account, but in the present context, I venture three critical observations. First, Mackay propounds an implausibly close parallel between Stirner's life and work, insisting, at one point, that given the nature of egoism, Stirner's own life 'could not have been other than it was'.⁵⁵ If this claim is understood to extend to all the details of his life, then it risks absurdity – does anybody really think that Stirner could not have written *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* if he had been a non-smoker, or had been better at avoiding winged insects? Second, even a more plausible account of the harmony between the life and work would need to be demonstrated, and not presumed. Stirner might well have been the living embodiment of an ataraxic life, but I would require more in the way of autobiographical and other appropriate psychological evidence (from outside of his philosophical writings) to be really persuaded of it. Third, it seems that the lack of this kind of evidence – that might, in other cases, be found in correspondence, diaries, the testimony of close friends, and so on – leads Mackay into reversing what I take to be the most familiar 'contextualist' approach to the connections between a life and work. That approach typically uses the former to illuminate the latter.⁵⁶ However, Mackay quietly promotes one thread from the work (emotional detachment) into a complete explanation of the author's life.⁵⁷

R. W. K. Paterson also offers some biographical reflections in *The Nihilistic Egoist. Max Stirner*, a work which was for many years the only book-length treatment of Stirner in English. Paterson not only shared Mackay's assumption that Stirner's life and work formed a unity, but also depended heavily on Mackay's work for the facts about that life. It is perhaps surprising then, that from these shared foundations, Paterson drew such different conclusions. (Sceptically, we might think that these differing conclusions tell us more about the commentators' own enthusiasms and commitments than they do of Stirner's.) Where Mackay saw emotional detachment as providing the unifying thread between life and work, Paterson located that unity primarily in the 'significant personality disorder' from which Stirner is claimed to suffer.⁵⁸ More precisely, Paterson identified 'the self-absorption, the destructiveness, and the negativism' that he saw propounded in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* as merely the 'conceptual expression' of Stirner's disturbed personality

(his lack of 'emotional responsiveness', 'indifference to social approval', failure to form 'close attachments', and so on).⁵⁹

Interestingly, the same critical observations (made about Mackay) appear pertinent here. First, Paterson propounds an implausibly close parallel between the life and the work. Stirner is identified as 'at once the book's author and its subject', and we are informed that Stirner's personality is 'indissolubly fused with the substance and meaning of his philosophy'.⁶⁰ Second, Paterson's assumption that *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* is an authentic expression of its author's character – 'the most complete statement of his identity' – appears to be assumed rather than demonstrated.⁶¹ It might be that Stirner suffered from a significant personality disorder, but again I would require more in the way of autobiographical and other appropriate psychological evidence (from outside of his philosophical writings) to be really persuaded of it; then, and only then, might one begin to think about building a case for the bearing of that psychological evidence on the central doctrines of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. Finally, Paterson also appears to use the work to compensate for the lack of evidence about the life. Indeed, he suggests at one point that – given the closeness of the parallel here – if we were fully to understand the work, then we would, as a result, already know everything essential about its author's life. To understand 'the unique individual' of the book's title would be to 'have deciphered the character of Stirner himself', and in such circumstances 'biographical details' from elsewhere 'would be rendered unnecessary'.⁶²

It is worth noting that some of Stirner's contemporaries were not so certain that his life and work formed such a close unity.⁶³ One of the most suggestive pieces of biographical evidence that we have about Stirner comes from a letter from Edgar Bauer (from which I have already quoted several times) that was passed by Max Hildebrand to Mackay. It forms part of the material sold by Mackay to the Marx-Engels-Institute in Moscow (see below), but happily it was among the manuscripts that Leo Kasarnowski, the secretary of the *Stirner-Archiv*, thought important enough to make copies on the night before the collection was removed. Edgar Bauer had been asked whether Stirner was 'good-intentioned or hardhearted', and his reply explicitly jettisons the conceit that the life and work were two sides of the same coin. Edgar Bauer suggests that, as a person, Stirner failed to fully to live up to the egoism he had propagated as a writer. He portrays Stirner as enough of an egoist to no longer love the 'good', but not enough of an egoist to be comfortable pressing home an advantage over others. The result, we might be tempted to say, involved the worst of both worlds, and made Stirner peculiarly

ill-equipped for the conflicts and pressures of this life. Edgar Bauer concludes that Stirner 'was dulled by a kind of egotistical calculation, but not yet armed with the armour of self-seeking'.⁶⁴ The remark is echoed in the slightly less subtle (but still interesting) observation made by Engels in his parallel response to Hildebrand's queries. Stirner, Engels remarks, 'was a good sort, not nearly as bad as he makes himself out to be in his *Einzig*'.⁶⁵

(iv)

The last section of this chapter is offered in something of the spirit of a postscript. I conclude these remarks on Stirner's life with a brief account of the man whose efforts uncovered most of the biographical information that we have, and of the fate of the material that he collected.

John Henry Mackay was born in Greenock, Scotland, in 1864, to a German mother and Scottish father.⁶⁶ His father died when he was only nineteen months old, and his mother returned to Germany with her son. Generous financial support from his mother (to whom Mackay was devoted) enabled him to pursue his early ambition to be a writer. As a young man he took several courses (in philosophy, art history, and literature) at the universities of Kiel, Leipzig, and Berlin. He also travelled widely. In addition to a formative year spent mixing with radical German exiles in London (1887–1888), Mackay spent time in Zurich, Rome, Paris, and the United States. During his three-month American trip he met Emma Goldman, and also began an important friendship with the anarchist publisher Benjamin R. Tucker (1854–1939).

Mackay's writings include work in a wide variety of forms: poetry, prose, novels, translations, biography, memoirs, and short stories. His growing radicalism found expression in the collection of poems *Sturm* (1888), and a novel entitled *Die Anarchisten. Kulturgemälde aus dem Ende des XIX Jahrhunderts* (1888). He also wrote one of the first sports novels, *Der Schwimmer. Die Geschichte einer Leidenschaft* (1901). A long period of depression followed the death of his mother in 1902, and although Mackay continued to write, his literary reputation is usually identified with his earlier works. An eight volume *Gesammelte Werke* was published in 1911. In addition to a companion piece to *Die Anarchisten* – a second 'book of freedom', entitled *Der Freiheitssucher. Psychologie einer Entwicklung* (1920) – his later writings include works published under the pseudonym 'Sagitta' (from the Latin for 'arrow') as part of his literary campaign in support of the 'nameless love' (of same sex relationships and pederasty), which resulted in the successful prosecution of his publisher.

Mackay first came across Stirner's name in Friedrich Albert Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus* (1866), which he read during his year in London. He subsequently managed to trace a copy of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, and was not only enthralled by its contents, but also puzzled by the dearth of information available about its author and the lack of contemporary interest in his work. He began what became a life-long endeavour to discover more about Stirner's life and work and to rescue both from what he saw as unmerited obscurity. Three successively fuller editions of Mackay's biography of Stirner appeared during his own lifetime (in 1898, 1910, and 1914;⁶⁷ the third 'private edition', in 325 numbered copies, is the most complete and most interesting, not least because it contains various material in facsimile, including the manuscript of '*Kunst und Religion*').⁶⁸ Mackay also published two editions (in 1898 and 1914) of Stirner's *Kleinere Schriften*; a later plan to publish a three volume set – comprising revised editions of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, *Kleinere Schriften*, and his biography, respectively – had to be abandoned. In addition to these publishing projects, Mackay raised funds to commemorate Stirner's life in more public and material ways. Not least, he arranged for a plaque to be placed on Stirner's birth-place and on his last home, and for a new and impressive memorial stone to be laid on Stirner's grave.

It would be a mistake to imagine that Mackay laboured alone; his biographical work benefitted from the tireless help of Max Hildebrand and the scholarly efforts of Gustav Mayer, amongst others. In addition, Mackay's work is not without limitations: for example, his theoretical engagement with Stirner's ideas is limited, and he sometimes allows his sympathy with his subject to distort his judgement. Furthermore, it is not impossible – although, at this distance, some will think it unlikely – that new and significant information about Stirner's life will emerge.⁶⁹ However, in the meantime, the debt of any biographical account to Mackay's original labours should not go unacknowledged. Indeed, that debt is part of a more general one owed to individualist anarchists who, at various times, have helped keep Stirner's work in print and interest in his ideas alive.⁷⁰ It was, for example, individualist anarchists who were responsible for the appearance of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* in English: Steven T. Byington (1868–1957) translated what is a very difficult text;⁷¹ George Schumm (1856–1941) helped copy-edit and proofread it;⁷² and Benjamin R. Tucker not only published the book, but was also responsible for the (distinctive, but less than literal) title under which it first appeared – *The Ego and His Own*.⁷³

Finally, mention should also be made of the fate of the *Stirner-Archiv*, the unique collection of material on Stirner (some 750 items including documents, letters, and books) that Mackay had managed to assemble in the course of his endeavours. Financial considerations, especially following the inflation of 1923, led him to sell the collection in May 1925. After exploring various possibilities (including the British Library, New York Public Library and the Library of Congress), Mackay reluctantly sold the collection to the very place where, in many ways, he thought it least belonged. It was bought by the Marx-Engels-Institute, under the direction of David Riazanov (1870–1938), for \$4000 (a sum which Mackay viewed as well below its real value). The collection sold to the ‘Bolchevists’ (*sic*) did not include the skull of Max Stirner which Mackay was also rumoured to possess, having ‘acquired’ it nefariously during the installation of the new memorial stone on Stirner’s grave.⁷⁴

Notes

1. References to *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* take the form of two page numbers separated by a forward slash. The references are to M. Stirner (1972) *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, ed. Ahlrich Meyer (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam); and M. Stirner (1995) *The Ego and Its Own*, ed. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), respectively.
2. References to Mackay’s biography take the form of two page numbers separated by a forward slash. The references are to J. H. Mackay (1914) *Max Stirner. Sein Leben und sein Werk*, third edition (Berlin: Selbstverlag); and J. H. Mackay (2005) *Max Stirner. His Life and Work*, trans. Hubert Kennedy (Concord, CA: Peremptory Publications), respectively.
3. Friedrich Engels to Max Hildebrand, 22 October 1889, K. Marx and F. Engels (1957–1986) *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Werke* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag) (henceforth *MEW*), volume 37, p. 292; and K. Marx and F. Engels (1975–2005) *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Collected Works* (London and New York: Lawrence & Wishart) (henceforth *MECW*), volume 48, p. 393. See also ‘Letter from Edgar Bauer (duplicate)’, translated by Lawrence S. Stepelevich (1978) *The Philosophical Forum*, 8/2–4, p. 169.
4. Bayreuth was under Prussian rule between 1791 and 1806, and French rule between 1806 and 1810.
5. Kulm was then a Prussian territory, but, following the First World War, was returned to Poland (and renamed Chelmno).
6. See, for example, L. S. Stepelevich (1985) ‘Max Stirner as Hegelian’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 46/4: 597–614; and W. de Ridder (2008) ‘Max Stirner, Hegel, and the Young Hegelians’, *History of European Ideas*, 34/3: 285–297.
7. Even Mackay erroneously gave Stirner the title (and mangled his birth name) when, in 1892, he arranged the first commemorative plaque on the (last) Berlin home of ‘Dr Caspar Schmidt’.
8. ‘Letter from Edgar Bauer (duplicate)’, p. 171.

9. 'Letter from Edgar Bauer (duplicate)', p. 171.
10. Stirner judiciously insisted on its informal character in his published response to some contemporary negative publicity. See his contribution to the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung*, no. 190, 9 July 1842, in M. Stirner (1914) *Kleinere Schriften und seine Entgegnungen auf die Kritik seines Werkes 'Der Einzige und sein Eigentum'* (Berlin: Bernhard Zack), pp. 129–131.
11. See Engels to Hildebrand, 22 October 1889, *MEW*, volume 37, p. 292; and *MECW*, volume 48, p. 393.
12. This drawing is reproduced in *Der Einzige* /p. xxi. (English edition only.)
13. This drawing is reproduced in *Der Einzige* /p. xvi. (English edition only.)
14. Mackay also (without success) sought access to the manuscript containing Marx and Engels' discussion of Stirner, from the collection of texts usually called *Die deutsche Ideologie*. See Friedrich Engels to Antonio Labriola, 27 February 1891, *MEW*, volume 38, p. 42; and *MECW*, volume 49, p. 136.
15. *Der Triumph des Glaubens*, *MEW*, *Ergänzungsband* 2, p.301; *MECW*, volume 2, p. 336.
16. See Engels to Hildebrand, 22 October 1889, *MEW*, volume 37, pp. 292–293; and *MECW*, volume 48, p. 394.
17. See Engels to Hildebrand, 22 October 1889, *MEW*, volume 37, pp. 292–293; and *MECW*, volume 48, p. 394.
18. Marie Dähnhardt also lent money to Bruno Bauer (to help him pay off various debts), but he seems to have repaid her, albeit over a lengthy period.
19. Mackay, *Max Stirner* 11/11.
20. Mackay, *Max Stirner* 12/12 and 181/181.
21. See the 'last word' published as 'Appendix G' in Mackay, *Max Stirner* 228/- (only the German edition has the appendices.)
22. Mackay, *Max Stirner* 13/13.
23. Mackay thought that his earliest published work dated from 1842, but Stirner has more recently been identified as the author of a review of Theodor Rohmer, *Deutschlands Beruf in der Gegenwart und Zukunft* (Zurich: Verlag des literarischen Comptoirs, 1841), which appeared in *Die Eisenbahn. Ein Unterhaltungsblatt für die gebildete Welt*, 77/78 (28/30 December 1841), pp. 307–308, 310–312.
24. See Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften*, pp. 51–96, and 97–232, respectively.
25. See Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften*, pp. 237–257. There is an English translation by Robert H. Beebe published as Max Stirner, *The False Principle of Our Education*, edited by James J. Martin (Colorado Springs, CO: Ralph Myles, 1967).
26. See Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften*, pp. 258–268. There is an English translation by Lawrence S. Stepelevich in Lawrence S. Stepelevich (ed.), *The Young Hegelians. An Anthology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 327, 334.
27. See Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften*, pp. 269–277.
28. See Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften*, pp. 278–295. *Les mystères de Paris* was an enormously popular contemporary novel which combined moralistic social fantasy with a salacious account of the Parisian underworld. Its main character, a mysterious Prince Rudolf, travels the margins of Paris in disguise, punishing evil and rewarding virtue. Rudolf's willingness to torture his victims is discussed by Stirner in *Der Einzige*, 324–325/258.

29. 'Letter from Edgar Bauer (duplicate)', p. 170.
30. 'Letter from Edgar Bauer (duplicate)', p. 170.
31. Mackay, *Max Stirner*, 127/127.
32. See Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften*, pp. 343–396. The Feuerbach sections of Stirner's reply have been translated by Frederick M. Gordon in 'Stirner's Critics', *The Philosophical Forum*, 8/2-4 (1978) pp. 66–80. 'Szeliga' was the pseudonym adopted by the Prussian officer, and sometime Left Hegelian, Franz Zychlin von Zychlinsky (1816–1900). In 1847, Stirner *may* also have replied (using the surprising pseudonym of 'G. Edward') to the criticisms of Kuno Fischer (1824–1907). See 'Die modernen Sophisten. Von Kuno Fischer' in Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften*, pp. 401–415.
33. I have discussed Stirner's relation to anarchism in David Leopold (2006) 'The State and I: Max Stirner's Anarchism' in D. Moggach (ed.), *The New Hegelians. Politics and Philosophy in the Hegelian School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 176–199.
34. The collection also included translations (not by Stirner) of the work of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865).
35. See *Kleinere Schriften*, pp. 301–336.
36. 'Letter from Edgar Bauer (duplicate)', p. 171.
37. Reported in Engels to Hildebrand, 22 October 1889, *MEW*, volume 37, p. 293; and *MECW*, volume 48, p. 394.
38. Stirner's grave is located at V-8-53.
39. See, for example, *Der Einzige* 5/6.
40. See *Der Einzige* pp. 9-15/13–18.
41. *Der Einzige* 10/14.
42. *Der Einzige* 10/14.
43. *Der Einzige* 10/14.
44. *Der Einzige* 12/15.
45. *Der Einzige* 11/15. Revealingly, Stirner describes the period when the child cares nothing for reason, cannot be persuaded by arguments, and has no settled convictions, as the 'fairest part of childhood'. *Der Einzige* 10/14.
46. *Der Einzige* 13–14/16–17.
47. *Der Einzige* 187/153. This reading of Stirner's notion of egoism is defended at greater length in Leopold, 'The State and I', pp. 182–185, and Leopold, 'Introduction', *Der Einzige* /xxiii–xxv.
48. See, for example, *Der Einzige* 64/56.
49. *Der Einzige* 5/6.
50. Mackay, *Max Stirner* 6/6 and 177/177.
51. Mackay, *Max Stirner* 6/6.
52. Mackay, *Max Stirner* 6/6.
53. Mackay, *Max Stirner* 212/212.
54. Mackay, *Max Stirner* 212/212.
55. Mackay, *Max Stirner* 6/6.
56. To give a non-Stirnerian example, it has been argued that locating Hegel's life in the religious and political culture of Württemberg provides guidance as to the character and role of the concept of 'ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*]' in his thought. See L. Dickey (1987) *Hegel. Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit, 1770–1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

57. Of course, the work might sometimes illuminate the life – most obviously, in the case of clearly autobiographical texts.
58. R.W.K. Paterson (1971) *The Nihilistic Egoist. Max Stirner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for University of Hull), p. 17.
59. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist*, p. 18.
60. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist*, p. x. Paterson insists that the concept of 'ownness' is to be understood as 'the self-love and self-assertion of the particular human being who was Max Stirner'. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist*, p. x.
61. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist*, p. 19.
62. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist*, p. 19.
63. I do not mean simply to endorse this alternative interpretation. My considered view is that demonstrating *any* substantive account of the relation between the intellectual position outlined and defended in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, on the one hand, and the psychology and relationships of its author, on the other, would require us to know more about Stirner's life than we currently do.
64. 'Letter from Edgar Bauer (duplicate)', p. 170.
65. Engels to Hildebrand, 22 October 1889, *MEW*, volume 37, p. 292; and *MECW*, volume 48, p. 393.
66. On Mackay, see T.A. Riley (1972) *Germany's Poet-Anarchist John Henry Mackay. A Contribution to the History of German Literature, 1880–1920* (New York: Revisionist Press); K.H.Z. Solneman (pseudonym of Kurt Helmut Zube) (1979) *Der Bahnbrecher John Henry Mackay: Sein Leben und sein Werke* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag der Mackay-Gesellschaft); and H. Kennedy (2002) *Anarchist of Love. The Secret Life of John Henry Mackay*, revised and expanded edition (San Francisco, CA: Peremptory Publications).
67. What became the second German edition of the biography was to have provided the textual basis for what was intended to be the first English edition in a translation by George Schumm. However, that translation (although not Mackay's original German text) was one of the many casualties of the fire that destroyed Benjamin Tucker's offices in New York in January 1908, ending his publishing career of some thirty years.
68. A reprint of this third edition was published by the Mackay-Gesellschaft in 1977.
69. It might be hoped that additional and unfamiliar Stirner material will eventually emerge from the Soviet archives (see below).
70. The relation of Stirner's thought to the writings of Benjamin R. Tucker, James L. Walker, and Dora Marsden, respectively, is discussed in J. F. Welsh (2010) *Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism. A New Interpretation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books), chapters 4–6.
71. Steven T. Byington was a teacher, linguist, and contributor to *Liberty*. His translations include *The Bible in Living English* which was published posthumously by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.
72. George Schumm was a compositor, printer, and assistant to Tucker. In addition to helping to copy-edit and proofread the Byington translation, Schumm translated Mackay's *Die Anarchisten*. See P. Avrich (2005) *Anarchist Voices. An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Oakland, CA: AK Press), pp. 11–13.

73. A more literal translation of the title would be *The Unique Individual and His Property*. Benjamin R. Tucker was the editor of the individualist anarchist periodical *Liberty* between 1881 and 1908, and author of the wonderfully titled *Instead of a Book, By a Man Too Busy to Write One* (New York: Benj. R. Tucker, 1893). On Tucker, see Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, pp. 8–11; and P. Avrich (1988) *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), chapter 10. On *Liberty*, see F. H. Brooks (1994) *The Individualist Anarchists: An Anthology of Liberty (1891–1908)* (New York: Transaction Publishers).
74. The skull may have been sold earlier to an unknown private collector. See F. Dobe (1987) *John Henry Mackay als Mensch* (Koblenz: Edition Plato), p. 82, and the letter from Mackay to Tucker, 28 August 1925, in J. H. Mackay (2002) *Dear Tucker. The Letters from John Henry Mackay to Benjamin R. Tucker*, edited and translated by Hubert Kennedy (San Francisco, CA: Peremptory Press), p. 214.

2

The Mirror of Anarchy: The Egoism of John Henry Mackay and Dora Marsden

Ruth Kinna

Introduction

Stirner occupies a curious place in the history of anarchist ideas. Although he has been identified as a central figure in histories of anarchist thought, he is probably the least celebrated of the nineteenth-century thinkers. Disquiet about Stirner's place in the canon was apparent as early as the 1880s and 1890s, the period of Stirner's revival. Although important figures like Max Nettlau attempted to negotiate the differences between individualists and communists, Kropotkin and Malatesta both advanced strong criticisms of growing egoist trends.¹ Even writers who admired Nietzsche, with whom Stirner's work was frequently associated in anarchist circles, were prone to attack Stirner. In a review for *Mother Earth*, Max Baginski dismissed the celebration of his work as a 'harmless bourgeois cult' and compared it unfavourably to Nietzsche's.² It is perhaps symbolic of the awkwardness anarchists felt about Stirner's contribution that no drawing of him appeared on the cover of the Freedom edition of Paul Eltzbacher's study of the seven sages: uniquely, his name is set in the frame of a blank box.

As the black sheep of anarchism, Stirner has sometimes been used as a cipher in ideological polemics. He remains a favourite subject of anti-anarchist critique, still used by Marxists to illustrate the destructive individualism said to lie at the heart of anarchist thought.³ Voices aligned to class-struggle anarchism have similarly recruited Stirner in their battle to drive a wedge between anarcho-communist and individualist positions. In his defence of platformism, Alexandre Skirda links egoism to illegalism with some justification, but also – and less justifiably – to intellectual bankruptcy and personal and strategic failure.⁴ Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt argue that Stirner was

anti-socialist and anti-revolutionary. They place him outside the 'broad anarchist tradition'.⁵ Contemporary scholars who have given sustained attention to Stirner's political thought have been kinder to him. Nevertheless, Stirner continues to be used to as a mirror to reflect the shortcomings of anarchism. Saul Newman's analysis of Stirner appears, at least in part, to have been driven by a desire to illustrate the shortcomings of anarchism: rather than raising a critique of Stirner's work to reflect on anarchism, he instead mounts a defence.

The strangeness of the place Stirner occupies as the reprobate architect of anarchist thought is matched by the consensus about his individualism. Interestingly, since he defends Stirner, Newman sketches the grounds of class-struggle anarchist concerns when he comments on Stirner's 'extreme individualism and egoism'. This extremism, he argues, amounted to a tendency to treat any 'collective identity' as 'an oppressive burden'. Stirner talked about the 'Unity of Egos', but Newman hints that his politics might be 'limited to individual rebellion'.⁶ Some scholars have suggested that such assessments of Stirner are mistaken and that they stem from a fundamental misunderstanding of nineteenth-century traditions. Allan Antliff's work on modernism shows that the creative impulse that Newman associates with Stirnerite autonomy had a central place in anarcho-communist thought and that ideas now attributed to Stirner were common currency in early twentieth-century anarchist movements and well embedded in so-called classical traditions.⁷ Antliff's fire is directed towards Newman, but, insofar as it identifies a misrepresentation, it has equal application to anti-individualist critiques.

The correspondence of Newman's critical assessment of egoism with anti-individualist class-struggle anarchism is puzzling and, as Antliff's work indicates, points to the possibility of an interrelationship between communist and individualist traditions that both parties to the debate are keen to resist. In order to consider this possibility, and the parameters of the individualist-communist divide, I follow Newman in treating Stirnerism as a mirror by which to reflect on anarchism. However, whereas Newman presents an analysis of Stirner's work to abstract a critique of anarchism, I develop a model of Stirnerism from late nineteenth and early twentieth-century sources and show how an egoist critique reflects on this model. The picture of Stirnerism it paints is quite different from the one Newman finds, and more porous to the sorts of exchanges Antliff identifies. The paper begins with an account of Newman's defence and then proceeds to a discussion of J. H. Mackay and Dora Marsden.

Newman: Stirner and anarchism

The idea which emerges most forcefully from Saul Newman's defence of Stirner is that of 'difference'. Stirner's work, he argues, attacked the liberal idea that 'every kind of particularity and difference must be overcome'.⁸ Stirner showed that liberalism involves the 'progressive "taming" of the individual – a restriction of his difference and singularity'.⁹ He argued, rightly, that 'individuals who deviate from the accepted moral and rational norms of liberalism are excluded from the liberal polity'. Even worse, in liberalism 'the individual himself is split between an identification with liberal subjectivity, and a recognition of those elements of himself which do not or cannot confirm to this ideal'.¹⁰ Individuals are expected to 'conform to a certain rational mode of freedom', based on 'a false universality and neutrality which masks its complicity with power'.¹¹

Freedom and autonomy are conditional upon the individual conforming to an abstract generality, therefore denying his difference and individuality. Those who do not or cannot live up to this ideal are excluded, marginalized and subjected to a whole series of regulatory, judicial, medical and disciplinary procedures which have as their aim the normalization of the individual. Stirner may therefore be seen as a crucial link in the post-Enlightenment and poststructuralist critique of liberalism – particularly his questioning of the conditions under which the liberal subject is constituted.¹²

Whilst the thrust of Stirner's critique seems to be anti-liberal, Newman finds its normative promise in what he calls its 'hyper-liberalism'. Stirner's response to restrictive liberalism was to explode its boundaries. He saw individuality as 'a radical *excess*... something that spills over its edges and jeopardizes [liberalism's] limits'.¹³ It was up to each individual, therefore, to 'go beyond the formal freedoms of liberalism and invent his own forms of autonomy'. Liberals, Newman argues, must acknowledge that rights and freedoms are not founded on 'some universal, essential subjectivity, but on a series of arbitrary exclusions, discursive constructions and strategies of power'.¹⁴ They must, then, abandon the search for 'a universal epistemological standpoint – to find the best form of life from which others can be judged'. Newman's attack is directed against Rawlsians and it leads him to embrace John Gray's '*agonistic* liberalism'. Rather than 'search for a rational consensus about the "best life"', he argues, we should recognize the 'incommensurability

of different perspectives in modern society'.¹⁵ This form of radical pluralism acknowledges the 'irreducibility of difference' and the establishment of 'a *modus vivendi* between competing forms of life'.¹⁶ In a practical sense, it does not lead to an abandonment of formal rights and freedoms, but to their extension to groups and identities that liberalism – in the name of universality – currently excludes.

Whilst Newman uses this analysis of Stirner to attack Rawlsian liberalism, the critique is also relevant to traditional forms of socialism, including anarchism. The argument rests on Stirner's characterization of enlightenment thinking which, as Newman acknowledges, emerges through his critique of Feuerbach. To show how Stirner breaks with the tradition of enlightenment Humanism, he outlines three movements of a *counter-dialectic* presented in Stirner's classic work, *The Ego and Its Own*.¹⁷ The first phase is marked by the emergence of 'political liberalism' and the claim for formal equality of rights. For Stirner, Newman argues, this involves the construction of a 'general anonymous political identity ... the *citizen*' – and, rather than giving individuals autonomy from the state, it binds them to it.¹⁸ The second movement, 'social liberalism', demands the extension of political rights to the social and economic sphere, and is associated with the socialist demand for the abolition of property rights. Newman argues that 'behind this discourse of social and economic equality for all, there is a pernicious and hidden resentment of individual difference'.¹⁹ On Stirner's account, social liberalism is only a demand for levelling.²⁰ The final phase of the dialectic – 'humane liberalism' – overcomes the contradiction between the drive for autonomy that Stirner locates in property or 'ownness' and the demand for economic equality by imposing a duty to subordinate self-interest to the common good. The goal of the humane liberal is to achieve a 'state of perfection and harmony', and the cost is that all individual differences are finally transcended.²¹

Even though it rejected the state, Newman argues that anarchism was fully immersed in this humane enlightenment tradition. Instead of thinking of individuals as right-bearers, anarchists cast them as essentially rational and sociable. These essential characteristics encouraged the anarchists to parallel Stirner's counter-dialectic with a utopian vision framed by a rejection of liberalism. Taking issue with the claims advanced by political liberals about the citizen, the anarchists argued that freedom lay in state's abolition. Yet, accepting the humane liberal position, anarchists argued that the condition for this liberation lay in the achievement of social and economic equality and in the return of humanity to its essence. Where political liberals saw the ethical state as

the vehicle through which the tensions between individual and society could be resolved, the anarchists identified the social, cultural, religious and economic inequalities that the state upheld as the cause of artificial divisions between naturally co-operative social beings. The conditions for harmony were entirely opposite, but the ideal was the same. Anarchists and liberals shared a singular conception of humankind and both were equally intolerant of individual difference.

Newman's argument has been powerfully persuasive, but, as Antliff argues, the claim that the critique accurately captures a dominant anarchist view is dubious. In distancing themselves from egoism, oppositional anarchists did not thereby endorse the positions Stirner associated with enlightenment humanism. Indeed, it is not even clear that the terms of debate were framed in the way that Newman suggests. To consider how they were framed, I turn to the work of two of Stirner's leading advocates, John Henry Mackay and Dora Marsden.

Stirnerism at the turn of the twentieth century

John Henry Mackay (1864–1933) and Dora Marsden (1882–1960) are both excellent guides to turn-of-the-century Stirnerism. Mackay was a writer and poet who actively campaigned for homosexual rights and the abolition of the age of consent. Using the pseudonym 'Sagitta' he wrote a number of books to encourage acceptance of inter-generational sex or 'man-boy love'. Of these, *The Hustler* was the most clearly propagandistic, and was written from an overtly anarchist perspective.²² However, he is probably better known as the author of *The Anarchists*, a fictionalized account of his experiences in the London anarchist movement in 1887–8. This book was written before Mackay became acquainted with Stirner's writings, but its success helped seal his reputation as a leading interpreter of Stirner's thought. Subsequently recognizing the coincidence of their views, Mackay became a keen advocate of Stirner's work and set about collecting his papers. When Richard Strauss first thought about setting some of Mackay's poetry to music in the 1890s, he described him as the 'great anarchist and biographer of the Berlin philosopher Max Stirner'.²³ Kropotkin also credited him with bringing Stirner into prominence,²⁴ a claim Mackay endorsed: 'What would one know today of Max Stirner and his life without me?' he asked. His answer: "Nothing!"²⁵

Like Mackay, Dora Marsden had already moved toward egoism before she read Stirner, and it was a measure of her respect for his ideas that she declined to label herself a follower. 'If the beer bears a resemblance

in flavour to other brands' she argued, 'it is due to the similarity of taste in the makers'.²⁶ Marsden's egoism did not attract such a wide audience as Mackay's, but as a former member of the Women's Social and Political Union who had broken ranks with the Pankhursts in 1911, Marsden established her reputation by engaging in a series of 'daredevil acts of militancy' – which included 'throwing balls labelled "bomb" through the windows of political meetings'.²⁷ And, as the editor of *The Freewoman*, *New Freewoman* and *The Egoist*, she communicated a rich diet of Stirnerite ideas to cultural and literary avant-gardes on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to activists like Edward Carpenter and Guy Aldred, contributors to the journals included Rebecca West, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence and Ezra Pound. A very public dispute with Benjamin Tucker helped establish the authoritativeness of her voice, and in *The Egoist* she not only exposed the gulf between her Stirnerism and the Proudhonian version to which Tucker subscribed, she also developed a clear, if biting, generalized critique of anarchism.

John Mackay regarded himself as an anarchist and, in common with a number of individualists active in the late nineteenth-century, he argued that anarchism was a necessarily individualist doctrine which was incompatible with communist ideas. The account he gave of the two doctrines indicates his sense of their irreconcilability. Anarchy, he argued, meant the abolition of the state, of artificial boundaries, the bureaucracy, the military and the judiciary; it meant the freedom of individuals to determine and pursue their own interests, consistent with the equal liberty of all. In anarchy, individuals would be free to live their private lives as they saw fit and to experiment without limit. Anarchy also spelt the end of technical languages – in diplomacy, finance and medicine – and signalled openness in communication and the development of free schools. In economics, it was based on the abolition of monopoly, and, instead, the free exchange of goods and ideas and open access to all natural resources. In anarchy, individuals would receive the full value of their labour and were free to fix its price. Work would be the only source of value, and the best goods would be offered for sale at the lowest possible price. Because it was just, Mackay argued, anarchy promised the disappearance of crime and poverty.

Communism was the negation of all this. Mackay associated it with the subordination of private interests to the public good, the regimentation of public services (economic planning and the direction of labour, the nationalization of industry) as well as the regulation of family life, including marriage and reproduction. It offered no scope for freedom of expression or artistic licence, and instead required that science, art

and learning be governed to satisfy the interests of the state. In *The Anarchists*, he linked communism with the doctrines of equality first elaborated by Babeuf.²⁸ It was not surprising, then, that he echoed Proudhon's description of government to characterize communism as a system of surveillance, examination, spying and control. Communists pictured communism as heaven on earth, but in reality it meant only boredom, restriction and dull uniformity.²⁹

One of Mackay's chief worries about communism was that it entailed the close monitoring of private life. As Kennedy notes, it would be 'simplistic to suppose that Mackay's realization that his sexual orientation was irreconcilable with modern society led him to advocate anarchism', but his homosexuality and his promotion of man-boy love influenced his politics, nonetheless.³⁰ Thomas Riley, Mackay's biographer, argues that Mackay's attraction to Stirner was forged by his sense of the brutality of life (he described old age as 'an undignified struggle for every next day without the prospect for improvement')³¹ – a feeling reinforced by the hardship of being a social outcast and sexual outlaw.³² The complexity of his identity overlapped with anarchism in two particular ways. On the one hand, his active campaigning for emancipation made him acutely aware of the social tensions of personal freedom. These tensions, he concluded, could only be mitigated, not resolved. "'Life itself will find a solution'", he said.³³ Whatever the costs, it was better that disputes were left to the process of living than given to the judgements of particular individuals, since the latter could never act flexibly and would always fix the boundaries of acceptable behaviour in repressive codes. On the other hand, Mackay's sense of disadvantage encouraged him to conceptualize freedom in terms of a human capacity to love or to realize what he called 'destiny'.

Mackay's ideal was free love: the 'freedom to "unite in love with any other being to whom he is drawn, if he finds mutual love there, and be allowed to separate from this being at any time, when the attraction no longer exists"'.³⁴ His understanding of this arrangement was not contractual in a narrowly legalistic sense, though free love was based on explicit consent. Love, as Riley notes, meant for Mackay 'the right to satisfy his love longings, and to give love where it was needed (as he felt)'.³⁵ In later life Mackay argued: 'Each strives constantly, uniquely, and alone for his *own* happiness (and then all the more if he believes to find it "in others")'.³⁶ This idea of love's drives left space for irrationality, emotional enslavement and exploitation. Mackay depicted precisely this condition in *The Hustler*, describing the torture that the lovelorn hero, Herman, experiences as a result of Gunther's juvenile, uncaring

instrumentalism and, ultimately, Gunther's psychological destruction at the point of the relationship's demise. The priority Mackay assigned to love resonated with Oscar Wilde's idea of personality: both argued that individuals should have the latitude to 'be themselves'.³⁷ Yet, whereas Wilde linked personality to inner peace, using Christ as his model, Mackay associated it with risk and tied its expression to boldness, courage and assertion. He probed this idea in the conclusion to *The Hustler*, when Hermann attempts to come to terms with the collapse of his affair with the teenager and rises above the public shame of his conviction for indecent assault. The female relative who lends him her support tells Hermann that pederasty 'is your destiny ... Neither oppose it, nor bow down under it. Neither will help you to the only happiness that there is for you. Make a peace treaty with it, and direct it. Then you will conquer it and only in that way'.³⁸ She continues: 'Let it be light – your love ... And do not question! ... Since it stands outside of all laws and morals of peoples, it is freer and – perhaps also more beautiful for it'.³⁹

The critique of anarcho-communism that Mackay presented in *The Anarchists* was not a crude attempt to brush it with the tar of communist repression. Nevertheless, the conclusions he drew from his experiences in London led him to believe that anarcho-communist doctrines would inevitably result in the creation of a repressive and oppressive statist system. Anarcho-communists were not disingenuous, they were deluded, and to show the dangers of the doctrines they espoused Mackay set out to expose their utopianism.

Mackay presented his analysis through two main characters: Conrad Auban and Otto Trupp. Meeting up in London, these former comrades discover that their views have drifted apart: Auban has adopted an individualist position whilst Trupp remains mired in communism. Mackay identified Trupp's view as Bakuninist, but he also associated anarcho-communist utopianism with Kropotkin and William Morris. Although he was sensitive to the differences between them, he argued that they shared a trust in abstract thought and a yearning for ideal community. For example, Bakunin was a romantic idealist. The 'shapeless structure of a general philosophy ... shimmering with promise' underpinned his 'ideal of brotherly love', and it wrongly led him to the conviction that the reality matched with 'sufficient clearness what he aspires after'.⁴⁰ Kropotkin 'had attempted to lay down the "scientific foundations" of his ideal' and, unable to see the 'delusive faith' he placed in them, was also unable to foresee the 'evil harvest of despotism, confusion and ... intense misery' they would reap.⁴¹ Morris spoke as a poet rather

than a scientist, and his communism was built on hope: “How beautiful it would be if it could be so – how everything would be dissolved in harmony and peace’”. Auban believed such hope ran against reason and called it ‘something evil’.⁴² Thinking through him, Mackay summed up Morris’s ‘picture of the free society’ as being as ‘enticingly and delusively’ fictional as Bakunin’s or Kropotkin’s.⁴³ None of them were able to grasp reality, and all of them consequently believed that the elaborate fiction of harmony and fellowship they identified with anarchy was not only possible, but that it ought to be put into practice. This is the charge that Auban puts to Trupp:

...you have forced an ideal of a future of happiness which corresponds most nearly to your own inclinations, wishes, habits. By naming it ‘the ideal of humanity’ you are convinced that every ‘real and true man’ must be just as happy under it as you. You would fain make your ideal the idea of all I on the contrary, want liberty which will enable each to live according to his ideas. I want to be let alone, I want to be spared from any demands that may be made in the name of ‘the ideal of humanity’.⁴⁴

Mackay identified the principle of community that lay at the heart of communism as a religious idea: it demanded faith in the possibility of a future transformation – akin to the promise of life after death; obedience to those who were able to picture the vision of earthly paradise; and, above all, a duty to sacrifice all in the pursuit of the cause.⁴⁵ Nechaev was the archetypal communist revolutionary and Trupp was made in his mould. Mackay described Trupp as someone who had learned ‘by heart, those mad eleven principles “concerning the duties of the revolutionist to himself and to his fellow-revolutionists,” which begins with the frightful worlds of the greatest illiberality: “The revolutionist is a self-immolated person ...”’.⁴⁶ Like Nechaev, Trupp is a ‘fanatic of fantasy’⁴⁷ who extols terrorism as a means of revolutionary struggle because he believes that the particular sacrifices it demands are the noblest test of revolutionary commitment. His conviction points to a separation of the means and ends of revolutionary struggle which Mackay regarded as self-defeating. ‘[T]hese people’, Auban declares ‘make a point of excelling each other in sacrifices and of seeking their pride not in victory, but in defeat! Sacrifice upon sacrifice!’⁴⁸ Yet Mackay did not identify the flaw of communist-anarchism in its utilitarianism alone. Anarchist-communist religiosity had an emotional dimension: Trupp and his ilk were sentimentalists who pitied

the needy and oppressed.⁴⁹ This theme also emerged in *The Hustler*: Mackay described Herman's pity for Gunther's impoverishment as 'that most dangerous of all matchmakers of love'.⁵⁰ Just as Herman's sentiments confuse him, blinding him to the physical basis of his attraction, in *The Anarchists* Trupp's sense of injustice leads him to believe, wrongly, that his duty is to others, rather than to himself. He thinks that he is responsible for delivering the downtrodden from their misery. As Mackay puts it: Trupp 'had lost himself more and more in the generality of mankind ... had placed himself at the service of his cause and felt as belonging to it in life and in death'.⁵¹ Trupp's compassion is a measure of the degree to which he has become a slave to his fantastic ideal, and whilst it leads him to justify the most outrageous violence and to give himself up in service to the oppressed, Auban is more disturbed to see that his pity justifies the imposition of similar obligations on others. For Mackay this position was untenable, and he illustrated the perversity of Trupp's thinking in a discussion of the Haymarket martyrs, where his subservience to the cause leads him to support the judicial murder of the convicted men and to reject their petition for a pardon as treachery.⁵² Shortly after this episode, Auban tells Trupp:

Continue to throw your bombs, and continue to suffer hanging for it, if you will never grow wise. I am the last to deny the suicide the right of destroying himself. But you *preach* your policy as a duty toward mankind, while you do not exemplify it in your lives. It is that against which I protest. You assume a tremendous responsibility: the responsibility for the life of others.⁵³

In the end, Mackay argued, the contradictions of the anarchist-communist position were impossible for any human to bear. For all his revolutionary zeal, Trupp calls on others to fulfil the duty that he believes to be incumbent on him because he cannot tolerate the harms that his cause requires him to commit. His compassion and pity were real, but they lead him to lose touch with his sense of justice. He goes mad. Auban observes:

Fiery, enthusiastic, devoted, he lived only for the cause. He could have given his life for it, and he found no other way than that of a 'deed'. He had been influenced by passionate speeches and inspiring promises. But his nature shrank from violence and bloodshed, revolted. And in the long struggle between what seemed to him as his holiest

duty and that nature which made its fulfilment an impossibility, his mind gave way.⁵⁴

Whilst Mackay dedicated *The Anarchists* to his friend Benjamin Tucker, and believed that there was an affinity between his egoism and Tucker's individualism, Dora Marsden elaborated her ideas precisely in order to distinguish her position from Tucker's. Marsden's argument with Tucker erupted some thirty years after Mackay outlined his critique of anarcho-communism, and it coincided with the appearance of the London edition of *The Ego and Its Own* in 1912. The row was provoked by an article Tucker published about Proudhon and the role that contract might play in a future anarchist society. Under Stirner's influence, Tucker had abandoned his theoretical commitment to natural rights, thrown out all notion of 'duty' and adopted, in its place, a theory of social convention.⁵⁵ Yet, prompted by the distortion of Proudhon's work at the hands of Leon Daudet and the French neo-royalists of the Cercle Proudhon, Tucker was keen to show that Proudhon's critique of Rousseau's social contract was not tantamount to the rejection of contract – certainly not in favour of monarchic oaths of allegiance.⁵⁶ In this, he argued that there was indeed a role for the contract and quoted approvingly from Proudhon's *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*:

The law is clear, the sanction still more so. Three articles, which make but one – that is the whole social contract. Instead of making oath to God and his prince, the citizen swears upon his conscience, before his brothers, and before Humanity. Between these two oaths there is the same difference as between slavery and liberty, faith and science, courts and justice, usury and labour, government and economy, non-existence and being, God and man.⁵⁷

Endorsing Proudhon's argument, Tucker added the following rider:

Leaving out the words 'good,' 'wicked,' 'brute,' and 'Humanity,' which are mere surplusage here, this extract, I think, would have been acceptable even to Max Stirner as a charter for his 'Union of the Free', – an appreciation of the importance of which is necessary to a complete appreciation of Stirner's political philosophy. If Miss Marsden knows of any idea originating in America, or developed there, of greater moment or larger dimensions than that presented in this page from France, she will do me a very great service in pointing it out.⁵⁸

Tucker's invitation only attracted Marsden's scorn. She replied:

When therefore Mr. Benj. R. Tucker challenges us...to find him an idea born in America bigger than Proudhon's outlined Social Contract, we are inclined to give it up. It is a thing difficult to accomplish...It is, in fact, a very dragon, big and very impossible in everything except words. If we outlined a scheme for building a block of flats as high as St. Paul's with lily-stalks for materials, and carefully went into the joys of living therein, and assessed the penalty for occupants who damaged the joinery, may we say, we should consider we were doing something very similar to that which Proudhon does in outlining the social contract. It need not be asserted in the pages of *THE NEW FREEWOMAN* that we consider Proudhon was a blazing light in a dark age, but the passage quoted by Mr. Tucker, we think, shows him at his worst.⁵⁹

Marsden's comments are sometimes interpreted as a straightforward rejection of contract.⁶⁰ However, although she believed that contracts were only made to be broken, (in *The Egoist* she argued that 'it is as natural to make contacts...as it is for men to laugh, talk and sigh or dogs to bark'), her position was more nuanced.⁶¹ In part, as Tucker realized, her concern was not with the substance of Proudhon's claim but the form of its expression. To be seduced, as Tucker had been, by 'the theatricality of Proudhon's style', 'with its faked matter and pompous manner...[o]ne would have to imagine oneself Cromwell refusing the crown', she mocked.⁶² In the other part, Marsden questioned the assumptions that underpinned Proudhon's position. The reference to 'lily-stalks', she explained, was designed to point out the fiction of his conception of human nature. The 'kind of people he describes never walked on earth:...they were unreal: figures with no genuine insides, stuffed out with tracts from the Church of Humanity and the Ethical Society'.⁶³

Both aspects of Marden's critique were central to her rejection of anarchism and explained her willingness to accept Tucker's designation of her view as 'archist'. She generalized it by advancing two principle claims. The first was that anarchists failed to acknowledge the partiality of their politics. Anarchism was merely an 'interest' and, like all others, it was locked in a competitive struggle for power. Its success hinged on the anarchists' ability to excite popular passions, to lure and encourage others to 'desert their own greyer interests' for the 'throb, the colour, the vividness' of the alternative.⁶⁴ This attack was similar to Mackay's, but whereas he pinpointed the particular dangers of

anarchist-communism in its irrational, utopian appeals, Marsden was more concerned to expose its generic failures. Her general critique of political movements predated her spat with Tucker. It was the “‘Woman Movement’” that first drew her fire and led her to conclude that political causes typically dominated their members, breeding passivity and stultification. In *The New Freewoman*, she argued that:

...the individual must give her energy to the cause. Propaganda started to teach women what they owed to the ‘Cause’: the ‘duty’ of draining their stream of energy into the dam: to ‘concentrate’ on the idea: to sink individual differences; to do just those things which makes the intelligent stupid. The blight of the ‘leader’ has brought the ‘movement’ to a standstill. The ‘Women’s Movement’ is the ‘Women’s Halt’.⁶⁵

Marsden did not dismiss the anarchists’ formal rejection of hierarchy and was not insensitive to the differences between anarchism and other political ideologies, but argued that the weakness of political movements applied as equally to the anarchists as to any other movement. In politics, she argued, movements typically drew on moral sentiments in the furtherance of their causes. Each ‘new “leader” has his “precept” for the guidance of the faithful: the “pattern” according to which they must work’.⁶⁶ Even without leaders, the anarchists did not depart from this model.

The second strand of her critique was that the anarchists confused ‘human’ with ‘humane’ behaviours, and, by inscribing the former with qualities associated with the latter, demanded that individuals love, sympathize and support each other as a condition for social interaction. Anarchists were not alone in this: other socialists and humanitarians made the same mistake, and she dubbed them all ‘embargoists’: they ‘endeavour to lay the weight of their “ought” across other people’s fads, and endeavour to inhibit them by an appeal to the conscience’.⁶⁷ Against this, Marsden argued that individuals had drives or instincts – what she sometimes called spirit or soul – and that the free society was one in which these were simply given free rein. Her position was similar to Mackay’s, but she diverged from him both in her characterization of these drives and her anticipation of the ways in which they played out in the social realm. Specifically, where he identified love as a central drive, Marsden saw only motion. Her view had a Hobbesian tinge: individuals were moved by particular tastes and were able to realize their desires by the exercise of will. Bargains with others

depended on individuals' competence (to employ, for example, 'fraud, deception, misrepresentation, bounce, swagger, "honest" miscalculation'); and 'rights' attached to promises were enforced only by might.⁶⁸ Although she rejected the idea that individuals were pleasure-seekers (on the grounds that 'pleasure' was too vague to define), she nevertheless defined behaviours as hedonistic. This allowed her to imagine the possibility of other-regarding behaviours whilst maintaining that the only relevant distinction between actions was the ease or hardship with which they were undertaken: to "please" oneself is to set one's energies moving in a channel in which they run readily and with comfort... to sacrifice oneself is to set them on enterprises where they move reluctantly and with hardship'.⁶⁹ However, the construction of Marsden's theory was certainly not Hobbesian. Whereas he elaborated his concept of man in a fictional state of nature, she situated the ego in the socialized state. The change of context was significant because instead of conceptualizing nature in the abstract, she assumed that individual interests supported social interactions. Her concern was to highlight the ways in which these interactions became habituated, how custom gave way to culture and civilization to stifle the ego – reversing the relationship between anarchy and order that Hobbes presented.

Like Mackay, Marsden concluded that order was the norm to which most individuals subscribed and that woolly anarchist (for Mackay, anarcho-communist) concepts of care and mutual support provided platforms for a repression as severe as Hobbes' differing only in the means of regulation it employed. Yet, reserving no special place for love in the measurement of freedom, Marsden identified the assertion of will as its only instrument. The American rebels of the 1770s were one model: 'no large servant class amongst them [t]hey came from a picked stock; self-assertive and powerful; too powerful to brook control'.⁷⁰ Emptying hedonism of content, she also jettisoned the basic equality that Mackay's conception of the ego assumed. Not everyone, she argued, had the 'genius and charm' to assert their interests.⁷¹ Some were too stupid or supine – the crowd – and others were insufficiently wilful and rightly suffered the herd's strictures. Her reasoning resulted in some startling judgements. For example, she was quite favourably disposed to syndicalism. Describing the syndicalist as 'an anarchist crossed with a mild egoist strain', she characterized the willingness to engage in sabotage as a sign of self-assertion:

In 'sabotage,' or in the conception of the general strike, there is a faint realisation that to win large shares in the world's spoils working

men must be ready to string their hearts and consciences up to the pitch of being despoilers. To hold one's own purposes so much in esteem as to be prepared to push others to the rear in their interest is a first sign of power.⁷²

Equally surprising was her assessment of Oscar Wilde. Now celebrated for his defiant transgression, Marsden judged him as insufficiently egoistical. 'For a dazzling intelligence to suffer itself to be shamed to death by the rabble,' she noted, 'is a shocking and offensive thing'. Nevertheless, Wilde only had himself to blame: 'a brilliantly audacious and adventurous life, only half-self-conscious, and consequently only half-expressed, must of its very nature invite it'.⁷³

In the period that she edited *The Egoist*, Marsden's thought evolved from 'literal to linguistic' rebellion, and she became increasingly pre-occupied with the restrictions of language.⁷⁴ Words, she argued, had 'grown into masters of all and servant of none', their 'origins lost through the great multitude of their begetters'. Used without precision, language had become stupefying, 'a magic mesh which neither screens nor lights up the mind'. By their repeated, careless use of particular words – 'liberty', 'equality', 'fraternity', for example – generations of philosophers had invested some words with special mystery or 'prestige'. Their words 'have grown great and climbed high to secure all the heavenly seats'. No matter how critically it was applied, inherited language only commanded, tyrannized and enslaved. Marsden continued: '"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God," they will say'. The point, however, was to 'blast the Word, and reduce it to its function of instrument'. Only this would bring 'the enfranchisement of the human kind: the imminent new assertion of its next reach in power'.⁷⁵

Marsden acknowledged that anarchist politics represented a break with existing social arrangements, but the change it promised was quite different from the one she looked for, and it took the form of a substitution rather than a transformation. The precept of the anarchists – or clerico-libertarians as she called them – was liberty and respect for the liberty of others.⁷⁶ Their aim was to eradicate class difference and the system of benevolent charity that it supported, but, in achieving this, the anarchists would only institutionalize a principle of mutual support in liberty's name. Just another form of 'embargoism', anarchism threatened to smother individuals in a regime of moral rules – rituals and taboos, inculcated through language, culture and tradition – just as all previous embargos had

done. Anarchism appeared to be radical but, she argued, this was just an illusion:

Opposition to the 'State' because it is the 'State' is futile: a negative, unending fruitless labour. What I want is *my* state: if I am not able to establish that, it is not my concern *whose* State is established: my business was and still remains the establishing of *my* own. The world should be moulded to my desire if I could so mould it: failing in that, I am not to imagine that there is to be no world at all: others more powerful than I will see to that.⁷⁷

Egoism and the politics of anarchism

The undeniably rich interpretations of Stirner offered by Mackay and Marsden are deeply provocative, but their critiques differ in important respects. As a subscriber to *The Freewoman* and *The New Freewoman*, Mackay would have been familiar with Marsden's work, though his correspondence with Tucker gives no indication of his assessment. Whilst he also attempted to subscribe to *The Egoist*, the issues seem never to have been delivered.⁷⁸ As Tucker's friend, it is likely that Mackay would have been unsympathetic to the tone of Marsden's critique, but in any case there were significant differences between them. Although many of the themes Marsden explored were common to Mackay, these differences affected the way in which they conceptualized egoism, their understandings of egoist union and their perceptions of anarchism's shortcomings.

At the centre of Mackay's egoism is a concept of man that is comparable to liberal thought. In the public sphere, man is a right-bearer and self-owner, with a sense of justice and a capacity to reason. Thus, Auban jettisons the romanticism that enslaves Trupp, but retains a legitimate 'faith in the slowly, slowly acting power of reason, which will finally lead every man, instead of providing for others, to provide for himself'.⁷⁹ Having freed himself from socialism – 'the last general stupidity of mankind'⁸⁰ – he realizes that 'justice...has become the only rightful guide and director in our lives'.⁸¹ His negative freedom requires only that the artificial barriers of state and monopoly are removed for justice to be realized. Admittedly, in the private sphere, the realization of freedom is complicated by love's drives. Here freedom has a positive character and it speaks to concepts of self-realization, tyranny and conquest. Mackay was under no illusions about the costs of this form of freedom, but it was Marsden who put the point most powerfully. The illusion of love, she noted, was that 'one seems to desire not one's own interests but

another's'. In reality 'the lover is a tyrant kept within bounds by the salutary fear that the substance of his desire will slip from his grasp: whereas his paramount interest is to retain his hold on it'.⁸²

From Marden's perspective, Mackay's ideal of liberal freedom drew him closer to the clerico-libertarian position than she could countenance. Veering towards existentialism, she treated the ego as a plain fact – a mere 'unit of life' – and rejected all notions that it described a moral category.⁸³ The statements 'I am', 'I feel', 'I live', 'I sense', 'I exist', she argued, were all instances of 'an assertion made twice'. The "I", she continued, 'is the comprehensive expression of existence as viewed by the only unit competent to view it: the one who exists'.⁸⁴ As Bruce Clarke argues, her view was that the ego was not 'referable, is not to be referred to any idea, emphatically not to Statist ideas. Rather, for their worth ideas are to be referred to selves and their several purposes'.⁸⁵

The differences resulted in two alternative conceptions of anarchist or archist union. For both, egoism justified narrowly self-centred behaviour, enabling individuals to take what they could from others in the fulfilment of desire. But Mackay identified anarchy as a condition in which mutual independence was supported by conventions designed to empower individuals, where the strong were no longer told to "Become weak!", but the weak were exhorted to "Become strong!"⁸⁶ Archy provided space for custom, but Marsden defined this as 'habitual conduct' to which 'public opinion attaches small weight either by way of approval or disapproval', in contrast to morality, which she dismissed as custom backed by authority.⁸⁷ Rather than seeing property as a right or a guarantee of independence, she saw it merely as "one's own", a principle of mastership limited only by the will.⁸⁸ Mackay's ideal was sensual and egalitarian. Archy was combative, and the continuous transgression Marsden embraced assumed a moral orthodoxy against which to transgress.

Mackay and Marsden offered different diagnoses of anarchist failure. Mackay identified the communists' error in pity. Their sentimental reaction to injustice placed them in a protective relationship with the disadvantaged and misled them into supposing that compassion was a natural human response to suffering and, therefore, that it provided a moral foundation for a self-regulating society – a belief he characterized as utopian. Marsden's view was similar, though she seemed unsure whether the anarchists were deluded or fraudulent: either they were too stupid to see that human actions were always self-regarding, or they were Machiavellian and elevated ideas of altruism and sacrifice as a political ruse. In any case, their doctrine was just another ideological barrier to the assertive ego. However, whereas Mackay's worry was that

individuals would be unable to pattern their behaviours in the ways that anarcho-communists desired without the use of force, Marsden's concern was that they were all too malleable and could be endlessly patterned. Similarly, whilst Mackay criticized anarcho-communists for subordinating reason to passion and identified the danger of sentiments with ruinous protest, Marsden accused the anarchists of stifling the ego's dynamic, vital energy and saw in morality only disciplining power.

The Stirnerism of both Mackay and Marsden dovetails with Newman's in a number of areas. All three share the suspicion of utopianism, the rejection of causes and the celebration of difference, autonomy and inventiveness. Yet neither Mackay's or Marsden's version of egoism maps neatly onto his account; the mirror they hold up to anarchism reflects a different image from the one he finds. Newman rightly sets Stirner's thought in the context of a debate about Hegelianism and traces a counter-dialectic contesting the concept of evolution in which individuals (citizens or comrades) overcome their alienation to realize themselves in ethical union.⁸⁹ In contrast, Mackay and Marsden are inspired by Tucker and Proudhonian mutualism and use this as the springboard for their critiques. As Riley notes, philosophical interpretations of Stirner's Young Hegelianism drew nothing from Mackay and he, in turn, took from *The Ego and Its Own* 'only what he desired, not what others told him was there'.⁹⁰ His and Marsden's complaint was not that anarchist theory was based on an abstract conception of the citizen/comrade, but that the adoption of socialist doctrines squeezed out and conditioned the space for self-assertion. The conclusion is similar, but, for Mackay and Marsden, the litmus test of anarchist failure was the elevation of conscience and the demand for compassion or – in Marsden's case – public concern or interest in others, not the denial of difference.

How far either Mackay or Marsden faithfully interpreted Stirner is a moot point. Riley suggests that Mackay's interpretation was a more unsocial doctrine than Stirner ever propounded.⁹¹ Steven Lukes' sketch of Stirner closes the gap. Stirner, he argues, took the 'German idea of individuality ... as a cult of individual genius and originality ... stressing the conflict between individual and society and the supreme value of subjectivity' and turned it into 'an uninhibited quest for eccentricity and ... the purist egoism and social nihilism'.⁹² However the relationship between Stirner, Mackay and Marsden is understood, Lukes' view perfectly captures the gap between them and Newman. This difference is instructive because it allows greater scope for dialogue between

anarchists than Newman's Stirnerism suggests. For example, it is possible to accept Mackay's and Marsden's anxieties about the domination of causes whilst challenging their rejection of promising and conscience. Likewise, it is possible to embrace the egoist celebration of experimentation and self-expression without endorsing egotistical behaviours, as Marsden and Mackay allow. To reject hedonism on Marsden's model in favour of sociability is not a call for uniformity, but a challenge to her defence of might as the only measure of right and her idea that conscience is a weakness which 'shrinks' as the ego becomes 'more powerful and more aware'.⁹³ Mackay's rejection of pity as dangerously utopian is also too stark in the choice it presents, and it fails to adequately distinguish between love for intimates and compassion for strangers. As Antliff suggests, the spaces that turn-of-the-century anarchists and anarcho-communists occupied in their engagement with individualism still exist. Their rediscovery requires that the mirror Stirner holds up to anarchism reflects both ways.

Notes

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91. Riley *Germany's Poet-Anarchist*, p. 75.
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Part II

Key Works

3

The Multiplicity of Nothingness: A Contribution to a Non-reductionist Reading of Stirner

Riccardo Baldissoni

Per speculum in ænigmate: on being mirrored in the texts of others

It was the destiny of many Western thinkers to be known through the words of their critics and adversaries. It happened, for example, to all Pre-Platonic, or Pre-Aristotelian philosophers: to Celsus, whose arguments against Christianity only survived in the doubtful quotations by his later critic, the theologian Origen, and to Siger of Brabant, whose interpretation of Aristotle was turned into the statement of double truth in the condemnation by the bishop of Paris, Etienne Tempier.

Similar occurrences seem unlikely in modern times. For example, it is difficult to imagine being able to access nineteenth-century insurrectionist theories only through their caricature in Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*. Nevertheless, Max Stirner owes a great deal of his posthumous fame to the mocking and ferocious attacks he suffers in Marx's *The German Ideology*.¹ Luckily, Stirner's words reach us not only through the lips of Saint Max in Marx's vitriolic transposition, but also through the pages of Stirner's original work.

Scripta manent? On the use of texts

In the Western world, since classical times, the written edition is held as the standard version of a text. For example, the Pisistratean redaction crystallizes the Homeric text, and the incision of the Twelve Tables codifies the results of the negotiations between Roman patricians and plebeians. Moreover, ever since the Christians spread the Jewish conception of a text inspired by a divine author, the interpretation of written texts is modelled on the principle of the restitution of a supposed original meaning.

In late eighteenth-century Germany, Johann Herder (and Ludwig Schleiermacher² soon after him) reversed the hermeneutical relation between religious and non-religious texts, which he also set as a general model for biblical readings. However, he supposed a specific intention of the author, the divination of which is the task of the interpreters.³ In contrast, Stirner proclaimed the absolute autonomy of the users of books, well beyond the limits of written communication: 'In fact, the child who tears it [the Bible] to pieces or plays with it, the Inca Atahualpa who lays his ear to it and throws it away contemptuously when it remains dumb, judges just as correctly about the Bible as the priest who praises in it the "Word of God", or the critic who calls it a job of men's hands.'⁴

Stirner extends his refusal to predetermine the use of texts to his own written production. In particular, he justifies his writing activity as a way to procure for his thoughts an existence in the world regardless of their effect on readers, in whom, in turn, he recognizes a likewise unlimited freedom: 'Do with them [my written thoughts] what you will and can, that is your affair and does not trouble me.'⁵ We probably should not understand the previous sentence as a literal declaration of disinterest, as Stirner takes the trouble to rectify in writing the interpretations of his work by Szeliga, Moses Hess and Ludwig Feuerbach.

In the notes in response to his critics, Stirner's main concern is to reject any attempt to define the subject construed in the pages of his book, namely the *Einzig*, or 'Unique One'.⁶ Stirner defends the non-determinability of the Unique on a terrain that disconcerts, surprises and even horrifies his critics,⁷ because he evokes a non-conceptual theoretical space:

Only in the Unique does this lack of determination appear to have been reached, because if one grasps it as a concept, i.e. as something expressible, it appears as entirely empty, as an indeterminate name, and thereby points to its content outside of or beyond the concept. If one fixes it as a concept – and that is what my opponents do – one must seek to give a definition of it, and in doing that one must necessarily end up with something different from what was intended.⁸

Hence, whilst in reading Stirner's texts we are allowed by Stirner himself to dispose of them at our will, we are also informed that something is indeed intended by their author. However, we would risk betraying this very intention if we would attempt to unearth it as the expression of the real Stirner, who vehemently protests his identification with any

of his products: 'Would I not be bound today and henceforth to my will of yesterday? My will would in this case be frozen. Wretched stability! My creature – to wit, a particular expression of will – would have become my commander.'⁹

An inconvenient truth about truth: on Stirner's text as an historical object

Stirner denounces the persistence of the religious spirit in the concept of truth, which, he writes, 'outlasts the downfall of the world of gods, for it is the immortal soul of this transitory world of gods, it is Deity itself'.¹⁰ He exposes his contemporary critics of religion as pious atheists devoted to the modern faith in secular values:

The priestly spirits of our day want to make a 'religion' of everything, a 'religion of liberty,' 'religion of equality,' etc., and for them every idea becomes a 'sacred cause,' even citizenship, politics, publicity, freedom of the press, trial by jury.¹¹

Also, the appeal to history is rejected as a surreptitious substitution of actual subjects with another conceptual entity.¹²

In line with Stirner's denunciation of the pretended objectivity of both conceptual entities and their instantiations, I will not consider his writings as an objectified source of some meaning to be discovered. Hence, I will not even attempt a restitution of the truth of Stirner's text, which I can only read from my necessarily subjective and anachronistic perspective. Though such a view from a determinate present is the condition common to any historical consideration, its perspective is generally reversed in historiographic accounts. As I intend to underline the role of perspectival reading not simply as a methodological disclaimer, I need a theoretical device to remark, from within my text, the inevitably a posteriori constitution of historical objects, including Stirner's text. A possible suggestion in this regard comes from Eliot, who acknowledges the necessary alteration of the past by the present, at least within the field of literary criticism.¹³ Jorge Luis Borges recasts such acknowledgement by stating that all authors create their predecessors.¹⁴ If we apply Borges' approach to non-fictional texts, we may say that several later authors create Stirner as their predecessor. An even stronger, albeit puzzling, recognition of our projective reconstruction of the past is proposed by Charles Peguy, who defines the fall of the Bastille as the zéroïème, i.e. the 'zeroth' or zero degree commemoration of the French

Republic.¹⁵ Peguy's use of repetition is thoroughly counter-intuitive, because it constructs past occurrences as iterating subsequent ones. Nevertheless, by virtue of its apparent incongruity Peguy's repetition can remind us of our constant intervention upon the past. Such repetition underlines the inexhaustible richness of the past itself, which, following Benjamin, is never ultimately safe,¹⁶ but which, I contend, is also never completely lost. Moreover, anachronistic repetition redefines the current relevance of texts in terms of their capacity to be reconsidered in the light of later ones. More importantly, Peguy's repeating past is not likely to undergo the objectification process that Stirner laments as the universal destiny of Western thinking to date.¹⁷ In other words, a past that is constantly reoriented towards its future cannot entrap humans with its pretended objectivity.¹⁸

In the attempt to perform a perspectival reading of Stirner's work, I suggest the application of Peguy's repetition as a theoretical device for reconsidering aspects of Stirner's thought in relation to both successors and predecessors. For example, on the one side, reading Stirner after Sorel makes the former appear as though attempting to repeat the latter's rejection of the illusions of progress. On the other side, pace Lukacs,¹⁹ the young Hegel read after Stirner seems to repeat the latter's exposure of intellectual objectification.²⁰ Of course, I am not denying the effect exerted upon Stirner by previous authors, and by him on later ones. Nevertheless, such effects are hardly detachable from those resulting from our necessarily retrospective analyses. In other words, I argue that the fiction of objective historical data²¹ turns the result of interpretative negotiations about a textual object into their original source, as if it could be possible to ignore the influence of subsequent authors and events, and, in particular, as if the truth of Stirner's text could be unveiled regardless of its constant reframing. As previously recalled, the Western tradition²² of textual criticism presupposes the possibility of such unveiling of the truth of the text. Stirner himself first exposes this presupposition by unveiling the unveiling, so to speak: 'the secret of criticism is some "truth" or other: this remains its energizing mystery'.²³ Hence, rather than attempting to unveil the truth of Stirner's text, I propose reading it through a series of anachronistic perspectives. If I had to employ the traditional critical language, I would say that I intend to use the works of authors who wrote after Stirner in order to cast light upon different aspects of Stirner's text, which, in turn, re-models our reading of texts written before Stirner's text. Nevertheless, after the reconsiderations of modernity in the last fifty years,²⁴ we are accustomed to understanding interpretation not simply as the operation of bringing to light

an absolutely pre-existing textual object, but rather as a work of reconstitution, or reconstruction of the text itself. I would radicalize this hermeneutic shift, and show how authors from Deleuze to Marx willingly (or unwillingly) reconstruct Stirner as their predecessor. More precisely, following Peguy, I am going to illustrate the influence of successive authors on our contemporary reading of Stirner as a reconstitution of Stirner's text, which appears to repeat themes and issues highlighted by Stirner's successors. In turn, I will also exemplify the effect of Stirner's text on previous authors such as Hegel, Kant and Augustine.

In my end is my beginning: how subsequent authors reworked Stirner's text for us

'As the world as property has become a material with which I undertake what I will, so the spirit too as property must sink down into a material before which I no longer entertain any sacred dread.'²⁵ This prophetic expression of Stirner's extreme nominalism²⁶ could appear as an anticipation of the process of commodification of intellectual work. On the contrary, I suggest disposing of the magic of teleology, and rejecting the temptation to turn our projections into predictions of the future anterior. In this case, I would say that contemporary theorists of immaterial labour make Stirner repeat their analyses of the detachment of intellectual products from their producers. Whilst this formulation only deprives Stirner's text of a dubious prophetic truthfulness, it in turn enriches it with the addition of meaningful interpretative layers. In other words, the dismissal of the truth of the text does not imply the potential for any possible interpretation whatsoever. On the contrary, if we follow Stirner's astonishingly radical equation of possibility [*Möglichkeit*] with reality [*Wirklichkeit*],²⁷ these possibilities of interpretation would certainly not exceed actual interpretations. More importantly, the choice between such interpretations could no longer pretend to be grounded in pre-existent conditions of possibility, be they the supposed objectivity of texts or historical, biological and logical conditions. Borrowing from Latour's analysis of the construction of scientific facts, we may say that the acceptance of an interpretation always comes at the cost of establishing the validity of that interpretation within a specific network.²⁸ Such an agonistic view of the survival process of ideas could also be described by Stirner's statement 'the war of all against all is declared'.²⁹ It is worth underlining that Stirner does not demand a Hobbesian lifting of all ideological warranties, but rather exposes such ideological warranties as an enslaving and self-enslaving mechanism.

According to Stirner, whilst such a self-enslaving mechanism is at work in every human being, regardless of their social position, its social outcome depends upon social positions. Hence, as an undeclared and generalized social war is already in place, Stirner simply demands a fair go for all, *Pöbel* ('rabble') included.

I previously claimed that several successive authors construct Stirner as their predecessor, both willingly and unwillingly. The latter distinction allows me to bypass the ostracism to which Stirner has been consigned, especially by German thinkers from Nietzsche to Heidegger and Adorno, who simply do not publicly engage with Stirner's texts. More importantly, this distinction sets apart the analyses of Stirner's work (which have often a very limited impact upon the text) from the veritable renewing effect that later key philosophical texts exert on *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum*. For example, Deleuze's definition of Stirner as 'the dialectician who reveals nihilism as the truth of the dialectic'³⁰ mainly reveals Deleuze's willingness to include Stirner in his anti-Hegelian genealogical line.³¹ In a similar way, Buber acknowledges the theoretical role of Stirner as a transitional step: 'as Protagoras leads to his contemporary Socrates, Stirner leads towards his contemporary Kierkegaard'.³² On the contrary, the reading of Stirner after the Deleuzian questioning of the priority of identity over difference³³ turns any *Einzige* into an instance of the field of differentiation. More precisely, the *Einzige* is self-differentiating in time without any relation to differentiating ideas, because given the conflation of possibility and reality, in Stirner's immanence there is no space for ideas,³⁴ all of which are dismissed as spectral projections. For Stirner, ideas cannot be salvaged, inasmuch as their externality to life puts them into conflict with life:

Archimedes, to move the earth, asked for a standpoint *outside* it. Men sought continually for this standpoint, and every one seized upon it as well as he was able. This foreign standpoint is the *world of mind*, of ideas, thoughts, concepts, essences; it is *heaven*. Heaven is the 'standpoint' from which the earth is moved, earthly doings surveyed and – despised.³⁵

On the contrary, Deleuze constructs the field of differentiation – that is virtuality – as an alternative to Aristotelian potentiality, Kantian possibility and Hegelian rationality, in order to acknowledge the productive role of ideas without predetermining their actualization.³⁶ On the horizon of such a bold enterprise, the boldness of Stirner's absolute refusal of the conceptual dimension stands out. However, this refusal

is not borne out of nihilistic despair, as it is grounded in the recognition that 'thought is a matron who has not always existed',³⁷ to put it in Artaud's terms. In other words, Stirner can announce the future because he knows that there has been a past:³⁸ 'Gods, my dear modern, are not spirits; gods do not degrade the world to a semblance, and do not spiritualize it.'³⁹

In the terms of my anachronistic reading, Stirner not only repeats later authors and themes, but also appears to combine them creatively:

Curative means or healing is only the reverse side of *punishment*, the *theory of cure* runs parallel with the *theory of punishment*; if the latter sees in an action a sin against right, the former takes it for a sin of the man *against himself*, as a falling away from his health.⁴⁰

Within this quotation, Ivan Illich and Michel Foucault seem to merge, just as Ulysses and Diomedes burn together within the same two-pointed flame in Dante's *Inferno*. Stirner not only appears to replicate Illich's exposure of modern health practices, which renew the traditional effort of religious institutions to deprive human beings of their jurisdiction over themselves,⁴¹ but he also constructs a visual metaphor that makes room for Foucault's parallel concerns with punishment and cure. However, Stirner is not exploring the nexus between the institutionalization of punitive and therapeutic practices, which he only considers in regard to Weitling's claimed shift from a punitive paradigm to a therapeutic one in the future communist society. Such a shift is already a spectral projection, or a political translation 'on the standpoint of should',⁴² of the actual clinical practices with which, in the late eighteenth century, Pinel and his fellow reformers turned the seventeenth-century system of confinement of the idle poor into the new psychiatric asylums.⁴³ Whilst Stirner is not specifically concerned with the history of clinical practice, he draws a parallel between crime and disease in order to underline their common derivation from a source, be it Law⁴⁴ or the health of the individual [*Einzelne*] and that of society, which is *other* than the *Einzig*e. In the language of moral philosophy, what is at stake here is autonomy, as opposed to the heteronomy, or alien guidance, of any given theoretical and practical order. Of course, historical transformations and continuities are also part of Stirner's concern with Law, and his observation that 'the criminal code has continued existence only through the sacred, and perishes of itself if punishment is given up',⁴⁵ seems to generalize, as well as project into

Carl Schmitt's future notorious axiom that 'all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts'.⁴⁶

The alleged epochal transition from a theological to a secular framework is the main theme of debate in the Hegelian Left, and Feuerbach's critique of Hegel constructs this transition as a reversal: it is heaven that mirrors earth, and not vice versa.⁴⁷ Stirner is writing at the very moment in which the theological framework is being superseded by the new humanistic consciousness; or at least, so it seems to Young Hegelians. Stirner instead suspects that all is to be changed so that nothing would change, as goes the eighteenth-century French *adagio*. More precisely, Stirner observes that though change does occur, functions remain unaltered:

morality and piety are now as synonymous as in the beginning of Christianity, and it is only because the supreme being has come to be a different one that a holy walk is no longer called a 'holy' one, but a 'human' one. If morality has conquered, then a complete *change of masters* [*Herrenwechsel*] has taken place.⁴⁸

A reading of the 1966 paper 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences',⁴⁹ in which Derrida describes the whole history of Western thought as a chain of substitution of a centre with another centre, makes Stirner a witness of the transition from the theological centre to the humanist one. However, Stirner underlines the notion that power is exerted equally by old and new centres, not only as the effect of the abstract coercive authority of structures, but through controlling and self-controlling authoritarian practices. These practices were generalized and internalized, especially after the Reformation, as Stirner remarks:

Protestantism has actually put a man in the position of a country governed by secret police. The spy and eavesdropper, 'conscience,' watches over every motion of the mind, and all thought and action is for it a 'matter of conscience,' that is, police business. This tearing apart of man into 'natural impulse' and 'conscience' (inner populace and inner police) is what constitutes the Protestant.⁵⁰

After the blooming of the Left Hegelians, with the exception of Nietzsche's vehement protestations against the alleged progressive role of Reformation,⁵¹ we had to wait until Marcuse's 1936 contribution to *Studies about the Authority and the Family*⁵² for the acknowledgement of

the historical role of Lutheranism in the construction of the authoritarian personality in modern Germany.⁵³ Stirner characterizes Lutheranism as a further stage of the Christian spiritualization of reality, and he continues:

Hence it was that the Lutheran Hegel (he declares himself such in some passage or other: he 'wants to remain a Lutheran') was completely successful in carrying the idea through everything. In everything there is reason, holy spirit, or 'the actual is rational.'⁵⁴

Not surprisingly, Stirner's contention that the Hegelian system 'was simply the extremest case of violence on the part of thought, its highest pitch of despotism and sole dominion',⁵⁵ appears to repeat and determine Marcuse's exposure of the order of things as a result of domination.⁵⁶

During the composition of his *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein writes a revealing note: 'how things stand is God. God is how things stand'.⁵⁷ Stirner relentlessly iterates such an equation as the double-faced target of his deconstructive work. Moreover, unlike Wittgenstein, he takes account of historical circumstances, and he describes divine and mundane realities as the two faces of the coin of Western post-classical⁵⁸ thought. As previously recalled, Stirner also describes the historical shift from one face to the other by underlining the fact that the Lutheran hallowing of the whole reality is the prelude to both its Hegelian spiritualization and its humanist conceptualization. In the meantime,⁵⁹ Marx similarly comments that, since the Reformation, the layman no longer struggles with the priest before him, but has to fight instead with his inner priest, his priestly nature.⁶⁰ However, Marx still trusts theory: 'the philosophical transformation of the priestly Germans into men will emancipate the people'.⁶¹ In contrast, Stirner does not trust any conceptual abstraction, and he insists on the non-determinability of the *Einzigste*:

The Unique One is the declaration of which it is conceded with all openness and honesty that it – declares nothing. Man, Spirit, the True Individual, Personality, and so forth are assertions or predicates that puff up with their fullness of content, phrases with the highest wealth of thought. The Unique One is, in contrast to these holy and exalted phrases, the empty, the unassuming, the entirely common phrase.⁶²

Wittgenstein would add that the precise usage of phrases further clarifies their field of meaning, and hence his remark that 'The way

you use the word "God" shows not *whom* but what you mean"⁶³ could be rephrased to express Stirner's discontent with the modern humanist: the way you use the word 'Man' shows not *whom* but *what* you mean.⁶⁴

Schmitt recalls with gratitude that Stirner was the only one who visited him in the cell where he was imprisoned as a Nazi intellectual, adding: 'Max knows something that is very important. He knows that the I is not an object of thought'.⁶⁵ Despite his appreciation for Stirner's spectral appearances, Schmitt undervalues Stirner's theoretical insight. Similarly to almost all readers of Stirner, Schmitt's attention is captured by the final product of Stirner's speculation, namely the empty *Einzig*. I contend that even if we would suppose that Stirner knew, like Archilochus' hedgehog,⁶⁶ only one big thing, this would not be simply the non-determinability of the 'I'. Of course, Stirner constructs the *Einzig* as the only black hole in the conceptual universe. Nevertheless, the *Einzig* is not the only entity that Stirner wants to redeem from the conceptual realm, but rather the only domain on which he allows himself to intervene as a productive theorist. I argue that the *pars construens* of Stirner's text, to quote Bacon,⁶⁷ is necessarily limited to just one non-conceptual entity, namely the *Einzig*, because of the limitations resulting from its *pars destruens*. These limitations set the range of possibility, which is also the field of realization of Stirner's theoretical proposal. In other words, following his exposure of the alienation [*Entfremdung*]⁶⁸ of concepts, Stirner has to abandon the level of conceptual generalization. Hence, he neither produces nor modifies any concept. On the contrary, his *Einzig* is a mere name, emptied of any conceptual determination. Stirner's bold refusal of given norms, rules and orders – which explains the non-determinability of the *Einzig* – obscures the extraordinary self-restraining move on which the *Einzig* is grounded. As a consequence of his deconstruction of the duplication of the human horizon into a real world and an ideal one, Stirner allows neither a descriptive, nor prescriptive, view of reality. He claims only the field of personal action, which he invites, by analogy,⁶⁹ his fellow human beings to claim too.

In Derridean terms, Stirner advocates no substitution of the ideological centre with another centre, but, instead, he puts in place a radical decentralization. By affirming the absolute singularity of the *Einzig*, Stirner breaks the chain of substitution of ideological masters and their police, which in Germany links the Catholic priestly external cop with the Lutheran inner cop working on behalf of God, and the Kantian inner cop working on behalf of reason.

Sorel is no less harsh on the Enlightenment than Stirner: 'all our efforts should tend to prevent the bourgeois ideas from coming to poison the

rising class'.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Stirner's indictment of ideas is not limited to their bourgeois variety, which for him is just a stage in the history of human' alienation. Hence, Stirner appears to repeat Lyotard's incredulity towards the *grands récits*, rather than the Sorelian recovery of myth, which would also risk reproducing the dichotomy between myth makers and myth believers. Apart from Stirner, only the young Marx is aware of this risk, which he depicts in the most explicit terms:

The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated. Hence this doctrine is bound to divide society *into two parts, one of which is superior to society*.⁷¹

Both Stirner and Marx dare to question the role of intellectuals, and I will not even attempt to address the *vexata quæstio* of their reciprocal influence. Instead, I would underline that the Hegelian understanding of the True as subject [*das Wahre...als Subject*]⁷² generates the same epiphany for them: ideas appear to both Stirner and Marx as a result of human production.

On the one hand, the causal link between ideas and their producers seems to be the only truth that Stirner is willing to endorse, and this endorsement could logically conflict with his general dismissal of truth. However, Stirner is not likely to be imputed inconsistency, as, in general, Western ideas producers since Plato would rather ignore a reminder of their productive role, which remains a blind spot for religious, scientific and critical thinkers alike.⁷³ On the other hand, Marx progressively confines his nuanced interpretation of objectivity within his notes; it emerges instead in the pages of *Capital* as being solidly determined, albeit within the *court durée* of a mode of production.⁷⁴ However, the parallel between Stirner and the young Marx is striking, overall, as both push theory beyond its own limits and towards a practice of appropriation.

In my beginning is my end: how Stirner reconstructs his predecessors

A major merit of Löwith's study *From Hegel to Nietzsche*⁷⁵ is that it reclaims Stirner's central role in the transformation of the Hegelian legacy towards the Nietzschean transvaluation of all values. Nevertheless,

I will not construct Stirner's approach and themes as derivative of Hegel or any other previous author. Instead, I will exemplify how Stirner's text modifies our reading of previous philosophical works or, to put it bluntly, how Stirner constructs his predecessors.

A most interesting illustration of the effect exerted on Hegel by Stirner is the truly remarkable essay 'Max Stirner as Hegelian',⁷⁶ which could be also described as Stepelevich's rereading of Hegel after Stirner. However, rather than making Hegel 'anticipate' Stirner, I will follow the example of Newman's reversal⁷⁷ and I will attempt recalling a Stirnerian moment in Hegel.

In the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel declares that his aim is to realize and to spiritualize the Universal [*das Allgemeine zu verwirklichen und zu begeistern*]⁷⁸ by way of bringing solidified thoughts back to fluidity [*die festen Gedanken in Flüssigkeit zu bringen*].⁷⁹ After Stirner, we are not surprised that those thoughts stand on a firm footing [*stehen jene Gedanken auf festem Fusse*],⁸⁰ just like Stirner's fixed ideas. According to Marx, the Hegelian solidified thoughts actually coincide with the fixed ideas of Stirner, who only differs from Hegel in abolishing these ideas without the aid of dialectics.⁸¹ Though Marx witnesses the early effect of Stirner on Hegel, his *vis polemica* carries him too far, as neither Hegel nor Stirner require any abolition whatsoever. Also, following his own later analysis of the fetishism of commodities, Marx should better observe that, after Stirner, the fixedness of Hegel's solidified thoughts is confirmed in its character of a fetish. Just as value is not inherent in commodities, fixedness is not inherent in ideas; rather, it is the effect of the continuously renewed postulation of ideas' 'out-there-ness'. In other words, alienation coincides with the production of ideas only inasmuch as this production implies its own erasure. Both Hegel and Stirner detect this erasure, and both entrust a unique subject with the task of claiming back the property [*Eigentum*] of ideas. Whilst Hegel boasts of representing his subject, who is unique because he⁸² is the Totality that includes his own history, Stirner more modestly speaks on behalf of himself.⁸³

Stirner only mentions Kant as a Prussian.⁸⁴ However, I argue that he links Kant to Illich through a series of repetitions. Illich makes Stirner repeat and generalize his protest, not only for modern medicine's expropriation of the human ability to self-assess their wellbeing, but also for the imposition of a universal heteronomous control through compulsory schooling:

Not enough that the great mass has been trained to religion, now it is actually to have to occupy itself with 'everything human.' Training

is growing ever more general and more comprehensive. You poor beings who could live so happily if you might skip according to your mind, you are to dance to the pipe of schoolmasters and bear-leaders, in order to perform tricks that you yourselves would never use yourselves for. And you do not even kick out of the traces at last against being always taken otherwise than you want to give yourselves. No, you mechanically recite to yourselves the question that is recited to you: 'What am I called to? What *ought* I to do?'⁸⁵

In turn, Stirner makes Kant repeat Illich's plea for laypeople to overcome the domination of experts. In his celebrated answer to the question 'What is Enlightenment?' Kant invites humans to emancipate themselves from their minority condition in regard to experts. Nevertheless, both Illich and Stirner make their Kantian repetition appear quite cautious, because Kant restricts himself to advocating the universal human potential to acquire expertise, rather than exposing expertise itself as the product of the alienation of human practices. Playing with Stirnerian jargon, we may say that whilst Lutheran theologians make humans surreptitiously internalize the word of God, Lutheran philosophers make them surreptitiously internalize the word of Man. In Stirner's words, 'the subject is again subjected to the predicate, the individual to something general; the dominion is again secured to an *idea*'.⁸⁶

Against old and new Christian reminders of human inadequacy, Stirner reassures his reader: 'you are *appropriate* [*geeignet*] and capacitated for everything that is yours'.⁸⁷ However, Stirner does not necessarily oppose Christian theoretical strategies, which he also appropriates and redirects:

As we there [within the Christian worldview] had to say, 'We are indeed to have appetites, but the appetites are not to have us,' so we should now say, 'We are indeed to have *mind*, but mind is not to have us.'⁸⁸

There is a convergence of Stirner's love for logical symmetries and the Hegelian will to leave no theoretical leftovers in this invitation to apply to the conceptual realm the Christian dismissal of the sensible world. However, the parallel between the two dismissals reveals a further, reversed symmetry. In the first case, the realm of flesh is making room for the realm of spirit. In the second case, the realm of spirit has to retreat to make room for human actions. Here, however, the reversal is not as simple as in Feuerbach's critique. A consideration of the historical

actors involved in the two dismissals would underscore how Stirner's invitation produces an unprecedented *cæsura* in Western thought.

In the writings of the western⁸⁹ Church Fathers, the dismissal of the world also implies the containment of their own involvement with the world, especially through their words. Though Christian historians teleologically read the long march of the Fathers within Latin culture, only the historical chance of the fall of the Roman Empire turns the Christian intellectual *parvenues* into the custodians of the Latin heritage. On the contrary, until well into the fourth century the Fathers not only struggled to give public dignity to Christian thought, but they strove more painfully to detach themselves from their guilt-ridden fascination with classical culture.⁹⁰ Following my anachronistic reading approach, I contend that Stirner makes the Fathers repeat his inner shift – that is, the retreating⁹¹ of his idealist self – in order to make room for the unpredictable *Einzig*. The Fathers similarly make their identity as Latin intellectuals shrink in order to let their identity of Christian believers expand.⁹² The symmetry of these redefinitions of the self finds a limit in the different roles devised for their new self by the Fathers⁹³ and Stirner respectively. Whilst the Fathers tentatively construct the new Christian intellectual, Stirner's *Einzig* makes melt into air not only the role of Western intellectuals as (re)producers of ideology,⁹⁴ but also ideology itself.

I suspect that it is this unredeemable sublimation process that gains Stirner a constantly renewed *damnatio memoriae*,⁹⁵ i.e. the condemnation, and hence the erasure, of memory, which expels from the domain of respectable thought any subsequent recovery of his untameable text. Conversely, inasmuch as this text continues to indict Western intellectuals with surreptitiously constructing reality as a network of concepts whilst hiding their responsibility behind the out-there-ness of being, God or nature, the very respectability of Western thought is at stake. More precisely, what is at stake is the respectability of Western intellectuals as ideologists, be they classical philosophers, theologians, scientists or critical thinkers.

Stirner's implacable indictment of ideas cannot be brought back under the umbrella of critique,⁹⁶ because it does not promise a better understanding of reality, and it transcends epistemology⁹⁷ in the name of a local and analogical ethics. Such ethics is non-prescriptive in terms of content, but it illustrates in the person of his expounder the realized possibility of two radical gestures, namely a vertiginous contraction towards the sphere of intervention of the *Einzig*, and the removal of any prescription. Both gestures are the effect of Stirner's exposure of

ideas as alienated human products. This exposure shifts the theological and critical focus on the dichotomy of heaven and earth towards the consideration of the processes of production of both earthly and heavenly concepts.

Augustine reconfigures the whole reality in terms of the dichotomy of heaven versus earth.⁹⁸ Hence, he builds the earthly city no less than the city of God. In particular, he grounds the earthly city on the fundamental inadequacy of the human subject, who is created as an imperfect image of God and is thus doomed to a perpetual pursuit of his perfect model. Stirner refuses this Sisyphean task by proudly proclaiming: 'We are perfect altogether! For we are, every moment, all that we can be; and we never need be more.'⁹⁹

In line with the critique of religion, Stirner rejects the pretensions of the heavenly city. Nevertheless, he also transcends critical atheism, inasmuch as he exposes the theological function of the categories we use to construct the earthly city. We may say that Stirner shows us the way beyond critical atheism's contention that God is constructed in the image of human beings, and invites us to reconsider how Western post-classical thought keeps construing human beings and their world in the image of God.

As a conclusion: on Stirner's multiple monstrosity

As a conclusion to an essay that makes a methodical use of repetition in order to promote openness, I can but repeat Calasso's warning: 'to reduce the *Ego* to a sequence of "positions" (be they anarchism, or Hegelism, or existentialism, or something more) is the surest way to neutralize its *unique* monstrosity'.¹⁰⁰ On the horizon of Western thought, Stirner is entitled to monstrosity because of the unpredictable multiplicity in time of the *Einzig*e as a singular subject, the irreducible multiplicity of its analogical repetitions in the other subjects, and the unthinkable multiplicity of a world that is not forced through the Western conceptual bottleneck. In particular, Stirner's joint indictment of religion and politics for putting human subjects 'at the standpoint of should'¹⁰¹ makes the *Ego* a monstrous rebuttal of most Western post-classical political theories. On the one hand, Stirner's exposure of conceptual alienation, and his consequential gesture of retreating within the limited sphere of the non-determinable *Einzig*e, drastically questions political thought's foreclosure of transindividual negotiations.¹⁰² On the other hand, Stirner's plea for human association opens up a radically participative political space, which is neither predetermined

by any overarching principle (regardless of its theological, rational or historical justification) nor by any *a priori* definition of the human subject. However, if monstrosity is more simply the modern cipher of the unknown other and her threatening openness, Stirner is surely bound to also endure the charge of monstrosity because of the uncontainable openness of his desire:

*I receive with thanks what the centuries of culture have acquired for me; I am not willing to throw away and give up anything of it: I have not lived in vain. The experience that I have power over my nature, and need not be the slave of my appetites, shall not be lost to me; the experience that I can subdue the world by culture's means is bought at too great a cost for me to be able to forget it. But I want still more.*¹⁰³

Notes

1. Marx wrote *The German Ideology* in collaboration with Engels, who nonetheless came close to Marx's rejection of Stirner's arguments only after a very positive initial reception of Stirner's book. See letter of 19 November 1844 from Engels to Marx.
2. Stirner attended Schleiermacher's lectures in Berlin.
3. For Herder, interpretation is a kind of scientific enterprise, and divination is an attempt at guessing the intention of the author beyond the limitations of the available hermeneutic tools.
4. M. Stirner (1995) *The Ego and Its Own*, ed. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 297.
5. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 263.
6. Unfortunately, just like Poe's purloined letter, the *Einzigste* is hidden in plain sight in the title of all Stirner's English versions, which translate *Einzigste* as the word 'Ego'. This translation is not only barely faithful, it is also misleading, as it can suggest a link with the concept of the egoist, which Stirner himself considers 'a spook as much as the devil is' (Stirner, *The Ego* p. 317). It is not surprising that Benjamin Tucker, the publisher of the first English version (1907), in taking responsibility for the choice of such an improper translation, could only appeal to the euphony and the incisiveness of his chosen title.
7. For example, Kolakowsky reproaches Stirner for an alleged claim of a return to animality, which Stirner denied in advance in *The Ego and Its Own*: 'No sheep, no dog, exerts itself to become a "proper sheep, a proper dog"; no beast has its essence appear to it as a task, i.e. as a concept that it has to realize. It realizes itself in living itself out, in dissolving itself, passing away. It does not ask to be or to become anything other than it is. Do I mean to advise you to be like the beasts? That you ought to become beasts is an exhortation which I certainly cannot give you, as that would again be a task, an ideal!' (Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 293).

8. M. Stirner (1978) 'Stirner's Critics', abr. and trans. Frederick M. Gordon *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol. VIII, nos. 2-3-4, 67.
9. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 175.
10. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 311.
11. Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 72-73.
12. 'Only as the property of me do the spirits, the truths, get to rest; and they then for the first time really are, when they have been deprived of their sorry existence and made a property of mine, when it is no longer said "the truth develops itself, rules, asserts itself; *history (also a concept)* [my emphasis] wins the victory," etc. The truth never has won a victory, but was always my means to the victory, like the sword ("the sword of truth")'. (Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 312).
13. See T. S. E. Eliot (1920) *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen).
14. 'El echo es que cada escritor *crea* a sus precursores. Su labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro'. [The fact is that all writers *create* their precursors. Their work modifies our conception of the past, just as it is bound to modify the future.] See Borges, 'Kafka and his Precursors' in J. L. Borges (1964) *Other Inquisitions*, trans. Ruth L. C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press).
15. See C. Peguy (1932) *Clio, Dialogue de l'Histoire et de l'Âme Païenne* (Paris: Gallimard).
16. See Benjamin, (2006) 'On the Concept of History' in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).
17. 'How can one try to assert of modern philosophy or modern times that they have reached freedom, since they have not freed us from the power of objectivity?' (Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 79).
18. In his XVI thesis on the concept of history, Benjamin describes this entrapment as the allure of the whore Once-Upon-A-Time, of the brothel of Historicism.
19. As a matter of fact, in his *The Young Hegel*, Lukacs makes Hegel (imperfectly) repeat Marx. Of course, for Lukacs, Marx explains Hegel just as, for both Hegel and Marx, human anatomy is the key to the understanding of the anatomy of the ape.
20. Young Hegel's concept of objectification was to be banalized in Feuerbach's concept of religion as an alienation of human essence. Neither Hegel nor Stirner conceived of a trans-historical human essence, and Marx made both repeat his VI thesis on Feuerbach: 'Human nature is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its actuality, it is the ensemble of the social relations'.
21. See the Western justifications for historiographic practices, from Thucydides' 'τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σφές,' i.e. certainty of the events, to Ranke's history '*wie es eigentlich gewesen*', i.e. the way it really was.
22. I admit that 'Western tradition' is a sweeping generalization. However, Western interpreters from Philo of Alexandria to Freud did share the belief in the possibility to extract the truth of texts.
23. Stirner immediately adds: 'But I distinguish between *servile* [theological] and *own* [humanist] criticism' (Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 309). A Derridean over-tone could be (rightly) detected in my use of Stirner's analysis of criticism.

However, I am arguing here that overtones constitute the very harmony of any discursive entity, which cannot be reduced to its supposedly original melodic line.

24. Stephen Toulmin argues in his ground-breaking work (1990) *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: Free Press) that the First World War interrupted the process of modernity's reconsideration, which took off again on a mass scale in the 1960s.
25. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 315.
26. Borges once observed, quite optimistically, that we no longer use the label 'nominalist', because nowadays we are all nominalists. Stirner's exposure of the realism – in the medieval sense – of modern Western thought gained him the apparently obsolete definition of nominalist, together with various adjectives such as absolute (Calasso), extreme and even pathetic (Buber), among others.
27. 'Possibility and reality always coincide' (Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 291). Only Spinoza dared to state a similar conflation.
28. See B. Latour (1988) *The Pasteurization of France*, trans. Alan Sheridan and John Law (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).
29. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 229.
30. G. Deleuze (1983) *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans., Hugh Tomlinson (London: The Athlone Press), p. 161.
31. Here, I am not criticizing Deleuze, who was bravely adamant in declaring his 'buggering' [sic] attitude towards his objects of study.
32. M. Buber (1966) *Between Man & Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Fontana), p. 65.
33. See G. Deleuze (1994) *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press).
34. Here Stirner appears more un-Hegelian than Deleuze himself.
35. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 59.
36. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, especially p. 207 onwards.
37. A. Artaud (1968) 'Correspondence with Jacques Rivière', *Collected Works* vol.1, trans. Victor Corti (London: John Calder), p. 19.
38. The pre-Christian Western past was to assume an even more important role in Nietzsche's thought, which here I make Stirner repeat.
39. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 36.
40. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 213.
41. See in particular I. Illich (1975) *Medical Nemesis* (London: Marion Boyars).
42. 'Under religion and politics man finds himself at the standpoint of *should* [Sollens]: *he should* become this and that, *should* be so and so'. (Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 215).
43. See M. Foucault (2001) *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Routledge).
44. 'Mir aus, sondern von einem anderen aus, ob sie nämlich entweder das Recht, das allgemeine, oder die Gesundheit teils des Einzelnen (des Kranken), teils des Allgemeinen (der Gesellschaft) verletzt.' M. Stirner (1972) *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam), p. 266. Stirner here uses the word 'Recht' which in German (as in most European languages) also defines the system of law.
45. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 214.

46. C. Schmitt (1985) *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), p. 36.
47. Young Hegel had actually already expressed the intention to regain control of the 'treasures formerly squandered on heaven'. See G. W. F. Hegel (1966) *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), p. 159.
48. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 55.
49. Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' (1966), in J. Derrida (1978) *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 278–294. Derrida also appreciated Stirner's thought: 'We take seriously the originality, audacity, and, precisely, the philosophico-political seriousness of Stirner who also should be read without Marx or against him.' Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p. 121.
50. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 81–82.
51. 'Luther, that cursed monk, not only restored the Church, but, what was a thousand times worse, restored Christianity, and at a time too when it lay defeated. Christianity, the *Denial of the Will to Live*, exalted to a religion!' in F. Nietzsche (2004) *Ecce Homo*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (New York: Dover), p. 125.
52. See M. Horkheimer et al., (1936) *Studien über Autorität und Familie. Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut für Sozialforschung* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan).
53. I am not considering Weber's studies, which are a good example of rationalization *a posteriori*. See instead H. Marcuse (2008) *A Study on Authority*, trans., Joris De Bres (London: Verso).
54. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 85.
55. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 69.
56. 'To be sure, the "objective order of things" is itself the result of domination' in H. Marcuse (1964) *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), p. 147.
57. L. Wittgenstein (1961) *Notebooks 1914–1916*, trans. Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), p. 79 [1 August 1916].
58. I use here the adjective 'post-classical' to refer to Western thought from the Church Fathers to contemporary thinkers.
59. The Introduction to Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* was published in 1843 in the first (and only) issue of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (i.e. German-French Annals), whilst the *Einzig* was in print in 1844.
60. K. Marx (1982) *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
61. Marx, *Critique*, p. 138.
62. Stirner, 'Stirner's Critics', p. 68.
63. L. Wittgenstein (1980) *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), p. 50.
64. 'It is not, τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, men, but τὸν ἄνθρωπον, Man, that the philanthropist carries in his heart. To be sure, he cares for each individual, but only because he wants to see his beloved ideal realized everywhere'. (Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 72).
65. Schmitt, *Ex Captivitate Salus*, p. 80, my translation. On the same page, Schmitt expresses all his admiration for Stirner: 'In the history of the spirit

- there are some uranium mines. I would put among them the Presocratics, some Church Fathers and some writings of the period before 1848. Poor Max perfectly fits it.'
66. Berlin half-seriously turned Archilochus' enigmatic fragment 'πόλλ' οἷδ' αλώπηξ, ἀλλ' ἐχίνοσ ἐν μέγα,' i.e. the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing, into a paradigm for the classification of thinkers, whom he grouped as either pluralist foxes or mono-focused hedgehogs. In Berlin's terms, I claim here the foxy nature of Stirner. See I. Berlin (1953) *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson).
 67. Bacon's main work, the *Novum Organon*, is divided in a *pars destruens*, or destructive part, in which he exposes the defects of previous ways of thinking, and a *pars costruens*, or constructive part, in which he articulates his new philosophy. See F. Bacon (2000) *The New Organon*, trans. Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
 68. I cannot consider here the copious literature on the concept of *Entfremdung* (and *Enttäusserung*). However, I prefer to translate *Entfremdung* as 'alienation' rather than 'estrangement' in order to emphasize its processual aspect.
 69. Without a conceptual ground, analogy rather than immediate commonality links the *Einzig*e to the others. Hence, human association [*Verein*] can only result from temporarily analogous wills.
 70. G. Sorel (1972) *The Illusions of Progress*, trans. John and Charlotte Stanley (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 157.
 71. From the III thesis on Feuerbach, in K. Marx (1975) *Early Writings*, trans., Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, in association with New Left Review).
 72. G. W. F. Hegel (1999) *Fenomenologia dello Spirito*, trans. Vincenzo Cicero, testo tedesco a fronte [facing-page German text] (Milano: Rusconi), p. 66.
 73. See Feyerabend, 'Classical Empiricism' in P. K. Feyerabend (1981) *Philosophical Papers*, (ed. John Preston; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
 74. Stirner seems to comment in advance: 'You believe that you have done the utmost when you boldly assert that, because every time has its own truth, there is no "absolute truth." Why, with this you nevertheless still leave to each time its truth, and thus you quite genuinely create an "absolute truth," a truth that no time lacks, because every time, however its truth may be, still has a "truth."' (Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 313).
 75. See K. Löwith (1991) *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. David E. Green (New York: Columbia University Press).
 76. See L. Stepelevich (1985) 'Max Stirner as Hegelian', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 46/4.
 77. Newman writes of a Foucauldian moment in Kant. See S. Newman (2003) 'Stirner and Foucault: Towards a Post-Kantian Freedom', *Postmodern Culture*, 13/2.
 78. Hegel, *Fenomenologia*, p. 88.
 79. Hegel, *Fenomenologia*, p. 88.
 80. Stirner, *Einzig*e, p. 47.
 81. Marx's remark makes Stirner repeat a Heidegger-like *destruktion* of metaphysics, which at least hints at the stakes of Stirner's leap beyond the horizon of

concept. See K. Marx and F. Engels (1988) *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus Books), p. 208.

82. In German, the word *Geist* or 'Spirit' is masculine.
83. Hegel recasts in his all-embracing 'Spirit' a long-standing, onto-theological totalizing tradition, which framed the whole of Western post-classical thought. It is not surprising that the Hegelian concept of an absolute totality still appears less monstrous than the absolute singularity claimed by Stirner.
84. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 120.
85. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 288.
86. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 164.
87. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 318.
88. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 59.
89. Here the adjective 'western' labels the Fathers who wrote in Latin, as opposed to those who wrote in Greek.
90. See the famous example of Jerome's sense of guilt, expressed in his dream in which god reproaches him: '*Ciceronianus es, non Christianus*', i.e. 'you are a Ciceronian, not a Christian'.
91. This retreating is that which I defined as an extraordinary self-restraining move: *as a theorist* Stirner renounces conceptual thought because *as a theorist* he denounces concepts as the hypostases of essences. Moreover, Stirner retreats as a theorist in order to expand as *that* specific human being. At the same time, his abdication of the traditional role of the theorist as a conceptual dispenser is also his most threatening theoretical move, because it is also, by analogy, a suggestion to do the same.
92. This shift was reversed in the fifth century by Boethius, who appealed to classical authors as a Christian thinker. However, the Christian polemic against the *humanæ litteræ* never completely subsided, and it is still raging within contemporary fundamentalist Christian Churches.
93. See, for example, Augustine's famous definition: 'Two cities, then, have been created by two loves: that is, the earthly by love of self extending even to contempt to God, and the heavenly by love of God extending to contempt of self,' in Augustine (1998) *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 632.
94. I am here using the word ideology in its general etymological meaning of a discourse with and about ideas – that is, conceptual thought.
95. The phrase *damnatio memoriae* defines the Roman practice of destroying evidence (from inscriptions to statues) of a disgraced public authority.
96. 'Criticism smites one idea only by another, such as that of privilege by that of manhood, or that of egoism by that of unselfishness.' (Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 315).
97. More precisely, Stirner evacuates epistemology of its objects, namely the ideas, of which he shows the historical and psychological roots. His narrations of the ontogenesis and the phylogenesis of human beings underline the psychological and historical temporariness of the very *episteme*. Despite Buber's superficial contentions, the dismissal of epistemology is a necessary outcome of Stirner's attack on ideas.
98. See Augustine, *City of God*, especially book XIV.
99. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 317.

100. 'Accompaniment to the Reading of Stirner' in R. Calasso (2001) *The Forty-nine Steps*, trans. John Shepley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 173, modified translation.
101. See *supra*, note 44.
102. Borrowing Bakhtin's terms, since at least the eleventh century Western political narratives are monologic, inasmuch as they reduce the political field to either only one collective body (from the mystical body of the Church to its state avatars) or just a numerical plurality composed of only one kind of subject (from the Hobbesian brutish *homo homini lupus* to its civilized replicas, namely the abstract citizen, the rationally calculating *homo æconomicus* and the subject of universal human rights). On the contrary, Stirner makes room for the dialogic polyphony of human political engagement, as he disposes of both predetermined collective subjects and predefined individuals. See M. Bakhtin (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press). On the *reductio ad unum* operated by Western post-classical thought, see R. Baldissone, (2010) 'Human rights: a *lingua franca* for the multiverse', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 14, no.7, 1117–1137.
103. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 295.

4

The Philosophical Reactionaries: 'The Modern Sophists' by *Kuno Fischer*

G. Edward [Max Stirner]

Translated and introduced by Widukind De Ridder

Introductory note on the text

Widukind De Ridder

This translation makes available to the Anglophone world, for the first time, what is possibly Max Stirner's final reply to his critics, entitled 'Die Philosophischen Reactionäre' (1847). The article was signed 'G. Edward', and its authorship has been disputed ever since John Henry Mackay 'cautiously' attributed it to Stirner and included it in his collection of Stirner's lesser writings.¹ If it is indeed Stirner's final reply, then some of the main traits of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* are restated and posited against those whom Stirner scornfully refers to as 'the philosophers'. Since it was written almost three years after his *magnum opus*, it would offer a unique insight into Stirner's own appraisal of the book in the wake of the ultimate demise of Young Hegelianism. Other than its obvious historical-philosophical significance, the text bears witness to Stirner's own 'spectrality'. The controversy over Stirner's authorship is related to the inherently idiosyncratic nature of his thought. Stirner defies – and indeed mocks – all philosophical and theoretical conventions or categorizations.

'Die Philosophischen Reactionäre' was published in *Die Epigonen*, a journal edited by Otto Wigand from Leipzig. At the time, Wigand had already published *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, and was about to finish the publication of Stirner's translations of Adam Smith and Jean-Baptiste Say (1845–1847).² As the subtitle indicates, 'Die Philosophischen Reactionäre' was written in response to an article by Kuno Fischer (1824–1907) entitled 'Die Moderne Sophisten' (1847). Kuno Fischer was a 23-year-old student of philosophy at the University of Halle, who

would go on to become a renowned liberal and professor of philosophy at the University of Jena.³ It is noteworthy that Fischer's review was the most elaborated criticism of Stirner that did not at the same time take on a defence of Young Hegelianism. Hegelianism in general was, on the contrary, considered the 'premise' for Stirner's 'sophism'. Fischer, however, was not a religious or political conservative, but a liberal and a personal friend of Arnold Ruge. His criticism of Stirner was first published in the short-lived *Leipziger Revue* (1847), after which Otto Wigand invited Fischer to republish it in *Die Epigonen*.⁴ In his article, Fischer mainly took aim at *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, as well as two books that had also been published by Wigand: *Das Verstandesthum und das Individuum* (1846) and *Liebesbriefe ohne Liebe* (1846). Both works were written by Karl Schmidt, but published either anonymously or under a pseudonym (Karl Bürger).⁵

Before analyzing Fischer's article and Stirner's reply, the authorship of 'Die Philosophischen Reactionäre' needs to be addressed. Mackay based his attribution of this text to Stirner on Kuno Fischer's subsequent reply to it, in which the latter, 'with such determination', identified G. Edward as Max Stirner.⁶ The article was entitled 'Ein Apologet der Sophistik und "ein Philosophischer Reactionäre"' and was published alongside 'Die Philosophischen Reactionäre'.⁷ Moreover, it seems rather odd that Otto Wigand would have published 'Edward's' piece back-to-back with an article that falsely attributed it to one of his personal associates at the time.⁸ And, indeed, as Mackay went on to argue, Stirner never refuted this attribution. This remains, however, a slim basis on which to firmly identify Stirner as the author.⁹ This circumstantial evidence has led some scholars to cast doubts over Stirner's authorship, based on both the style and content of 'Die Philosophischen Reactionäre'.¹⁰ One should, however, bear in mind that it was written almost three years after *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, at a time when Young Hegelianism had withered away. Before dealing with the arguments that have cast doubt over Stirner's authorship, we will briefly sketch out Kuno Fischer's article and analyse Stirner's reply.

In 'Die Modernen Sophisten', Fischer considered both Max Stirner and Karl Schmidt to be the representatives of 'modern Sophism'. Fischer defined the 'principle of Sophism' as 'the mirror image of philosophy' and its 'inverted truth'.¹¹ The three stages of modern Sophism were: 'egoism' (Stirner), 'the individual' (*Das Verstandesthum und das Individuum*) and 'irony' (*Liebesbriefe ohne Liebe*).¹² Before elaborating on these different stages, Fischer establishes 'the

philosophical premises of the modern Sophists: Hegel, Strauss, Bauer and Feuerbach'.¹³ Whereas the unity of subject and object was either posited as 'substance' in Hegel, 'pure criticism' in Bauer, or 'the species' in Feuerbach, the 'modern Sophists' sought to 'dissolve' objectivity itself. This 'Sophist violence' was first expressed in 'the egoism of the unique subject' (Stirner), went on to the 'individual' (*Das Verstandesthum und das Individuum*) and finally brought itself to 'the role of a sophistic lover' (*Liebesbriefe ohne Liebe*).¹⁴

Fischer claims that Stirner's 'I' was 'the nothing of all earth-shaking powers'. By 'dissolving all essences' it was itself nothing but 'a ghostly illusion'.¹⁵ What Fischer tried to demonstrate, throughout numerous quotes from *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, was an inherent contradiction in Stirner's alleged 'absolute egoism' – a contradiction between 'formal universality' and 'actual particularity' that was criticized in '*Das Verstandesthum und das Individuum*'.¹⁶ Sophism, therefore, moved beyond Stirner to the 'individual', and eventually to the 'dissolution of the Sophist principle as such' in '*Liebesbriefe ohne Liebe*'.¹⁷ Fischer summarized his entire argument in a couple of concluding remarks, which bear testimony to his own humanism. Sophism was nothing but 'a reaction in the specific sense of the word, a revolt against the ethical and scientific positing of the human essence'. In short, the modern Sophists were nothing but reactionaries.¹⁸

In his reply, 'Edward' considers Fischer, in turn, to be a 'philosophical reactionary'. The majority of the text deals with Fischer's definition of Sophism, his use of philosophical concepts like 'thinking subjectivity' and 'the objective powers in the world'. With much wit, 'Edward' exposes the self-contradictory nature of Fischer's criticism of Sophism as a whole. While making a sharp distinction between Sophism and philosophy, Fischer at the same time considers Sophism to be the 'mirror-image of philosophy'. The Sophists breathe 'philosophical air' and are 'dialectically inspired to a formal volubility'. 'Edward's' reply seems to refer to Stirner's formal or parodic use of dialectical reasoning in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*:

Have you philosophers really no clue that you have been beaten with your own weapons? Only one clue. What can your common sense reply when I dissolve dialectically what you have merely posited dialectically? You have showed me with what kind of 'volubility' one can turn everything to nothing and nothing to everything, black into white and white into black. What do you have against me, when I return to you your pure art?

This quote echoes Max Stirner's reply to his critics in 1845. It was written in response to three separate criticisms by Szeliga, Feuerbach and Moses Hess. In his criticism, Szeliga had 'in all seriousness' referred to Stirner's parody of Hegel's link between historic-cultural developments and the self-knowledge of self-consciousness:

After Szeliga has let the ego in all seriousness develop and identified him with 'man' (p. 4: 'the ego has not always been ego, not always been man, but instead once child and afterwards youth') he turns him into a 'world-historical individual' [...].¹⁹

After dealing with Fischer's philosophical presuppositions, 'Edward' turns to his criticism of Stirner. Fischer's appraisal of Bauer and Feuerbach is largely ignored, because (Young) Hegelianism is 'a philosophical process that has already become historical, but is still too recent to be exposed as a novelty in such a trivial way'. By 1847, Young Hegelianism had indeed withered away, and Stirner himself had moved on to translating classical works in political economics in order to make a living. This might, moreover, explain why he decided to publish his reply to Fischer under a pseudonym.²⁰ Philosophical or theoretical quarrels might have lost their relevance to Stirner, and he felt reluctant to dignify Fischer's assaults with an answer. Bruno Bauer – who was in open conflict with Arnold Ruge – had turned to writing a series of historical studies without, however, entirely giving up on his critique of conservatism.²¹ It is remarkable how 'Edward' tries to downplay the importance of Stirner's criticism of Bruno Bauer in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. This may well be related to Fischer's claim that Stirner was in fact the logical conclusion of Bauer's subjectivism. Ludwig Feuerbach, on the other hand, had radicalized his earlier criticism of religion, and his humanism had gained 'broader importance from the German socialists and communists'.²² That is why Stirner's criticism of humanism is offered centre stage and is disconnected from his broader criticism of Young Hegelianism in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. Instead, 'Edward' tries to emphasize how Stirner's criticism of humanism was eventually a criticism of philosophy itself.

Before tackling humanism, 'Edward' first dealt with Fischer's claim that Stirner was 'the dogmatist of egoism':

If Mister Fischer had read that article [Stirner's reply to his critics], then he would not have come to the comical misunderstanding of viewing Stirner's 'egoism' as a 'dogma', a seriously meant 'categorical

imperative', a seriously meant 'ought' [...]. In that article Stirner himself has described it as a 'phrase', but as the last possible phrase, capable of bringing the whole regiment of phrases to a halt.

According to 'Edward', Stirner wanted to do away with humanism's imperative to become 'a human being', by positing the notion of 'egoism' over it. Stirner's 'I' doesn't want to be 'man', as he has been constructed for him, but instead cuts loose every 'general relation, even the one of language'. This is of course related to Stirner's criticism of 'the logos' (the word) in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*: 'To step out beyond [the domain of religion] it leads into the unsayable. For me paltry language has no word, and "the Word" the Logos, is to me a "mere word".'²³

Egoism thus leads into the unsayable; it brings the 'whole regiment of phrases to a halt'. This is the core of 'Edward's' argument, and it is indeed incompatible with the positing of a new 'ought', a new 'categorical imperative'. Stirner seemed to have affirmed as much when replying to his critics in 1845:

There is no development of the concept of the Unique. No philosophical system can be built out of it, as it can out of Being, or Thinking, or the I. Rather, with it, all development of the concept ceases. The person who views it as a principle thinks that he can treat it philosophically or theoretically and necessarily wastes his breath arguing against it.²⁴

In order to bring the 'regiment of phrases to a halt', Stirner thus had to posit the final 'phrase': 'egoism' or 'the Unique'. Such an endeavour was, however, inherently self-contradictory and prone to failure, since it allowed his philosophical opponents, with their 'talent' and 'sagacity', to treat this 'phrase' theoretically and philosophically. In the hands of these philosophers, and much against Stirner's own intentions, 'egoism' became a philosophy of the self. That is why 'Edward' again refers to Stirner's reply to his critics:

Stirner himself has described his book as in part a clumsy expression of what he wanted to say. It is the arduous work of the best years of his life; and yet he calls it in part 'clumsy'. That is how hard he struggled with a language that was ruined by philosophers, abused by state-, religious- and other believers, and enabled a boundless confusion of ideas.

Stirner indeed stated the matter most clearly in his reply to Feuerbach, Szeliga and Hess: 'What Stirner says is a word, a thought, a concept; what he means is no word, no thought, no concept. What he says is not what is meant and what he means is unsayable.'²⁵

What makes 'Edward's' assessment of Stirner so interesting is that it clearly affirms Stirner's concept of egoism as beyond philosophy. Whereas *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* was still consumed with a criticism of Feuerbach and Bauer, 'Edward' focuses on a much broader criticism of philosophy and, indeed, of thought itself. This criticism is of course integral to his general critique of humanism which, like any system of thought, always posits an 'ought', a 'categorical imperative'. Stirner's spectrality, which still haunts philosophy to this very day, is therefore arguably related to his attempt to beat 'the philosophers' with their own weapons.

Let us now take a look at the doubts that have been expressed over Stirner's authorship of 'Die Philosophischen Reactionäre'. The most elaborated arguments stem from Bernd Kast's dissertation: 'Die Thematik des Eigners in der Philosophie Max Stirner' (1979).²⁶ Kast gives three reasons why, according to him, 'doubts can be cast'²⁷:

- A) 'Edward' distances himself from 'thoughtlessness', whereas Stirner claims that 'only thoughtlessness really saves me from thoughts'.
- B) 'Edward' claims that Stirner has 'dialectically dissolved what others have posited dialectically'. This stands in contrast with Stirner's 'anti-dialectical attitude'.
- C) 'Edward' relates Stirner's notion of 'principle' ('fixed idea') to the concept of 'interest' (as in having a personal interest) and he considers 'egoism' a principle as well, whereas in Stirner, the concept of 'principle' bears a distinctly negative connotation.

Let us consider these three reasons more closely:

- A) 'Edward' does not seem to distance himself from Stirner's notion of 'thoughtlessness', but rather tries to demonstrate the self-contradictory nature of Fischer's concept of 'Sophism'. On the one hand, Fischer states that 'the Sophist is thoughtless', but, on the other hand, he states that the Sophists are not entirely 'thoughtless' and that they are even 'philosophical'. Fischer does so, according to 'Edward', by calling the Sophists 'the inverted mirror image of philosophy', by saying that 'they breathe philosophical air'. 'Edward's' outcry – 'but no!' – refers not to his denunciation

of thoughtlessness, but to the contradiction in Fischer's own definition of Sophism.

- B) I agree, of course, with Kast's reading of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* as being fundamentally anti-dialectical. By stating that Stirner has 'dialectically dissolved what others have posited dialectically', 'Edward' is, however, not implying that Stirner used a serious dialectical method; instead, he is only referring to Stirner's parody of Hegelianism. Stirner's ironic use of Hegelian elements was meant to bring down dialectical reasoning (and philosophy) as a whole. Kast merely had to quote 'Edward' fully to understand this claim: 'You [the philosophers] have showed me with what kind of "*volubility*" one can turn everything to nothing and nothing to everything, black into white and white into black. What do you have against me, when I return to you your pure art?'
- C) 'Edward' does not equate 'the principle' and 'the interest' in the way Stirner had defined those concepts. Instead, he refers to the way in which 'church', 'state' and 'the philosophers' have 'kept the world captive in the division between the principle and the interest'. In the eyes of 'church', 'state' and 'the philosophers', 'principles' are not 'fixed ideas'. What 'Edward' tries to demonstrate is the self-contradictory nature of this division. They make a division between 'the principle' and 'the interest', but how 'can one have a principle in which one is not interested, an interest that for the moment cannot become a principle'? Again, Kast merely had to quote 'Edward' in full to understand that he doesn't equate 'the principle' and 'the interest' in the way Stirner had defined them. According to 'church', 'state' and 'the philosophers', 'you have to, you must have a "pure" principle, interest is impure'. Here we have the concept of 'principle' in Stirner's sense of the word, as a 'fixed idea' that is posited over one's own interest. This brings us to Kast's final point: that 'Edward' considers 'egoism' a principle, whereas principles are indeed 'fixed ideas' according to Stirner. Egoism is indeed posited as a principle or a phrase, but as the 'last possible phrase capable of bringing the whole regiment of phrases to a halt'. 'Edward' clearly repudiates Fischer's interpretation of egoism as 'a dogma' or 'a categorical imperative'.

Kast's argument unwittingly exemplifies 'Edward's' claim about how hard Stirner 'struggled with a language that was ruined by philosophers, abused by state-, religious- and other believers, and enabled a boundless confusion of ideas'. Yet, perhaps the controversy over Stirner's authorship of 'Die Philosophischen Reactionäre' need not be settled after all:

the mystery surrounding it only affirms the spectrality of the thinker who, in the words of 'Edward', one can 'go crackers' on.

Dixi et salvavi animam meam

The Philosophical Reactionaries. 'The Modern Sophists' by Kuno Fischer.²⁸

Translated from the original German by Widukind De Ridder

A productive painter was summoned from his workshop by his wife for lunch. He answered: 'Just one moment: I only have to paint the twelve apostles in life size, one Christ and one Mother Mary.' This is also the way of the philosophical reactionary Kuno Fischer – I choose this expression, because one cannot enter the salon of philosophy without the jacket of a philosophical phrase. Modern criticism, which had the painful, titanic task of storming the philosophical heaven, the last heaven among the heavens, is painted with great brushstrokes. One after the other is depicted. It is a joy to behold. Strauss, Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, Stirner, the Greek Sophists, the Jesuits, the Sophists of Romanticism – everything is painted from the same template.

The good man hunts for Sophists, like our Friends of the Light [*Lichtfreunde*²⁹] and the German Catholics [*Deutschkatholiken*³⁰] hunt for Jesuits. Hang a label around his neck, scold him as a 'Sophist!' and every respectable philosopher will put up a cross for him. Hegel already pointed out that the little that was passed on to us from the Sophists shows how superior they were to Greek idealism, whose entire glory was preserved in the writings of Plato. In the end, Hegel is a 'Sophist' as well. Bring your template, Mister Kuno Fischer, I like to call Hegel a Sophist. But let us listen to our glorious Sophist-hunter: '*Sophism is the mirror image of philosophy, its reversed truth.*'³¹ So, the whole truth, but from the opposite perspective? Well, we do not care about this perspective. We look at the image from above and call it a 'Sophist', we view it from below and call it a 'philosopher', 'tel est notre plaisir'.

'The Sophistic subject, that makes himself lord and despot of thought and thereby offers all objective powers in the world to the "tel est notre plaisir", cannot be thinking subjectivity.'³² 'Lord, despot of thought' – whose thought? My thoughts? Your thoughts? Or thoughts in themselves? When the 'Sophist subject' makes himself lord of my thoughts, or of thoughts in themselves, of a thing which makes no sense, then it is, however, more powerful and entitled to be so, because only through thinking can it take possession of thoughts, and thinking is certainly an honourable and gentlemanlike weapon. If, however, he is lord over

his own thoughts, that is nothing special. If you are not, then you are a lunatic, a plaything of your own fixed ideas. But don't worry, there we have the '*objective powers in the world*', a sublime bunch. Who are you? Are you the light, 'that breaks through stained glass' and despite my *plaisir*, colours my nose blue when I am standing inside a gothic church? Yes, even my praying neighbour, soaked with the objectivity of the present God, has to laugh about the blue nose. Or are you the destructive force of a falling body, discharged electricity, the rapid spreading of vaporizing matter?

No! None of that. I can see the philosophers smile. Spiritless nature should be an objective force in the world? Nature, which does not exist if I do not think of her, is but a thought-object. No! Until now she is more powerful than the philosopher and therefore he disavows her; but his god, decorated with phrases, the garlanded golden calf is an '*objective power in the world*'. Past history is worthless insofar as it doesn't show the dialectical process of this particular thought, and the future – has already been 'drawn' by the philosopher. So, '*the Sophist subject*', '*the despot of thoughts*', '*cannot be thinking subjectivity*'. 'Thinking subjectivity!' When it was still called 'the thinking subject', the nonsense of this sentence was evident, that 'the Sophist subject is not a thinking subject, because he is lord of thoughts, and thus thinks, but rather because he is thought from a thought, because he is the will-less organ of Absolute Spirit'³³, or however these wise definitions may turn out. The alleged '*thinking subjectivity*' has thus become a multi-headed Hydra of nonsense.

'The subject who distinguishes himself as independent from his thoughts, is rather the particular, accidental subject, who doesn't observe anything else in thoughts than a plausible means to an end, and only conceives of the natural, moral world from this category.'³⁴

I distinguish and do not distinguish myself from my thoughts; there I am so consumed by my thoughts that no emotion, no experience can arouse a difference between me and my thoughts. But – I am now using the clumsy words of my opponent – can I then speak of '*thoughts*'? A 'thought' is something accomplished, something thought, and I always distinguish myself from them like the creator from his creation, or the father from his son. Therefore, I most certainly distinguish myself from my thoughts that I have thought or will think; the first are objects, the other – un-laid eggs. That is also why I am merely '*the specific, accidental subject*'. Whoever considers himself, however, '*a necessary subject*', has to identify himself as such. He can get that identity from the moon for all I care. An absurd question, whether a subject is necessary or accidental,

whether it is 'a' subject or 'the' subject. It is necessary because it is there and if it makes itself necessary, it is accidental because nobody would care two hoots about it if it were no longer there. The greatest possible need for a world conqueror, for a scholar, a statesman, is strictly illusory. All these people bind, in the service of their own 'specific' interests, the passions and thoughts of their time to their own chariot like 'possible means to their own ends'. Their intent may well be *real* or an *idea*; it is always *their* idea, a 'particular' idea of which they are fond, and by which they see as an anathema people who, by their proud and unbroken personality, can clearly be singled out as 'accidental, specific subjects'. Regarding the view of '*the natural and moral world*', I have to admit that I do not understand how one can conceive of the natural world other than as a natural '*particular*' subject. I gladly leave you your 'moral world', which has only existed on paper all along: it is the eternal lie of society and will always be shattered by the rich diversity and incompatibility of mighty unique ones [*Einzelnen*]. Let us leave this 'paradise lost' to the poets.

Now our hero makes a journey through history in a blink of the eye. 'Hurray, the dead are riding fast!'³⁵

*'The idealism of thought of the Eleats struck fear into the hearts of Greek sophism.'*³⁶ Well, that brought lots of fame to the Eleats. As if the '*Idealism of thought*' of his madmen doesn't strike fear into the heart of a mad-doctor, the more so when there is 'method in their madness'.

*'The sophism of catholic Christianity was Jesuitism. The believing subject who outwardly opposes catholic dogmatism, brought the very same equally outwardly under his control.'*³⁷ 'Outwardly', indeed, but also *de facto*? Or did the students of Loyola not dominate the Vatican all along? In Austria and Bavaria the masses are constantly fooled with popular ideas by the Legitimists³⁸, in Belgium by the *sans-culottes* and in France by the communists. Even in the depths of Asia, where the hunger of the wastelands and the superiority of the nomads have led all expeditions to ruins, they have trampled the land. Today, a Jesuit pupil sits on the papal throne and rules in accordance with religious and political liberalism, and he is hailed by both Catholics and Protestants alike.

*'In the Sophism of the Romantics, the particular subject stormed the absoluteness of the Fichtean I.'*³⁹ Hear, hear! You Romantics, you art enthusiasts, Schlegel and Tieck, you wise theosoph Novalis, hear it from your graves, you are all but common '*particular*' subjects. Really! With phrases one can relate everything to everything. '*Sophism emancipates the subject from the power of thoughts; so, the Sophist subject is the thoughtless, the raw, particular subject, who hides himself behind thoughts in order*

to escape their power'.⁴⁰ So, because *I* have thoughts, and thoughts do not have *me*, because I think freely and I am not the monkey of a thought that is thought, I am 'thoughtless', 'particular', yes even a 'raw' subject? But no! The Sophists are not entirely 'thoughtless', they are even 'philosophical', something like the '*the inverted mirror-image of philosophy*', but in what way? '*The coarse subject breathes philosophical air, that gives him a peculiar oxygen, by which he is dialectically inspired to a formal volubility*'.⁴¹ Have you philosophers really no clue that you have been beaten with your own weapons? Only one clue. What can your common sense reply when I dissolve dialectically what you have merely posited dialectically? You have showed me with what kind of 'volubility' one can turn everything to nothing and nothing to everything, black into white and white into black. What do you have against me, when I return to you your pure art? But with the dialectical artwork of a philosophy of nature, neither you nor I will dissolve the great facts of natural sciences, and no more than Schelling and Hegel have done.⁴² Right here, philosophy has showed itself a coarse subject, since it was put into a sphere in which it is powerless, a Gulliver without wit among the giants.

*'The Sophist is the "stable", the "accidental" subject and is part of the "reactionary points of view" that have already been overcome in philosophy*⁴³, and for the last time this subject has been abundantly 'depicted' by Kuno Fischer. The subject probably did not understand the philosophers, since 'natural man understands nothing at all of the spirit of God'. Let us now look at how Mister Kuno Fischer has understood those whom he constructs philosophically, so that we can at least admire his 'volubility'. *'In this process of "pure criticism" it does not bring the subject to a true understanding of its sovereignty, it remains critically engaged with the illusions it combats*.⁴⁴ With this, only an absurd reproach is made to 'pure criticism': namely, that it is simply 'critique', because how can somebody criticize something without being 'critically engaged with it'? The question is only in whose advantage this engagement turns out to be, i.e. whether the critic critically overcomes the matter or not.

This critical engagement destroys the subject; it is the uncompromising nothing of all earth-shaking thoughts; they have fallen victim to the absolute egoism of the unique one (Einzigen). Peter Schlemihl^[45] has lost his shadow.⁴⁶

How unfortunate, when somebody chooses an image by which he will most evidently be defeated. Peter Schlemihl's shadow is precisely the image of his uniqueness, his individual contour, figuratively

speaking, the recognition and the feeling of himself. When he has lost it, he is the unfortunate prey of the gold for which he has replaced his essence; the opinion of the plebs, which he cannot despise; the love for a sinful girl, which he doesn't know how to renounce; the plaything of a demon, which he only fears as long as it fears him, as long as it has a contractual bond to him. He could just as well have become the prey of philosophy.

But let us leave these images. In a similar way, like Mister Fischer above, the eighth issue of Bruno Bauer's 'Literaturzeitung' speaks out:

What coarseness and frivolity, to want to solve the most difficult problems, acquit yourself of the most comprehensive tasks, by a *breaking off*.⁴⁷

Stirner answers:

But have you tasks if you do not set them for yourself? So long as you set them, you will not give them up, and I certainly do not care if you think, and, thinking, create a thousand thoughts.⁴⁸

Does the unique one break off the process of thinking here? No! He gives free rein to it, but does not let his uniqueness be broken off and laughs in the face of critique when it tries to force him to help solve a problem which he has not posited, laughs at your '*earth-shaking thoughts*'. The world has suffered long enough under the tyranny of thoughts, under the terror of the idea; she awakes from the heavy dream and follows the joyful *interest* of the day. She is embarrassed by the contradiction in which church, state and the philosophers have kept her captive, the contradiction they have made between the *interest* and the *principle* – as if one can have a principle in which one is not interested, an interest that for the moment cannot become a principle. But you have to, you must have a 'pure' principle – interest is impure. You just have to relate yourself 'philosophically' or 'critically'; otherwise you are a '*coarse*', '*raw*', '*accidental*', '*particular*' subject.

Hear natural scientists, you who observe with pleasure the development of the chicken in a brooded egg, and do not think about criticizing it; hear Alexander, you who cut the Gordian knot which you didn't tie. You have to die a young man at the hands of a priest at Sais⁴⁹ because you harmlessly dared to lift the veil of holy gravity, and the clerics also have the nerve to tell Stirner 'the sight of God has killed you'.

However, first, a proof of the ideal, ethereal attitude of language, that introduces a subject that is not 'coarse', 'necessary', 'earth-shaking':

The Sophist subject, who knows himself debased to a eunuch by his own despotic conceit, finally withdraws behind the foreskin of his own individuality etc.⁵⁰

After Kuno Fischer has honoured the '*philosophical premises of modern sophism, Hegel, Strauss, Bruno Bauer, Feuerbach*',⁵¹ with a broad exposition, a philosophical process that has already become historical, but is still too recent to be exposed as a novelty in such a trivial way, he eventually starts to speak about Max Stirner himself. Regarding the subsumption of Stirner among the Sophists, a label which will neither insult nor flatter him, it will suffice to give his appraisal of the Greek Sophists: 'Certainly the principle of the Sophistic doctrine must lead to the possibility that the blindest and most dependent slave of his desires might yet be an excellent Sophist, and, with keen understanding, trim and expound everything in favour of his coarse heart. What could there be for which a "good reason" might not be found, or which might not be defended through thick and thin?'⁵²

I have already often made the remark that critics, who have with great talent and sagacity explored and analysed the objects of their criticism, have indeed gone crackers on Stirner, and each and every one of them has been, by the most diverse consequences of their own misunderstandings, carried away by downright stupidities.⁵³

Kuno Fischer, for instance, takes the trouble of turning Stirner's egoism and uniqueness into a consequence of Bruno Bauer's self-consciousness and 'pure criticism'. The subject, that '*in the process of pure criticism does not attain a true sentiment of its sovereignty*'⁵⁴, becomes in Stirner '*the resolute nothing of all earth-shaking thoughts*'.⁵⁵ This trick is achieved in Stirner by '*breaking off the critical engagement with the illusions which it fights*'.⁵⁶

But this trick is simply a trick of Kuno Fischer; in Stirner's book nothing of the sort can be found. Stirner's book was actually finished before Bruno Bauer turned his back on his theological criticism as a thing of the past, and every proclamation of 'absolute criticism' in the '*allgemeinen Literaturzeitung*' is only mentioned in a postscriptum, which does not necessarily belong to the structure of the work as a whole.⁵⁷ Feuerbach's 'humanism', which gained broader importance from the German socialists and communists, lay much closer to a realization that clearly brought to light the 'inhumane' of 'humanism',

the contradiction inherent to its system. The fight against humanism is, therefore, what Stirner was most concerned about.⁵⁸ Feuerbach has answered in *Wigands Vierteljahrsschrift* 1845, volume III, and Stirner has refuted this answer.⁵⁹ Kuno Fischer does not seem to be aware of all this, otherwise he would have spared himself the trouble of making the following witty discovery:

'The egoism of the unique one is no arbitrary thought, it is rather objective, it exercises a dogmatic violence, it is a screw, a spook, a hierarchic thought and Max Stirner is its cleric.'⁶⁰ 'Stirner is the dogmatist of egoism.' 'In the objectivity that Stirner gives the absolute egoism (there is no trace of "absolute" egoism in Stirner's book), it has become a noumenon, a dogma.'⁶¹

If Mister Fischer had read that article, then he would not have come to the comical misunderstanding of viewing Stirner's 'egoism' as a 'dogma', a seriously meant 'categorical imperative', a seriously meant 'ought', like 'Humanism', which says, you ought to be 'man' and not 'unman' and thereafter constructing the moral catechism of humanity. In that article Stirner himself has described it as a 'phrase', but as the last possible phrase, capable of bringing the whole regiment of phrases to a halt. If we break out of Feuerbach's 'Wesen des Christenthums', his lesser writings, out of his 'philosophy of humanity' as a whole, the categorical imperative, therefore the positively desired, i.e. if we seize his 'species-ideal' with its mysterious 'powers': 'reason', 'will', 'heart', and its realization: 'insight', 'character', 'love' as the psychological images of abilities and attributes that are immanent in the *real* human species as such, in human organization, aside from historical changes and complications, then already, in Feuerbach, a large step forward was made; he shows already, going back to the main traits of our societal organization, how ridiculous it is to, on the one hand, give such an excess of importance to one attribute like thought or thinking, that it threatens to devour the others; in short, he seeks the *whole of man* with the same authority in all its attributes, and thus also his senses and willpower. But, when he arrives at this point, he forgets that 'man' does not exist, that it is an arbitrary abstraction. Whereas he posits it as an ideal. No wonder that it becomes an impersonal mysterious species-being, invested with mysterious polytheistic 'powers', just like the Greek gods who stand in relation to Zeus. Consequently, an 'ought' sets in: you have to be *man*. Opposite to 'man' stands the 'unman'. Now, nobody will consider an un-animal to not be an animal. Likewise it would be difficult for

Feuerbach to prove that an 'unman' is not really a 'man'. An 'unman' is still, and remains, a real 'man', marked with a moral anathema, with an affect of horror, banished from human society by those – who call him 'unman'.

Against this phrase of 'humanism', Stirner posits the phrase of 'egoism'. How? You summon me to be a 'human being'; more precisely, that I should be 'man'? Well! I was already a 'human being', 'bare homunculus' and 'man' in the cradle; that is what I am for sure; but I am more than that, I am what I have become through myself, my own development, by the appropriation of the outside world, of history, etc. I am unique. But that is not what you really want. You do not want me to be a real man, you do not give a penny for my uniqueness. You want me to be 'man', as you have constructed him, as an ideal for all. You want to make the 'loutish principle of equality' the standard of my life. Principle around principle! Demand around demand! I posit the principle of egoism against you. I just want to be 'I', to despise nature, men and their laws, human society and their love, and cut loose from every general relation, even the one of language, with you. Against all the impressions of your 'ought', all designations of your categorical judgments, I posit the 'ataraxia' of my 'I'; I am already lenient when I make use of language, I am the 'unsayable', 'I merely show myself'. And am I not entitled to the terror of my 'I', which repels all that is human, when I do not allow you to disturb me in my self-enjoyment, just like you with your terror of humanity which labels me an 'unman' when I sin against your catechisms?

Does that mean that Stirner wants to ignore all that is general with his egoism, wants to put down everything as non-existent, wants to clear away all the attributes of our societal organization from which no individual can withdraw himself, by simply denying them? That he wants to give up every relation with people? That he wants, suicidally, to pupate in himself? Really, this misunderstanding is no less bearish than every German liberal or conservative who is even today angered by Börne's statement that 'when you do not like your king's nose, chase him away'⁶², as if it had occurred to Börne to turn the king's nose into a crime against democracy. One should be ashamed to try to make this apprehensible to the mister muddleheads.

But there is an important 'therefore' in Stirner's book, a powerful implication which can be read between the lines, but which the philosophers failed to notice because they do not know actual human beings, do not know themselves as actual human beings and only deal with 'men', 'spirit' in itself, *a priori*, always with the name, never with the

thing. In a negative way, Stirner expresses this with the harsh, irresistible criticism with which he analyses all the illusions of idealism, exposing all the lies of unselfish devotion and sacrifice; what his glorious critics have repeatedly seen as an apotheosis of blind self-interest, of 'cheated egoism' that ousts the belongings of a man, just to get a few pennies from him. Stirner himself has described his book as, in part, a clumsy expression of what he wanted to say. It is the arduous work of the best years of his life, and yet he calls it, in part, 'clumsy'. That is how hard he struggled with a language that was ruined by philosophers, abused by state-, religious- and other believers, and enabled a boundless confusion of ideas.⁶³

But let us return to our critic. When Stirner says 'Love is my sentiment, my property, etc.', or 'my love is only my love, when she is absolutely part of a selfish and egoistic interest, hence when the object of my love is really my object or my property', and says the same about a liaison in which the lovers love each other mutually, now our critic raises himself up triumphantly: '*So after all a Dalailamacult! Which means that one is consumed twice.*' 'I consume my own being consumed'. '*In the natural history of love, Max and Marie⁶⁴ belong to the ruminants.*'⁶⁵

However, since Mister Kuno Fischer gets personal and picturesque, we would like to turn it around. Kuno loves Kunigunde and Kunigunde loves Kuno. But Kuno does not love Kunigunde because he finds his enjoyment in this love; he does not enjoy his female lover for joy, but rather out of pure self-sacrifice, because she wants to be loved. He does not allow her love to get hurt in any way, but not because his love for her compensates him sufficiently, so not on selfish grounds but, instead, without taking himself into account, out of pure self-sacrifice. Kunigunde does the same with Kuno. So we have the ideal couple at a fools' wedding: two people, who have put it in their heads to love each other out of self-sacrifice. Kuno Fischer can keep such a sublime philosophical love to himself, or can find himself a match for it in the insane asylum. We other 'raw', 'particular' subjects want to love, because we feel love, because love satisfies our senses and we experience, in the love for another, a higher self-enjoyment.

Further on, our critic gets trapped in his own contradictions. The 'state-dissolving egoism of the unique one'⁶⁶ is at the same time 'the most solid union of mediocrity', 'in truth the foundation of the most shameless despotism',⁶⁷ whose 'clinking fatal sabre'⁶⁸ can already be heard by our critic. The 'clinking sabre' would no longer have been fatal had we not made it our doom and had we not foolishly carved shibboleths in

its steel, which give the sabre the power to subjugate us into serving an 'idea'.

We can go no further; we hope that one will be honourable enough so as not to expect us to read more than a single page from a book like *'Verstandesthum und Individuum'*,⁶⁹ let alone listen to a critique. We want to inform Mister Kuno Fischer, however, that the author of *'Verstandesthum und Individuum'* wrote a critique against himself in the *'evangelischen Kirchenzeitung'*. But maybe Mister Kuno Fischer is more acquainted than us with such burlesque acts from a man who wants to become famous *à tout prix*.

Notes

1. J. H. Mackay (1977) *Max Stirner, sein Leben und sein Werk* (Freiburg: Mackay-Gesellschaft), p. 172; M. Stirner, 'Die Philosophischen Reactionäre' in J. H. Mackay (1914) *Max Stirner's Kleinere Schriften und Entgegnungen auf die Kritik seines Werkes: 'Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum' aus den Jahren 1842–1848* (Berlin: Bernhard Sachs Verlag), pp. 401–415. David Leopold is equally cautious in his richly annotated edition of *The Ego and Its Own*, when writing that the reply was 'possibly written by Stirner'. M. Stirner (1995) *The Ego and Its Own*, ed. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. xxxiv.
2. M. Stirner (1845–6) 'Die National-Ökonomen der Franzosen und Engländer, *Ausführliches Lehrbuch der praktischen politischen Ökonomie von J.B. Say*'. *Deutsch mit Anmerkungen von Max Stirner*, (Leipzig: Otto Wigand), 4 volumes.; M. Stirner (1846–1847) 'Die National-Ökonomen der Franzosen und Engländer, *Untersuchungen über das Wesen und die Ursachen des Nationalreichtums von Adam Smith*.' *Deutsch mit Anmerkungen von Max Stirner* (Leipzig: Otto Wigand), vol. 4.
3. J. H. Mackay, *Max Stirner, sein Leben und sein Werk*, p. 172.
4. The article was therefore published in *Die Epigonen* vol. 5, after Stirner's reply and Kuno Fischer's subsequent reply in vol. 4. Ibidem.
5. For an introduction to Karl Schmidt, see Ernst Barnikol's inexhaustible 'Das Entdeckte Christentum im Vormärz' in E. Barnikol (1927) *Das Entdeckte Christentum im Vormärz* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs), pp. 39–52.
6. J. H. Mackay, *Max Stirner, sein Leben und sein Werk*, p. 172.
7. K. Fischer, 'Die Philosophischen Reactionäre. Ein Apologet der Sophistik und "ein Philosophischer Reaktionär"', *Die Epigonen*, vol. 4, pp. 152–165.
8. See note 2. One might even wonder whether Wigand did not invite Fischer to publish his original piece because he wanted to have it printed alongside Stirner's reply.
9. Further proof stems from Arnold Ruge's correspondence with Kuno Fischer. In a letter dated 14 March 1847, Ruge wrote to Fischer: 'Rössler brought you Stirner's reply. The moor [insultive] is unsound. It is surely good, if you would answer Stirner in a letter and would let him stumble once more over his own stupidities'. This might explain why Fischer attributed the text to

- Stirner. A. Ruge, Brief vom 14 März 1847 an Kuno Fischer, in A. Ruge (1886) *Briefwechsel und Tagebüchblätter aus den Jahren 1825–1880*, v. 1, (Berlin: Weidmann), p. 429 (see also p. 439).
10. Reference works, such as a bibliography of socialism and communism, and a lexicon of pseudonyms, also treat 'G. Edward' as a pseudonym of Max Stirner. See J. Stammhammer (1900) *Bibliographie des Socialismus und Communismus*, v. 2, (Jena: Gustav Fischer), p. 99; M. Holzmann (1906) *Deutsches Pseudonymen-Lexikon*, (Wien: Akademischer Verlag), p. 71.
11. K. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', *Leipziger Revue*, p. 9.
12. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 11.
13. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten'.
14. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 19.
15. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten'.
16. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 45.
17. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 47.
18. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 51.
19. 'Rezensenten Stirners' in B. Laska, (ed.), (1986) *Parerga, Kritiken, Repliken*, (Nürnberg: LSR-Verlag), pp. 147–148.
20. Ernst Barnikol was also intrigued by the mystery surrounding Stirner's authorship. After referring to 'Die Philosophischen Reactionäre', he added in footnote: 'Did Stirner find this pseudonym in Edellmann's book: "Die Göttlichkeit der Vernunft", where Edellmann speaks out against professor Edward?' (Barnikol, *Das Entdeckte Christentum im Vormärz*, p. 50). Adding to the mystery are a couple of articles by one 'G. Edward' in 'Berliner Zeitungs-Halle', entitled 'Reiseskizzen aus Algier' ('Traveling Sketches from Algiers'). They were published from 17 May 1847 to September 1847. What makes this particularly intriguing is that Stirner's former wife, Marie Dähnhardt, was also publishing (anonymously) a series of articles in the 'Berliner Zeitungs-Halle' between March and November 1847. This series was entitled 'Vertraulichen Briefen aus Engeland' ('Confidential Letters from England'): H. Mackay (1977) *Max Stirner, sein Leben und sein Werk*, p. 189.
21. D. Moggach (2003) *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 153–156; M. Tomba (2005) *Krise und kritik bei Bruno Bauer, Kategorien des Politischen im nachhegelschen Denken* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang), pp. 152–155.
22. Feuerbach probably revised his earlier stance after Stirner's criticism in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. In *Das Wesen der Religion* (1846) a naturalist-existentialist motive prevails over the Hegelian motifs expressed in *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841). See A. Van Harvey (1995) *Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 21.
23. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 164; M. Stirner (2000) *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (Stuttgart: Reclam), p. 201.
24. Stirner, 'Rezensenten Stirners', p. 150.
25. Stirner, 'Rezensenten Stirners', p. 149.
26. B. Kast (1979) *Die Thematik des Eigners im philosophischen Denken Max Stirners* (Bonn: Bouvier).
27. Kast, *Die Thematik*, pp. 429–431.
28. G. Edward [Max Stirner] (1847) 'Die Philosophischen Reactionäre. "Die modernen Sophisten" von Kuno Fischer.' *Die Epigonen*. 4. Band. Leipzig,

pp. 141–151. This translation is based on: M. Stirner, 'Die Philosophischen Reactionäre', pp. 207–222. For further information on the background of this text we refer to the annotations in Leopold's edition of Stirner's *The Ego and Its Own*.

29. Lichtfreunde: An association of 'rationalist' and liberal Protestants that arose around 1841. G. Müller (2003) *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, (Berlin: de Gruyter), p. 294.
30. Deutschkatholiken: The catholic counterpart to the Lichtfreunde that arose around 1844. Ibidem.
31. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 9.
32. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', pp. 9–10.
33. 'Edward' is paraphrasing but not quoting, Fischer's definition of the 'Sophist subject'.
34. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 10. Italics are used here, and henceforth, to distinguish Fischer's words as quoted by Edward, from Edward's own words that he at times also places in quotation marks, as well as his quotations from others.
35. Quote from a poem by Gottfried August Bürger entitled 'Lenore' (1774). Fischer also referred to this poem in 'Moderne Sophisten'.
36. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 10.
37. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten'.
38. Legitimists: French ultra-royalists who strove for the restoration of the House of Bourbon in the wake of the 1830 July revolution.
39. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 10.
40. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten'.
41. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten'.
42. Most likely a reference to *Das Verstandesthum und das Individuum*, in which Karl Schmidt made a parody of Stirner's allegedly dialectical reasoning in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. In the chapter on Stirner, reference is made to natural sciences in separate chapters on physics, chemistry, medicine, geology and astronomy, etc. K. Schmidt (1846) *Das Verstandesthum und das Individuum* (Leipzig: Wigand), pp. 249–276. 'Edward' implies that Schmidt – like Fischer – didn't understand how Stirner was trying to return to the philosophers their own 'dialectic art'. Schmidt's own 'dialectical artwork of a philosophy of nature', however, would not 'dissolve the great facts of natural sciences'. Stirner's dialectical artwork, on the other hand, successfully 'beat the philosophers with their own weapons', according to 'Edward'. This is consistent with what has already been argued: that Stirner's use of dialectical reasoning in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* was strictly parodic. See W. De Ridder (2008) 'Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians', *History of European Ideas*, 34/3: 285–297. For more information on '*Das Verstandesthum und das Individuum*', see the final note.
43. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten'.
44. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', pp. 10–11.
45. Peter Schlemihl ('schlemiel' means fool in Yiddish) is the main character of Adelbert von Chamisso's 'Peter Schlemihl's wundersame Geschichte' ('Peter Schlemihl's Remarkable Story'), published in 1814. It is a children's tale about a man who sells his shadow to the devil and becomes a social outcast. Stirner referred to the story in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*.

46. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 11.
47. Quote: Stirner, *Der Einzige*, pp. 164–165.
48. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 165.
49. Reference to the Egyptian town of Sais, as mentioned in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Critias*.
50. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 11.
51. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten'.
52. Quote: Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 18.
53. Reference to Stirner's first reply to his critics, published in 1845: 'Rezenstenten Stirners', *Wigands Vierteljahrsschrift* (Leipzig), Vol. 3, pp. 147–194. See: 'Rezensenten Stirners', in *Parerga, Kritiken, Repliken*. Abridged translation: M. Stirner (1977) 'Stirner's Critics', *The Philosophical Forum*, 8/2-3-4: 66–80.
54. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 10.
55. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 19.
56. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 11.
57. Reference to Stirner's 'Remark' (Anmerkung) in his chapter on 'Humane Liberalism' (Bruno Bauer). Stirner, *Der Einzige*, pp. 159–167.
58. This is rather striking, since the entire chapter on 'humane liberalism' (humanism) and its postscriptum were solely dedicated to Bauer, and were not at all inconsistent with Stirner's 'fight against humanism'. Bruno Bauer's position as a leading critic of Restoration Prussia had, however, waned between 1843 and 1847. Many of his contemporaries, like Kuno Fischer and Karl Marx, considered him a radical subjectivist who had abandoned the Hegelian Left. This was, in part, due to his writings in 'Die Allgemeinen Literaturzeitung' in 1844. Stirner dedicated his postscriptum to these articles, but considered them the logical conclusion of Bauer's humanism, which now 'saw the inhuman everywhere, except in his own head'. In order to refute Fischer's erroneous claim that Stirner was in fact the consequence of Bauer's philosophy of self-consciousness and its alleged 'subjectivism', 'Edward' had to downplay the importance of Stirner's criticism of Bauer altogether. For an overview of the debates on Bauer's subjectivism and conservatism after 1843–1844 and its relation to Stirner, see W. De Ridder (2011) 'The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer, Krise und Kritik bei Bruno Bauer', *Historical Materialism*, 19/1: 315–329.
59. Feuerbach's reply was entitled 'Über das Wesen des Christentums in Beziehung auf den Einzigen und sein Eigentum' ('On the Essence of Christianity in Relation to the Unique One and his Property'), and published in the same volume as Stirner's response mentioned in note 26.
60. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 22.
61. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 22.
62. Carl Ludwig Börne (1786–1837): German political writer who was, alongside Heinrich Heine, a member of *'Junges Deutschland'*. 'Young Germany' (1830–1850) was a literary movement that, contrary to 'Young Hegelianism', viewed literature and literary critique as a powerful tool of social reform rather than social-political criticism.
63. Reference to Stirner's first reply to his critics: see note 26.
64. Allusion to Stirner's wife Marie Dähnhardt, who left him in 1846.
65. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 31.
66. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten', p. 30.

67. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten'.
68. Fischer, 'Moderne Sophisten'.
69. Reference to the anonymously published book, written by Schmidt, *Das Verstandesthum und das Individuum*. Fischer criticized it in 'Moderne Sophisten', while claiming that the anonymous author had superseded Stirner. The book can be considered, in part, a parody of Stirner and the Young Hegelians. Schmidt frequented the so-called Berlin Young Hegelians ('Die Freien') between 1844 and 1846. After developing his critique of Stirner and Young Hegelianism, he went on to become a renowned historian of pedagogy. For an annotated translation of chapter two of the book ('Das Individuum') and the beginning of the introduction, see K. Schmidt (2010) *The Individual* (North Syracuse: Gegensatz Press). Eric v.d. Luft explains in his introduction that Karl Schmidt (pseudonym: Karl Bürger) published another satire of Stirner in 1846: *Liebesbriefe ohne Liebe*. Translation: K. Schmidt (2010) *Love Letters without Love*, (Gegensatz Press: Syracuse, 2010). In his introduction, Eric v.d. Luft considers *Das Verstandesthum und das Individuum* as a 'proto-existentialist' work. Moreover, both books 'sought to reduce dialectical philosophy to its own absurd and self-contradictory consequences'. (Schmidt, *The Individual*, p. 8). It is noteworthy, therefore, that Edward disparages Schmidt in his reply to Kuno Fischer. 'Edward' even accuses Schmidt of having himself written a critique of his own book that was published anonymously in Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg's *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung*. A translation of this text can be found in Eric v.d. Luft's edition. 'Edward' probably refuses to read more than 'one single page' of *Das Verstandesthum und das Individuum*, because the book merely copies Stirner's ironic use of Hegelian elements and is, for that reason, equally the work 'of a man who wants to be famous à tout prix'.

Part III

Themes and Debates

5

Max Stirner and Karl Marx: An Overlooked Contretemps

Paul Thomas

The German Ideology has rarely been considered in its entirety; its belated publication¹ and translation has obscured its contents. Its most lengthy section, 'Saint Max', a detailed examination of Max Stirner's book *The Ego and his Own* (*Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*), has been almost completely ignored.² Roy Pascal's long-standard English language translation of *The German Ideology*³ omitted Marx's sustained attack on Stirner, but many of the most important arguments that have long been associated with *The German Ideology* find their fullest expression in 'Saint Max'.⁴ 'Saint Max' indicates why Marx put forward the arguments of *The German Ideology* in the way that he did, and why he put them forward at all. 'Saint Max' is no mere satellite to a parent body, *The German Ideology*; 'Saint Max' is its core.

It was Stirner's anarchism that afforded Marx the opportunity of settling accounts with the Young Hegelians and with his own 'philosophical' past. 'Saint Max' was Marx's first extended critique of an anarchist theory; Marx considered the theory in question to be the consummation of Young Hegelian excess:

Hitherto men have constantly made up for themselves false conceptions about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be. They have arranged their relationships according to their ideas of God, or normal man, etc. The phantoms of their brains have got out of their hands. Let us liberate them from the chimeras, ideas, dogmas, imaginary beings under the yoke of which they are pinning away. Let us revolt against the rule of thoughts.⁵

That this opening salvo serves both as a *précis* of Young Hegelian theorizing in general and of Stirner's argument in particular tells us what

the 'the German ideology' is, why this phrase was used as the title of the book, and why Marx considered Stirner to be its touchstone. Most commentators fail to notice Stirner's distinctively Young Hegelian lineage, which is what prompted Marx to attack it as frontally and brutally as he did, and enabled Marx to signify by this attack his unequivocal rejection of Young Hegelianism in general.

The myth that Stirner moved 'merely on the fringes of Hegelian circles'⁶ badly needs putting to rest. William Brazill's study of the Young Hegelians awards the nomenclature of Young Hegelian to only six people other than Stirner.⁷ Stirner was a characteristic, if eccentric, member of the Young Hegelian ginger group in Berlin, 'The Free' (*die Freien*). For all his characterization as an *enfant terrible*, Stirner's Young Hegelian credentials were never called into question as the result of his book's appearance. *The Ego and his Own* enjoyed a certain *succès de scandale* in Young Hegelian circles. Arnold Ruge commended Stirner for having given up Fichtean metaphysics and the Feuerbachian 'theology of humanism', and proceeded to insist that '[Stirner's] book must be sustained and propagated. It is liberation from the stupidest of stupidities, the "social artisans' dogma" ... which preaches ... the salvation of *absolute economics*'.⁸ Moses Hess placed Stirner among those who had expressed the opposition of individuality and collectivism. The *impasse* to which this opposition had led, Hess argued, could be resolved only by his own 'socialism', the communal organization of society⁹ – a conclusion with which Stirner would never have agreed.

Ruge and Hess were not the only writers who attempted to appropriate Stirner. The initial reaction of Engels is particularly striking. While he considered Stirner's egoism to be 'merely the essence of present-day society and of present-day men brought to the level of consciousness', Engels insisted (in a letter to Marx) that this very egoism 'can be built upon even as we invert it'. He compared Stirner to Bentham, and argued that Stirner's egoism must forthwith be transmuted into communism (*gleich in Kommunismus umschlagen*); 'only a few trivialities' needed to be stressed against Stirner, 'but what is true in his principles we have to accept'.¹⁰ Marx's reply to Engels has not been preserved, but we have the central part of a major book written by Marx to indicate that he disagreed; in a later letter Engels was to say that he had come round to Marx's viewpoint and that Hess had done so also.¹¹

The responsiveness of the various members of the Young Hegelian circle to Stirner's arguments indicates that Marx was not wrong in identifying this milieu as Stirner's true setting. Young Hegelian thought tended, in Marx's opinion, to issue in the injunction that 'people have

only to change their consciousness to make everything in the world all right'.¹² Stirner's arguments demand to be outlined if we are to appraise Marx's phrase-by-phrase dissection of them, and to adjudicate the issues dividing the two.

The arguments of *The Ego and his Own* have been summarized by Sir Isaiah Berlin. 'Stirner believed', he says,

that all programmes, ideals, theories as well as political, social and economic orders are so many artificially built prisons for the mind and the spirit, means of curbing the will, of concealing from the individual the existence of his own infinite creative powers, and that all systems must therefore be destroyed, not to which is a new form of idolatry; only when this has been achieved would man, released from his unnatural fetters, become truly master of himself and attain to his full stature as a human being.¹³

Stirner's notion that, throughout history, men have been whoring after false gods was counterbalanced by its equally Young Hegelian corollary: that all we need to do to change reality is to master our thoughts, instead of letting them master us.

Egoism and anarchism

Max Stirner may be an 'egoistic anarchist'; yet both terms admit of elasticity. Stirner's brand of egoism is distinct from most others – very different from the argument of Mandeville (and, by extension, the early political economists) that 'private vices' add up to 'public benefit'; Stirner regarded the notion of public (as opposed to private) benefit as nonsensical. Stirner's egoism, again, seems irreducible to Romantic notions of subjectivity. Stirner was a forthright foe of all teleological categories – of goals, purposes, ends, even if these are imposed upon the individual by the individual himself. Stirner denied the possibility of any political outcome of the free play of self-defined forces, and did not share the psychological determination of a Spinoza, a Hobbes or a Helvétius. These theorists had maintained that the assertive ego could act only on its own behalf, whereas Stirner despairingly maintained that, quite to the contrary, people throughout history had submitted themselves voluntarily to what he calls 'hierarchy' – a sequence of oppressive, outside belief systems and institutions. All such systems and structures, Stirner insisted, had struck at individuals' uniqueness, originality and singularity.

Stirner's 'analysis of the modern age is a sort of demonology of the spirits to which humanity has been successfully enslaved';¹⁴ *The Ego and his Own* is a diatribe against the effects of those successive *idées fixes*, against beliefs that had worked successfully and remorselessly to prevent the ego from working on its own behalf. Stirner's aim was to remove the blinkers from our eyes; the autonomous individual was a hoped-for goal of future human endeavour – a goal that is presaged only among the outcasts of modern society. The obstacle to the final emergence of individual autonomy is consciousness, conceived in the Young Hegelian manner as being alien, oppressive and imposed.

The Ego and his Own inventories obstacles to the free play of the ego, obstacles which are attacked so broadly that the theories of most other 'egoists' would not escape condemnation. The 'absolute ego' of Fichte is a case in point: Stirner attacks it because it is a postulated goal that might dominate individuals, and because the goal in question was said to consist in the realization of rational universality, a project Stirner considered senseless. Stirner's egoism, made operative, would not 'realize' anything; it would destroy all known forms of society once and for all.

Stirner saw revolution in the same, unsparing light in which he saw religious faith, moral duty, political organization and social institutions – as demands upon the individual self, demands which displace its 'particularity' (*Eigenheit*) with various conceptions of the purportedly 'true' self to which the real, empirical self must aspire and subsequently adhere. Stirner aimed to undermine all such demands for self-sacrifice by spelling out their implications; the demands of revolutionaries were not exempted. What most needs safeguarding is the core of irreducible singularity (*Eigenheit* again) on which all forms of society and state, and all kinds of revolutionary organization, had fed. Only the association (*Verein*) of egoists was to be the outcome not of revolution, but of a very different form of uprising which would not have the individual aspire to some formative principle greater than the self. This association was to come into being specifically in order to preserve, and not to usurp, the self-defined privileges and prerogatives of the sovereign individual. According to Stirner, the association will somehow positively preserve and enlarge the individual's self-assertive particularity; Stirner attacked any mentality – revolutionary or not – that relied on moral postulates or depended on the use of the word 'ought' (*sollen*). Evil resided in the very notion of such ideals or 'vocations'.

The constraints against which Stirner's polemic was directed may be internal, external or both at once. Enslavement to the dictates of consciousness involves a loss of the individual self that may be as severe or

demeaning as that entailed by regulation by external moral codes. To follow commands is to allow one's actions to be determined: in Stirner's unorthodox lexicon, to 'find oneself' in thought, or in 'spirit', is to 'lose oneself' in 'reality'. The loss of self involved has taken different forms at different historical stages. The culmination of the process, according to Stirner, was to consist in the supremacy of the assertive ego. Even so, Stirner considered history up to that point as the autogenesis of man propelled by spirit or consciousness. He may have been 'very weak on history'¹⁵ – Marx thought that he had 'cribbed' his history from Hegel – yet Stirner aimed to turn his borrowings to good account:

I receive with thanks what the centuries of culture have acquired for me; I am not willing to give up anything of it; I have not lived in vain. The experience that I have power over my nature and need not be the slave of my appetites need not be lost upon me; the experience that I can subdue the world by culture's means is too dearly bought for me to be able to forget it. But I want still more.¹⁶

Stirner gives an original twist to the notion that 'Christianity begins with God's becoming man and carries on its work of conversion and redemption through all time to prepare for God a reception in all men and everything human, and to penetrate everything with the Spirit'.¹⁷ The Christian *Sollen*, he insists, denigrates the individual in a forceful way. In loving the spiritual, the Christian can love no particular person. The concern of Christianity 'is for the divine', and while 'at the end of Heathenism the divine becomes the extramundane, at the end of Christianity it becomes the intramundane'.¹⁸

Whereas the Catholic is content with carrying out commands proceeding from an external, authoritative source, the Protestant is his own *Geistlicher*, using his own 'internal secret policeman' to watch over every motion of his mind.¹⁹ The shift to Protestantism is political and religious all at once; liberalism entails the absence of intermediaries between citizen and state just as Protestantism involves their absence from the individual's relationship to the deity. The individual becomes a political Protestant in relation to his God, the modern state, the state Hegel had called a 'secular deity' which 'men must venerate'.²⁰

The section of *The Ego and his Own* that deals with political liberalism bears the imprint of Marx's 'On the Jewish Question',²¹ Stirner repeats Marx's argument that just as religious freedom means that religion is free, and freedom of conscience that conscience is free, political freedom means that the state (not man himself) is free. Stirner, however, twists

this argument in a direction that is all his own. 'Liberalism', he declaims, 'simply [introduced] other *concepts* – human instead of divine, political instead of ecclesiastical, scientific instead of doctrinal, real conflicts instead of crude dogmas.' What these shifts all mean is that 'now nothing but mind rules the world';²² liberalism, according to Stirner, accentuates and institutionalizes the 'Christian' depreciation of the individual. 'The rights of man... have the meaning that the man in me entitles me to this and that. I as individual am not entitled but "man" has the right and entitles me.'²³ With the advent of modern citizenship (*Bürgerthum*) 'it was not the individual man – and he alone is man – that became free, but the citizen, the *citoyen*, the political man, who for that very reason is not man'. Although what Stirner called *Bürgerthum* requires an impersonal authority, the absence of intermediaries this requires has the effect of increasing individual submissiveness.²⁴ The uprising of enraged individuals would suffice to destroy the state, root and branch. Denigration of the individual is the principle of the state. The kernel of the state, like the kernel of 'morality', was the abstraction 'man'; every collective category or concept respects and validates only the 'man' in the individual.

Stirner's anarchism, by rejecting both the state and morality on the same grounds, underscores their connection. The state exercised domination *and* remained an *idée fixe*, an 'apparition' by which people are 'possessed'. While he presents the state as an agency of sacredness and morality, he presents society and religion (not to mention revolution) in almost identical terms. Stirner never clearly distinguishes state from society, although he provides some pointers: while society denies the liberty of the individual, the state denies his peculiarity or uniqueness (*Eigenheit*); society, from which people must nevertheless escape by asserting their *Eigenheit*, is not an illusion in the way the state is; society, unlike the state, is never linked with pauperism; and nothing in society is said to correspond to the total surrender of man that the state requires – the taking over by the Protestant-liberal state of the 'whole man' with *all* his attributes and faculties.

Stirner, similarly, says very little about forms of the state, beyond the proposition that any state is a despotism, even if all those who belong to it despotize over one another, and that the liberal state reinforces the coercive power of conscience. This is what accounts for its power; in itself the liberal state is no more than a mechanical compound. The state machine moves the wheels in people's heads, but only so long as none of them move autonomously. An upsurge of *Eigenheit*, which will remove and undercut the individual's destitution of will, would destroy the mechanism once and for all. This is to be the task of 'rebellion'.

As part of this upsurge, Stirner insisted that individuals would discover for themselves that the state is, in the last analysis, an illusion; as an authority for this assertion he cited Marx. Stirner had absorbed Marx's message in 'On the Jewish Question', namely that the state considered as a community was illusory and that citizenship considered as a measure of community was likewise more apparent than real. But he then proceeded to assert that the state, not as a collective moral force, but as the repressive embodiment of the policy, military and bureaucracy, was likewise an illusion. To Marx such a conclusion was preposterous. The idea that people obey the state because they are deluded does not lead to the proposition that the state itself is a delusion. Stirner believed that the rule of the state was an instance of people being ruled by their own illusions. Since 'man' is by nature not a political animal, and since only the political in 'man' is expressed in the state, political life is a fabrication. Law embodies no coercive force except in the minds of those who obey it – a proposition ridiculed by Marx. 'In every institution in our society', writes one twentieth-century writer, wittingly or unwittingly echoing Stirner:

people must be helped to realize that the power of the ruling elite and its bureaucracy is nothing, nothing but their [people's] refusal and externalized power. Then it is a matter of recuperation of this power, and the recuperative strategy is quite simple; act against the rules, and the act itself converts the illusory power in them into real power in us.²⁵

That such an argument can be trotted out again does nothing to make it any less ridiculous.

Stirner, Feuerbach and Marx

The Ego and his Own was an attack on Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*. Its division into 'theological-false' then 'anthropological-true' sections ('Man' – *Der Mensch*, and 'Myself' – *Ich*) indicates its target by mirroring it. Both *The Ego and his Own* and *The Essence of Christianity* are concerned with men's alienated attributes and their re-appropriation; both arguments involve recapturing human autonomy.

Even so, Stirner was convinced that the ultimate expression of the oppressive spirituality he so detested was the very book, *The Essence of Christianity*, in which Feuerbach had claimed to neutralize spirituality. Stirner regarded Feuerbach's theoretical *coup* as a mere 'theological

insurrection', and Feuerbach himself as a religious thinker *malgré lui*; his accusation should detain us. The activity of the Prussian censors, as well as that of the Young Hegelians themselves, attests to the connection both sides made between the critique of religion and that of politics. Marx's essay 'On the Jewish Question' had as its terrain the penumbra where religious and political critiques overlap; what really distinguishes Feuerbach from his Young Hegelian confederates is not that he introduced them to a radical critique of religion,²⁶ but that he alone discussed religion without also discussing the state.

But Stirner perceived a connection between the two. All claims emanating from outside the individual are attempts to annihilate the self; with the advancement of such claims 'our essence is brought into opposition with *us* – we are split into an essential and an unessential self'. The outer 'man' is ranged against the real individual. What Feuerbach called 'sense experience' was by no means the actual experience of real individuals, but an 'essence', an abstraction which Feuerbach had called 'sensuousness', but which, in reality, like all abstractions and essences, has come to dominate people. The weakness in Feuerbach's position was his conception of human 'divinity' as something that could be regained at the level of consciousness. Because the individual must, by implication, give way before his or her newly found 'divinity' once it is regained, this category would be as oppressive and burdensome a taskmaster as any other spirit or collectivity to which individuals historically had succumbed.

There is a certain truth in Stirner's accusation that faith in an eternally present divinity is compatible with atheism on Feuerbach's definition: 'a true atheist', Feuerbach himself admitted, 'is one who denies the predicates of the divine being, not one to whom the subject of these predicates is nothing'.²⁷ Feuerbach's celebrated reversal ('all we need do is always to make the predicate into the subject...to arrive at the undisguised, pure and clear truth'),²⁸ his substitution of 'man' for 'God' as the agent of divinity, *changes* nothing for anybody. 'Man', or mankind, considered as a collectivity, is no less oppressive and sacred than 'God' so long as the individual continues to be related to this category in a religious manner. Feuerbach advances nothing more than an abstract change in the object of self-renunciation. Feuerbach was just a 'pious atheist'; Feuerbach, in his reply to Stirner, admitted that his statement, 'There is no God', was only the negative form of the 'practical and religious, i.e. positive statement' that 'man is the God', which was precisely Stirner's point.²⁹

Feuerbach's relocation of divine essence within humanity means that some human essence continues to be brought into opposition to the real individual, who remains split into 'essential' and 'non-essential' spheres. Stirner's task was to overcome all such divisions; to make an essence (Feuerbach's 'species-being' or Hegel's *Geist*) or a moral imperative the centre or goal of one's being is to bifurcate the self, exalting the 'better' spiritual or moral part over the paltrier remainder. Feuerbachian humanism is the *ne plus ultra* of man's self-renunciation, of his enslavement to the categories he has himself created; its adumbration signals the advent of Stirner's 'association of egoists', which is to rise like a phoenix from the ashes of 'spirituality'. Stirner argues that *The Essence of Christianity* expresses a distinctively Christian principle in the most extreme possible form.³⁰

Stirner, in the course of excoriating Feuerbach's notion of 'species-being' (*Gattungswesen*) as an example of empty but ominous humanitarianism, suggested that Marx himself was Feuerbachian. Stirner's accusation had sufficient force to elicit from Marx an extended response. Marx's most obvious line of defence was to assert his credentials as a communist revolutionary. This separated him decisively from Feuerbach, who disavowed revolution. It also required Marx to disprove Stirner's accusation that revolutionary tasks and goals were as burdensome and anti-human as any other goal or essence.³¹

The foundation of irreligious criticism is this: man makes religion; religion does not make man. Religion is, in fact, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who had either not yet gained himself or has lost himself again... This state, this society, produced religion, which is an inverted world-consciousness, because they are an inverted world. Religion... is the fantastic realization of the human being because the human being has attained no true reality. Thus, the struggle against religion is indirectly the struggle against the world of which religion is the spiritual aroma... Religion is the illusory sun about which man revolves only so long as he does not revolve around himself.³²

In Marx's words, the 'critique of religion ends in the doctrine that man is the supreme being for man; thus it ends in the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a debased, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being'.³³ Marx did not share Stirner's Young Hegelian belief in the oppressive force of Feuerbach's relocated

divinity; but he did share with Stirner a desire to assault Feuerbach's vapid anthropocentrism, the abstract love for an abstract 'Man' at the expense of any concern for real, individual people. Marx maintained in *The German Ideology* that Feuerbach:

only conceives [man] as an object of the senses, not as sensuous activity, because he still remains in the world of theory ... [and] stops at the abstraction 'Man' ... [He] never manages to conceive the sensuous world as the total, living, sensuous activity of the individuals comprising it.

The 'True Socialists', too, by casting their arguments in terms of an abstraction – 'Man' – return from 'the realm of history' to 'the realm of ideology'.³⁴ Here, again, it is hard not to see the imprint of Stirner. Stirner's accusation that Marx was a Feuerbachian had enough bite to impel Marx to redefine his own position. In rejecting Feuerbachian humanism, Marx had to avoid aligning himself with the extreme individualism that Stirner propounded.

Revolution and rebellion

Stirner's portrayal of successive stages of human submission issues in the injunction that 'my own will is the state's destroyer' (*der eigener Wille meiner ist der Verderber des Staats*). While this sentiment expresses an anarchist position, Stirner denied that it was revolutionary. Revolution appeals to collectivity and self-sacrifice, which must be avoided by the egoist. Revolution – a game not worth the candle – is one more variant of faith, morality and domination, one more creed or *Sollen* displacing the uniqueness, particularity and singularity (*Eigenheit*) of the individual. Any submission to any revolutionary task, agency or body must rest, according to Stirner, on some prior belief in what he called the 'sacredness' of some precept or other; it is belief in the sacredness of precepts that people most need to overcome. Revolution may appear to go against the grain of established forms of society, but, for all its disruptive claims and pretensions, revolutionary organization remains a form of organization. Those espousing revolutionary ends are trading one form of submissiveness and self-sacrifice for another. To Stirner, Revolution was an agency of 'fanaticism' or morality, another 'vocation' involving devaluation of the individual. Freedom has to be taken, self-assertively; if it were simply 'received' it would amount, in Stirner's unorthodox vocabulary, to mere 'emancipation'. 'Rebellion' (*Empörung*) was to be a rising

of individuals who would be reacting to nothing outside themselves, relying on nobody but themselves. It would take place without regard to future arrangements; its object would be less the overthrow of some established order than the elevation of the autonomous individual above all established orders. Whereas revolution aims at new arrangements, rebellion aims at our no longer allowing ourselves to be arranged.

Stirner's principle of 'rebellion' avoided the need for the tyrannical regimentation that he thought characterized revolutionary organization. 'Rebellion' was to be an unleashing of individual passions, energy and anger against every social and political tie; the outcome of this eruption of individual self-assertion and outrage was to be not a new kind of political or social form, but the non-systematic 'association' (*Verein*) of egoists.

Of all forms of organization, only Stirner's *Verein* would exert no moral influence, exercise no legal constraint. It alone would not displace or feed upon the individual's *Eigenheit*; the individual would remain 'more than' the *Verein*. We should aspire not to the chimera of community, but to our own 'one-sidedness'; we should combine with others purely and simply in order to multiply our own powers, and only for the duration of any given task.³⁵ If the state 'consumes' the individual, the individual will 'consume' the 'association' in his turn. In view of such characterizations of the association of egoists, which Stirner himself portrayed as a 'free for all', it is small wonder that Marx regarded it as an 'ideal copy' of capitalist society, of Hegel's 'civil society' and its 'system of needs'.³⁶ Stirner's 'egoistical property', said Marx, 'is nothing more than ordinary or bourgeois property sanctified'.³⁷

In Stirner's association, Marx went on,

every relation, whether caused by economic conditions or direct compulsion is regarded as a relation of 'agreement'... [and] all property belonging to others is relinquished to them by us and remains with them only until we have the power to take it from them.

What this means is that:

in practice the 'Association' reaches agreement with Sancho [Stirner] with the aid of a stick... This 'agreement' is a mere phrase, since everyone knows that the others enter into it with the secret reservation that they will reject it on the first possible occasion.

Marx paraphrases Stirner's egoist: 'I see in your property something that is not yours but mine; since every ego does likewise, they see in it

the *universal*, by which we arrive at the modern-German philosophical interpretation of ordinary, special, and exclusive private property.³⁸ Stirner 'lets the old [civil] society continue in existence...[and] strives to retain the present state of affairs'; Stirner 'retains in his association the existing form of landownership, division of labour and money... with such premises Sancho [Stirner] cannot...escape the fate of having a special "peculiarity" [*Eigenheit*] prescribed for him by the division of labour'.³⁹

Stirner attempts to make 'rebellion' a means without an end. His advocacy of violence is muted, in effect, by the Young Hegelianism that tinges it. Stirner:

waxes indignant at the thought of atheism, terrorism, communism, regicide, etc. The object against which [Stirner] rebels is the Holy; therefore rebellion does not need to take the form of...action for it is only a sin against the 'Holy'.⁴⁰

Yet Stirner raised a serious question, namely whether there is any distinction, not between revolution and 'rebellion', but between revolution – considered as a collective act requiring the possibility of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice on the part of the committed revolutionary – and other forms of subjection. The question was whether, in espousing revolutionary goals, people were (to steal a phrase from Rousseau) walking headlong into their chains.

Marx, faced with Stirner's anti-communist diatribe, took issue with it vehemently and archly, no longer simply ridiculing Stirner's learning, logic and skill in argument with all the scorn and heavy-handed irony he could muster, but also outlining at length the dangers inherent in Stirner's view. The question of whether people, in succumbing to revolutionary ideals and revolutionary forms of organization, were replacing one form of subjection with another at the immense cost of their own individuality, was a question to which Marx responded at length in *The German Ideology*. When Marx wrote, in one of its most central passages, that 'communist society is the only society in which the creative and free development of the individual is no mere empty phrase',⁴¹ he had Stirner in his sights.

Pauperism, criminality and labour

Stirner's solution to the denigration of the individual by the collectivity was to pin his hopes on the man held most in contempt by the respectable, upright citizen, the man despised because he 'lacks settlement'

and has 'nothing to lose': the pauper. State and citizen, according to Stirner, regard the pauper as shiftless, immoral and (at least potentially) criminal; these are the reasons why Stirner values the pauper as exemplar. Although Stirner uses the word *prolétariat*, his pauper has nothing in common with Marx's proletariat; the idea that 'the theory of the alienation of the proletarians was enunciated by Stirner at least one year before Marx'⁴² is an exaggeration. Stirner included criminals and freewheeling intellectuals among his *prolétariat* which, in the words of Marx, 'consists of ruined bourgeois and impoverished proletarians, a collection of ragamuffins, who had existed in every epoch... Our Saint [Stirner]', Marx continues, 'has exactly the same notion of the proletariat as the "good comfortable burghers"'⁴³ – that they may be despised as riff-raff (*canaille*). Stirner thought that these alone could be free of the adverse, debilitating effects of Christianity. While Marx, for his part, agreed that 'the social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-contempt, debasement, subjugation [and] humility', he insisted, against Stirner, that the proletariat 'which does not want to be treated as *canaille*, needs its courage, its consciousness of self, its pride and its independence far more than its bread'.⁴⁴

The opposition Stirner specifies between the proletarian-pauper and the citizen-bourgeois is drawn according to the principle of criminality as opposed to that of respectability. This polarization is the setting for Stirner's defence of crime, which emphasizes not the acquisition of external goods so much as the assertion of the individual self of the criminal against the state. This defence of crime makes sense only if we assume with Stirner that law has binding force *as a matter of fact* because people believe it to be binding. Eltzbacher points out that Stirner was preoccupied with undermining such beliefs by spelling out their implications, but this neglects Stirner's own Young Hegelian belief in the material power of belief systems. In contrast, Henri Arvon is well aware of the Young Hegelian context of Stirner's thought. He argues that ordinary criminal activity undertaken in ignorance of the need to assert individuality is not necessarily covered by Stirner's defence of crime, but nowhere does Stirner disapprove of *any* crime undertaken for *any* reason.⁴⁵

The corollary of the proposition that the state exists (*inter alia*) in order to repress paupers is, according to Stirner, that the pauper has no need of the state; since he has nothing to lose, 'he does not need the protection of the state for his nothing'. 'Pauperism', Stirner declaims,

is the valuelessness of me, the phenomenon that I cannot realize value [*Geltung*] from myself. For this reason state and pauperism are

one and the same. The state does not let me come to my value, and continues in existence only through my valuelessness; it is forever intent upon getting value from me, i.e. exploiting me, turning me to account, using me up, even if the only use it gets from me consists in my supplying a *proles*. It wants me to be its creature.⁴⁶

Because pauper and proletarian are not distinguished from each other, neither are poverty and labour. These ellipses in his argument enable Stirner to conclude, to his own satisfaction, that labour's egoistic character points the way to freedom. This made Marx indignant. 'Freedom of labour', he insisted, means 'free competition of workers among themselves. Saint Max is very unfortunate in political economy, as in all other spheres. Labour is free in all civilized countries; it is not a matter of freeing labour but of abolishing it.'⁴⁷

The division of labour

Stirner played a more important part than has been recognized in impelling Marx to approach *The German Ideology*. Stirner's forced portrayal of labour as egoistic had overlooked the fact that labour, according to Marx, could no longer even be personal. Marx's analysis in *The German Ideology* of the division of labour and its destructive effects on the individual in capitalist society is pointed, in the first instance, at Stirner, who had misprized the obstacles to the emergence of the individual as he or she could be.

The notion that Marx intended the passage in *The German Ideology* specifying that 'in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity, but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes' so that the individual would be able to 'hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as [he has] a mind', as a 'parody of Stirner'⁴⁸ is wide of the mark indeed. The passage is designed to meet Stirner's arguments. Marx was concerned to outline the ominous consequences of what he called the 'fixation of social activity' that is engendered and required by the division of labour in capitalist society, and its 'consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us, growing out of our control and thwarting our expectations'.⁴⁹ Marx insists that individuals:

must appropriate the existing totality of productive forces not only to achieve self-activity but also merely to safeguard their very existence...The appropriation of the totality of the instruments of

production is, for this very reason, the development of a totality of capacities in the individuals themselves.⁵⁰

We need to ask why Marx insists that the forms taken by labour in capitalist society deny, and do not express, this 'self-activity'. The difference between two kinds of divisions of labour – Plato's and Adam Smith's – was less of a conceptual distinction than an historical fact.⁵¹ Stirner's view of labour as 'egoistic' overlooks the fact that the placement of individual workers in the productive process is no longer connected with any personal qualities the individual worker might possess:

Through the inevitable fact that within the division of labour social relationships take on an independent existence, there appears a division within the life of each individual, in so far as it is personal and in so far as it is determined by some branch of labour and the conditions pertaining to it...In the estate, this [division] is as yet concealed; for instance, a nobleman always remains a nobleman, a commoner always remains a commoner, apart from his other relationships, a quality inseparable from their individuality. The division between the personal and the class individual, the accidental nature of the conditions of life for the individual, appears only with the emergence of the class, which is a product of the bourgeoisie.⁵²

Marx insists in *The German Ideology* that:

The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals and its repression in the broad masses is the result of the division of labour...With a communist organization of society there disappears the subordination of the artist to local and national narrowness, which arises entirely from [the] division of labour, and also the subordination of the artist to some definite art, thanks to which he is exclusively painter, sculptor, etc., the very name of his activity adequately expressing the narrowness of his professional development and his dependence on the division of labour. In a communist organization of society there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other activities.⁵³

Labour, if we are to believe Marx, *can* become the re-appropriated power of the individual, the expression and outgrowth of his individuality; but not under capitalism:

The all-round development of the individual will only cease to be conceived as ideal, as vocation etc. when the impact of his world

which stimulates the real development of the ability of the individual comes under the control of the individuals themselves, as the communists desire.⁵⁴

Individuals and individuality

Because occupational categories in modern capitalist society are a denial, not an expression, of whatever particular features might characterize an individual occupant, Stirner's stress on the 'unique', 'peculiar' or 'egoistic' character of labour is misplaced. Marx's perception is at variance with the point of view of Durkheim's *The Division of Labour in Society* that 'the activity of every individual becomes more personalized to the degree that it is more specialized'.⁵⁵ In modern society, Marx claimed, specialization and 'personalization' of labour are not of a piece; capitalism has separated the social determinations of people's lives from individual qualities and characteristics.

As the result of this separation, 'the individual' might be ranged against 'society' in certain senses. Yet Marx hoists Stirner with his own petard. Because 'the ego of Stirner's is not a "corporeal individual"' but 'a category constructed on the Hegelian method', Stirner undermines his own argument:

Since every individual is altogether different from every other, it is by no means necessary that what is foreign, holy for one individual should be so for another individual; it even cannot be so... Saint Sancho [Stirner] could at most have said: for me, Saint Sancho, the state, religion, etc. are the alien, the Holy. Instead of this, he has to make them the absolutely Holy, the Holy for all individuals... How little it occurs to him to make each 'unique' the measure of his own uniqueness, how much he uses his own uniqueness as a measure, a moral norm to be applied to other individuals, like a true moralist, forcing them into his Procrustean bed... is already evident.⁵⁶

Stirner's mistake was that of taking opposition between an undefined 'individual' and an unspecified 'society' as a datum to be applied, categorically and across the board, to the necessary relationship of *all* individuals to *all* societies. Individuality or 'uniqueness' then becomes an essence that is in no way dissimilar to those Stirner had set out to attack. The opening paragraph of *The Ego and his Own* declaimed with a flourish that just as God is said to be, by definition, His own cause (*causa Sui*) so 'the individual' should be *his* 'own cause'. 'We see', says Marx,

what holy motives guide Saint Max in his transition to egoism... had [he] looked a little more closely at these various 'causes' and the 'owners' of the causes, e.g. God, mankind, truth, he would have arrived at the opposite conclusion: that egoism, based on the egoistic mode of action of these persons, must be just as imaginary as those persons themselves.⁵⁷

Since Stirner's historical stages are mock-Hegelian embodiments of successive *idées fixes*, the success of his egoist consists in the 'overcoming' of 'ideas'; his victories enjoy but a hollow, conceptual form. 'For Stirner, right does not arise from the material conditions of people... but from their struggle against their own concept which they should "get out of their heads".'⁵⁸ Stirner 'canonizes history', transforms historical conditions into ideas, 'seizes everything by its philosophical tail' and takes:

as literal truth all the illusions of German speculative philosophy: indeed, he has made them still more speculative... For him, there exists only the history of religion and philosophy – and this exists for him only through the medium of Hegel....⁵⁹

Worse still, Stirner is 'a clumsy copier of Hegel', one who 'registers ignorance of what he copies'.⁶⁰ The shortcoming of the stages of consciousness Stirner outlines in *The Ego and his Own* is that each successive stage of 'consciousness' confronts a world that owes nothing to previous confrontations, but is 'ready-made'. Despite himself, Stirner had indicated the danger arising from attempts to account for historical change by ascribing constitutive power to consciousness. Because, for Stirner,

the holy is something alien, everything alien is transformed into the Holy; and because everything Holy is a bond, a fetter, all bonds and fetters are transformed into the Holy. By this means [Stirner] has already achieved the result that everything alien becomes for him a mere appearance, a mere idea, against which he frees himself merely by protesting against it.⁶¹

Even if Stirner were justified in excoriating Feuerbach's dependence on generalities like 'man', he nevertheless remained dependent upon such abstractions. Stirner:

constantly foists 'man' on history as the sole *dramatis persona* and believes that 'man' had made history... he actually believes in the

domination of the abstract ideas of ideology in the modern world, he believes that in this struggle... against conceptions he is... attacking... the real forces that rule the world.

Stirner, in other words, believes 'Don Quixote's assurances that by a mere moral injunction he can, without further ado, convert the material forces arising from the division of labour into personal forces'; 'the practical moral content of the whole trick', as Marx puts it, 'is merely an apology for the vocation forced on every individual' by the division of labour.⁶²

Hegel had believed that 'by working on the world, a man gives his own individuality an external, objective and enduring form'. One illustrative passage may be found in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*:

Man is realized for himself [*für sich*] by practical activity, inasmuch as he has the impulse, in the medium which is directly given to him, to produce himself, and therein at the same time to recognize himself. This purpose he achieves by the modification of external things upon which he impresses the deal of his inner being, and then finds repeated in them his own characteristics. Man does this in order as a free subject to strip the outer world of its stubborn foreignness, and to enjoy in the shape and fashion of things a[n]... external reality of himself.⁶³

Both Stirner and Marx, in their different ways, perceived that by now what had seemed indissoluble was in fact dissolved. But, if we consider the nature of the ensemble that is dissolved, when its dissolution takes effect, and by which agency, differences of some substance are quick to emerge. Marx admitted that 'individuals have always started out from themselves, and could not do otherwise',⁶⁴ that 'the greater and more articulated the social power is within the relationship of private property, the more egoistic and asocial man becomes'; but, Marx added that the more egoistic and asocial man becomes, 'the more he becomes alienated from his own nature'.⁶⁵ The *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* maintain that 'man is a unique individual – and it is just his particularity that makes him an individual'; yet Marx's conception of the individual differs radically from Stirner's. To be an individual is to be 'a really individual communal being [*Gemeinwesen*]'.⁶⁶ Marx saw no contradiction in using the term *Gemeinwesen* to refer both to the individual and to society (though not to *capitalist* society). 'The individual is the social being [*gesellschaftliches Wesen*]; 'individual human life and

species-life are not different things'; man 'is in the most literal sense a *zoon politikon*, not only a social animal but an animal that can develop into an individual only in society'.⁶⁷

The hinge of Marx's argument is a distinction between individualism and individuality. Stirner's book has been seen as 'the testament of a dissenting intellectual', and 'a sociological document of the first order'; it has been claimed that 'Marx, who was well aware that "revolution begins in the mind of intellectuals", did not accord this credit to Stirner because at the time [1845-6] he was already thinking in terms of classes and not of individuals'.⁶⁸ In fact, Marx did not think that revolution begins in the *mind* of anyone. Far from neglecting 'the individual' for 'the class', he was attempting to examine their relationship in capitalist society – thanks in no small measure to Stirner himself.

Marx met Stirner's presentation of the issue of the individual versus the collectivity point by point. Individualism, said Marx, is one thing, individuality another; the difference is akin to Hegel's distinction between self-assertion (in civil society and its 'system of needs') and self-determination (which takes place only at the level of the state). Individualism and individuality are conceptually distinct, and historically they have come to work at cross-purposes. Individualism animates capitalist society and *by the same token* does violence to individuality; indeed, it cannot do otherwise, since labour in capitalist society negates self-activity.

Marx's use of the term *Gemeinwesen* to refer to the individual (*ein Gemeinwesen*) and society (*das Gemeinwesen*) indicates that, quite unlike Stirner, he refuses to separate the individual and society *categorically*. Marx had insisted, against Hegel, that 'the nature of the particular person is not his beard, his blood, his abstract *physis*, but rather his social quality...'⁶⁹ To get the full sense of this we need to examine 'Saint Max', yet some of the main features of Marx's position have been well outlined by Joseph O'Malley in his 'Editor's Introduction' to Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*:

What governs these discussions [Marx's 1842 and 1843 critiques] is a special notion of the relationship between the individual social being on the one hand, the society on the other: society is the *sine qua non* for the humanization of the individual man; and the character of the individual member of society will be a function of the character of society itself. At the same time, however, the character of society will be an expression of the character of its members, for society itself is the actual social or communal nature of its members. Such

a conception of the nature of the relationship of the individual and society underlies Marx's use, in the *Critique*, of the term *Gemeinwesen* (communal being) to signify both the individual and...the social complex within which he lives and acts...⁷⁰

Marx observes that 'every function' in society can be regarded, *prima facie*, as a representative function, provided that the unity between individual and community has itself not been broken:

For example, the shoemaker is my representative in so far as he fulfills a social need, just as every definite social activity, because it is a species-activity, represents only the species; that is to say, represents a determination of my own essence the way every man is the representative of the other. Here, he is representative not by virtue of something other than himself which he represents, but by virtue of what he is and does.⁷¹

By the time Marx investigated the modern division of labour in *The German Ideology*, he recognized that, in modern society, it was no longer the case that every function in society is 'representative' in this sense. While individual and society for Marx are not categorically separable, they *are separated* in capitalist society in a way that does violence to man's human, social character. Marx had indicated that:

[as] human nature is the true communal nature or communal being of man, men through the activation of their nature create and produce a human communal being, a social being which is no abstractly universal power opposed to the single individual but is the nature or being of every single individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth...the society of this alienated man is the caricature of his actual common life, of his true generic life. His activity, therefore, appears as a torment, his own creation as a force alien to him, his wealth as poverty, the essential bond connecting him with other men as something unessential so that the separation from other men appears as his true essence.⁷²

That 'separation from other men' takes on the aspect of an 'essence' is precisely Marx's accusation against Stirner. Marx indicated that Stirner's truculent 'ego' enjoyed but a vapid, conceptual existence; that Stirner's egoism led him into solipsism of a peculiarly Young Hegelian kind, according to which the vaunted principle of 'peculiarity' could

not avoid becoming one more 'essence' of the sort Stirner attacked; that Stirner's insistence on the egoistic character of labour overlooked the fact that, in modern society, proletarians, and individuals in general, 'are entirely subordinated to the division of labour and hence are brought into the most complete dependence on one another',⁷³ a dependence they could, and would have to, turn to good account in revolutionary organization.

Self-activity and communism

Capitalism, in Marx's opinion, offends against community, individuality and selfhood alike. Under its domination 'labour itself can only exist on the premise of [the] fragmentation' of society and of the individuals of which it is composed:

The productive forces appear as a world for themselves, quite independent of and divorced from the individuals... individuals, whose forces they are, exist split up and in opposition to one another... Thus we have a totality of productive forces which have taken on a material form and are... no longer the forces of the individuals but of private property... Standing over against these productive forces we have the majority of the individuals from whom these forces have been wrested away and who, robbed in this way of all real life-content, have become abstract individuals... The only connection which still links them with the productive forces and with their own existence – labour – has lost all semblance of life-activity and only sustains their life by stunting it.⁷⁴

The axis of Marx's discussion is self-activity as distinct from the individualism that animates capitalist society. Individuality is not Stirner's raw datum existing beneath successive 'vocations'. It is something that can only rarely emerge under capitalist conditions. Stirner:

believes that the communists were only waiting for 'society' to 'give' them something, whereas at most they only want to give themselves a society... He transforms society... into an instrument from which he wants to derive benefit... He believes that in communist society there can be a question of 'duties' and 'interests,' of two complementary aspects of opposites that exist only in bourgeois society (under the guise of interest the reflective bourgeois always inserts a third

thing between himself and his mode of action – a habit seen in truly classic form in Bentham, whose nose would have to have some interest before deciding to smell anything)...[Stirner] believes that the communists want to ‘make sacrifices’ to ‘society’ when they want at most to sacrifice existing society....⁷⁵

Stirner’s analysis was vitiated by an ignorance of economics, which led him to overlook the character of the capitalist division of labour. Nevertheless, Stirner’s discussion raised the issue of the threat to the individual posed by the communists, whom Stirner included prominently among the moralists and taskmasters he was concerned to attack. The crucial point here is that Marx need have framed his arguments – not only about the division of labour, individualism and individuality, but also about communism and revolution – only in response to Stirner. Private property and the division of labour, according to Marx,

can be abolished only on condition of an all-round development of individuals, because the existing character of intercourse and productive forces is an all-round one, and only individuals who are developing in an all round way *can*...turn them into the manifestations of their lives.⁷⁶

‘Abstract individuals...are by [the fact of their “abstraction”] put into a position to enter into relations with one another as individuals’. Stirner:

believes that communist proletarians who revolutionize society and put the relations of production and the form of intercourse on a new basis – i.e. on themselves as new people, on their new mode of life – that these proletarians remain ‘as of old’...[Proletarians] know too well that only under changed circumstances will they cease to be ‘as of old’ and therefore they are determined to change these circumstances at the first opportunity.⁷⁷

Marx insisted that communists’ revolutionary injunctions and calls to action are in no way reducible to, or comparable with, moralistic imperatives and tasks of the kind that Stirner had excoriated. Instead, they were, in the fullest sense of the word, *historical* imperatives that await realization: ‘Communism is not for us a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We

call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things.⁷⁸

'All-round dependence', 'this natural form of the world-historical cooperation of individuals', will be transformed by 'communist revolution into the control and conscious mastery of these powers which, born of the actions of men on one another, have till now overawed and governed men as powers completely alien to them'.⁷⁹ As Marx was to put it in the *Grundrisse*:

Universally-developed individuals, whose social relationship are subject, as their own communal relationships, to their own collective control, are the product not of nature but of history.... The universal nature of this production creates an alienation of the individual from himself and others, but also for the first time the general and universal nature of his relationships and capacities.⁸⁰

The individual, as a member of the revolutionary proletariat, would in no way have his individuality diminished; the collectivity in question becomes the *sine qua non* for individual freedom and self-activity alike:

Modern universal intercourse can be controlled by individuals... only when controlled by all... Only at this stage does self-activity coincide with material life, which corresponds to the development of individuals into complete individuals... The transformation of labour into self-activity corresponds to the transformation of the earlier limited interaction into the interaction of individuals as such.⁸¹

For the proletarians, 'no other "agreement" is possible but a political one directed against the whole present system'.⁸² While, 'in imagination, individuals seem freer under the domination of the bourgeoisie than before... in reality... they are less free, because they are more subjected to the violence of things'.⁸³ This, indeed, is the reason why:

the transformation through the division of labour of personal powers into material powers cannot be dispelled by dismissing the general idea of it from one's mind but can only be abolished by the individual's again subjecting these material powers to themselves and abolishing the division of labour. This is not possible without the community. Only in community with others has the individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom possible... In

the real community, the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association... With the community of revolutionary proletarians... who take their conditions of existence and those of all members of society under their control, it is... as individuals that the individuals participate in it. It is just this combination of individuals which puts the conditions of the free development of individuals under their control – conditions which were previously abandoned to change and which won an independent existence over and against individuals just because of their separation as individuals.⁸⁴

Most evaluations of Marx's argument have been advanced in the absence of any adequate understanding of *why* he made it, and *whose* points he was meeting. A re-evaluation of Stirner's argument is in order; the significance of his egoism in provoking Marx's response has for too long been overlooked. Stirner impelled Marx to take a position against the Young Hegelians (whose faults are exemplified by Stirner's poaching of 'snipe existing only in the mind').⁸⁵ Marx's direct and extended rejoinder to Stirner means not that Marx regarded Stirner as a threat,⁸⁶ but that Marx regarded Stirner's argument as remaining trapped within a purely theoretical framework.

Marx was stung by Stirner's accusation that he himself was a 'Feuerbachian' foe of the individual; this accusation was based not only on Marx's use of Feuerbachian terminology ('species-being' in particular), but also on Marx's assumption of what Stirner considered the Feuerbachian mantle of 'liberator of humanity'. To disavow Feuerbach was one thing; to reply to this charge was something else again, since it raised the issue of individuality and communism.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx aimed to demonstrate that his own critique, far from condemning the present in the light of some abstract categories or principles, did so on historical grounds:

if...the workers assert in their communist propaganda that the vocation, destiny, task of every person is to achieve an all-round development of all his abilities...[Stirner] sees in this only the vocation to something alien, the assertion of the 'Holy.' He seeks to achieve freedom from this by taking under his protection the individual who has been crippled by the division of labour at the expense of his abilities and relegated to a one-sided vocation. What is here asserted [by Stirner] in the form of a vocation, a destiny, is precisely the negation of the vocation that has hitherto resulted in practice from the division of labour...⁸⁷

– particularly from the division of labour in its modern, capitalist form.

What concerns Stirner about revolution as a ‘vocation’ is that it devalues the individual and appeals, in the name of collectivity, to self-abnegation and self-sacrifice. Yet:

[t]he difference between revolution and Stirner’s rebellion is not, as Stirner thinks, that the one is a political and social act while the other is an egoistical act, but that the former is an act while the latter is no act at all...If Stirner had studied the various actual revolutions and attempts at revolution...[if,] further, he had concerned himself with the actual individuals...in every revolution, and their relations...perhaps he would come to understand that every revolution, and its results, was determined by these relations, by needs and that the ‘political and social act’ was in no way a contradiction to the ‘egoistical act.’⁸⁸

Marx’s way of conceptualizing the individual is radically at variance with Stirner’s. Marx’s is expansive and dynamic, Stirner’s restrictive and static. At the root of Marx’s criticisms of Stirner is a conception of individuality differing radically not only from the individualism that animates capitalist society, but also from Stirner’s ‘ego’, which is nothing more than a conceptual category. Stirner’s assertion of ‘peculiarity’ (*Eigenheit*), besides being abstract and solipsistic, is also beside the point if (as at present) personal powers cannot be apprehended as social powers. As Marx was later to put it,

although at first the development of the capacities of the human species takes place at the cost of the majority of human individuals and even classes, at the end it breaks through this contradiction and coincides with the development of the individual: the higher development of individuality is thus only achieved by an historical process.⁸⁹

What lies behind this characteristic Marxian claim is a set of issues and themes: individualism, individuality, vocation, labour, self-activity, freedom, self-determination and communism. All these key words in the Marxian lexicon were raised in the course of Marx’s attack on Stirner. Stirner, despite himself, takes us to the heart of the Marxian enterprise, and vice versa.

To say this is not to deny that Stirner also takes us beyond Marx. Warren Breckman observes that:

Feuerbach was deeply affected by Max Stirner’s vigorous critique of his conception of speciesbeing as a vestigial theological abstraction.

Reluctant though he was to acknowledge the accuracy of Stirner's objections, Feuerbach moved away from the universalizing idea of humanity that had animated *The Essence of Christianity* in 1841 toward a greater emphasis on the sensuous, needful, individual human being.

Similarly, according to Breckman, Arnold Ruge 'agonized over the "obliterating generality" of both socialism and Feuerbachian humanism' that Stirner had duly and pointedly emphasized; and while Marx, for his part, agonized less about socialism and humanism by moving beyond their joint ambit – a move solidified in and by the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in 1848 – it remains the case that 'the problems that made (Ruge) retreat from communism [the communism, let us remember, of Marx as well as Weitling] in 1844 has dogged radical thought ever since'.⁹⁰ It can be argued that this problem was to dog radical thought because, after 1844, radical thought took shape around a truly astounding ignorance of what Marx (by any reckoning a major influence on the contours and lineaments of 'radical thought') had written, not least – or especially – in the 'Sankt Max' section of *The German Ideology*.

While Stirner's role as catalyst, gadfly and irritant is not in doubt, it is no less evident that Marx's attack on Stirner occupies a place of honour within Warren Breckman's account of 'dethroning the self', this being a leitmotif of Young Hegelian speculation at large. Indeed, it may well be that Marx's throwing down the gauntlet in 'Sankt Max' occupies a more prominent position within the overall process of 'dethroning the self' than Breckman admits – though this, loaded as it is, is not an issue that can adequately be joined here. It will, perhaps, in time become the fruit of future labours.

Notes

1. During Marx's lifetime only the fourth chapter of the 'Saint Bruno' section of *The German Ideology* was published as the 'Obituary to M. [Moses] Hess' (the original chapter title) in the *Westphälischer Dampfboot*, August–September 1947. Engels published a version of Marx's *Thesis on Feuerbach* as an appendix to *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* in 1888, but *The German Ideology* itself was first published in the Soviet Union only in 1932 (in German) and 1933 (in Russian).
2. Sidney Hook's pioneering work, *From Hegel to Marx* (New York: Humanities Press, 1950) first published in 1936, devoted a chapter (pp. 165–85) to Stirner and Marx, which does not explain why Marx devoted the best part of a major work to attacking Stirner. ('Saint Max' was composed by Marx,

not Engels.) Of more recent books, R. M. Tucker's *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) does not mention Stirner, and Shlomo Avineri's *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) does not discuss Stirner. The best outline accounts of the dispute in English are those of Nicolas Lobkowicz in *Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx* (Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), pp. 401–426; R. W. K. Paterson in *The Nihilist Egoist: Max Stirner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 101–125; and Jerrold Siegel in *Marx's Fate* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 154–169.

3. Marx and Engels (1938) *The German Ideology*, trans. Roy Pascal (London, Lawrence & Wishart; New York, International Publishers). The first complete English translations only appeared in 1965 and 1976. Cf. *The German Ideology*, trans. Clemens Dutt; ed. Salo Ryazanskaya, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1965); and a different rendering (the order of the pages in Part I differs significantly), also by Clemens Dutt, in the *Marx-Engels Collected Works* (New York and London: International Publishers, 1976), vol. v. Both translations, which will be referred to hereafter as *The German Ideology* and MECW v respectively, make use of the textual discoveries of S. Bahne: cf. his "Die deutsche Ideologie" von Marx und Engels. Einige Textergänzungen', *International Review of Social History* (Amsterdam and Assen), vol. 7, part 1, 1982, 93–104.
4. *The German Ideology*, pp. 206 ff. (esp. pp. 207–11); MECW v, pp. 193 ff. (esp. pp. 193–195).
5. *The German Ideology*, p. 23; MECW v, p. 23.
6. J. Joll (1964) *The Anarchists* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode), p. 171.
7. W. Brazill (1970) *The Young Hegelians* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press), pp. 13–14. The others were Strauss, the brothers (Edgar and Bruno) Bauer, Feuerbach, Vischer and Ruge.
8. P. Nerrlich, ed., (1886) *Arnold Ruge: Briefe und Tagebuchblätter*, (Leipzig: Weidmann), vol. 1, pp. 388–390; A. Ruge (1946) *Zwei Jahre in Paris: Studien und Erinnerungen* (Leipzig: Jurani), Part II, chps 13–14, (esp. pp. 117–134).
9. M. Hess (1945) *Die letzten Philosophen*, (Darmstadt: Leske), pp. 6–7.
10. Engels to Marx, 19 November 1844, in *Marx-Engels Werke*, (Berlin: Dietz) (hereafter cited as MEW), vol. xxvii, pp. 11–12.
11. Engels to Marx, 20 January 1845, in MEW xxvii, pp. 14–18. Cf. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist*, p.103.
12. *The German Ideology*, pp. 52, 304; and MECW v, pp. 56, 282.
13. I. Berlin (1978) *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, 4th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 106.
14. D. McLellan (1969) *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (New York, Praeger), p. 121.
15. McLellan, *The Young Hegelians*, p. 119.
16. M. Stirner (1882) *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, 2nd edn, (Leipzig: Wigand), pp. 344–345. Most libraries catalogue this volume under Stirner's real name, Johann Kaspar Schmidt. For a translation, cf. John Carroll (ed.), (1971) *The Ego and His Own* (London: Cape), pp. 238–9. Unhappily, Carroll selects sparingly from the standard but sloppy translation of Steven T. Byington (*The Ego and His Own*, London: Fifeild, 1912), a rendering which is sufficiently

- defective, for instance, to translate *Nationalökonomie* (political economy) as 'national economy', which is meaningless. Carroll's introduction should be complemented by a reading of John P. Clark's *Max Stirner's Egoism* (London: Freedom Press, 1976), a short and thoughtful critique from a non-egoist anarchist viewpoint. The most comprehensive Stirner bibliography is at the end of Hans G. Helm's fascinating attempt to deal with Stirner from a Marxist perspective, *Ideologie der anonymen Gesellschaft: Max Stirner's 'Einziges' und der Fortschritt des demokratischen Selbstbewusstseins vom Vormärz bis zur Bundesrepublik* (Cologne: Dumont, 1966), pp. 510–600.
17. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 375.
 18. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 375.
 19. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, pp. 91–92; cf. MECW iii, p. 182, for a rare instance of agreement (or convergence) on the part of Marx.
 20. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, pp. 107–109; cf. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, translated and with an introduction by T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), §272A, p. 285.
 21. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 179; cf. pp. 109–110.
 22. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 99; Carroll (ed.) *The Ego and his Own*, p. 88.
 23. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 325.
 24. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, pp. 112–114.
 25. D. Cooper, (1970) *The Death of the Family* (New York: Pantheon), p. 78; Stirner, *Der Einzige*, pp. 315–316, 200, 232, 238; Carroll (ed.) *The Ego and his Own*, pp. 211, 132, 150, 115–116.
 26. McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, p. 93; cf. pp. 94–95.
 27. L. Feuerbach (1959) *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. F. Bolin and W. Jodl, (Stuttgart: Frommann), vol. vi, p. 26; cf. *The German Ideology*, p. 256, or MECW v, p. 237.
 28. Feuerbach, 'Preliminary Theses for the Reform of Philosophy' ('Vorläufige Thesen zur Reform der Philosophie'), 1842: 'Wir dürfen nur immer das Prädikat zum Subjekt und so als Subjekt zum Objekt und Prinzip machen – also die spekulative Philosophie nur umkehren, so haben wir die unverhüllte, die pure blanke Wahrheit'. L. Feuerbach (1957) *Anthropologischer Materialismus: Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Alfred Schmidt (Munich: Europa), vol. i, p. 83. Cf. (1972) *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach*, trans. and with an introduction by Zawar Hanfi (New York: Anchor), p. 154; and Feuerbach (1957) *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper & Row), p. 189.
 29. Feuerbach, *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. vii, pp. 294–310; Stirner, *Der Einzige*, pp. 351–352.
 30. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, pp. 34–36.
 31. Cf. Nathan Rotenstreich, *Some Basic Problems in Marx's Philosophy* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 14.
 32. Marx (1970) *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. Annette Jolin; ed. Joseph O'Malley, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) (henceforth cited as O'Malley), p. 131; MECW iii, p. 175.
 33. O'Malley, p. 137; MECW iii, p. 182.
 34. *The German Ideology*, pp. 58–59, 502; MECW v, pp. 40–41, 456.
 35. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, pp. 318, 332; Carroll, ed., *The Ego and his Own*, pp. 214, 168. Cf. *The German Ideology*, pp. 448–9; MECW v, p. 409.

36. *The German Ideology*, p. 224; MECW v, pp. 208–209.
37. *The German Ideology*, p. 400; MECW v, p. 367.
38. *The German Ideology*, p. 445, cf. p. 224; MECW v, p. 406, cf. pp. 208–209.
39. *The German Ideology*, pp. 439, 437; MECW v, pp. 400–401, 399.
40. *The German Ideology*, p. 325; MECW v, p. 300.
41. *The German Ideology*, p. 483; MECW v, p. 439.
42. Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx*, p. 11.
43. *The German Ideology*, pp. 216–217; MECW v, p. 202.
44. MEW iv, p. 200.
45. P. Eltzbacher (1908) *Anarchism*, trans. Steven T. Byington (London: Fifield), p. 100; Henri Arvon (1950) *Aux sources de l'existentialisme: Max Stirner* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), p. 108.
46. *The German Ideology*, p. 217; MECW v, p. 202; Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 261; Carroll, *The Ego and his Own*, p. 163.
47. *The German Ideology*, p. 220; MECW v, p. 205; Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 119.
48. *The German Ideology*, pp. 44–45; MECW v, pp. 47–48; McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, p. 132. In the original manuscript of *The German Ideology*, only the words '(and) criticize after dinner' are in Marx's hand; we may make of this what we will, but it plainly admits of more than one interpretation.
49. *The German Ideology*, p. 45, cf. pp. 247–248; MECW v, p. 48, cf. pp. 229–230.
50. *The German Ideology*, p. 83; MECW v, p. 87.
51. *The German Ideology*, p. 87; MECW v, p. 81.
52. *The German Ideology*, p. 93; MECW v, p. 78.
53. *The German Ideology*, pp. 431–432; MECW v, p. 394.
54. *The German Ideology*, pp. 315–316; MECW v, p. 292.
55. Émile Durkheim (1972) *The Division of Labour in Society*, quoted in Anthony Giddens (ed.) *Émile Durkheim: Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 140.
56. *The German Ideology*, pp. 205, 307; MECW v, pp. 192, 284–285.
57. *The German Ideology*, pp. 123, 279–281; MECW v, pp. 120, 258–260; Stirner, *Der Einzige*, pp. 5–8; Carroll (ed.), *The Ego and his Own*, p. 39.
58. *The German Ideology*, p. 345, cf. pp. 205, 142; MECW v, p. 318, cf. pp. 192, 137.
59. *The German Ideology*, pp. 296, 182; MECW v, pp. 275, 171.
60. *The German Ideology*, pp. 196, 180, 183–187; MECW v, pp. 184, 170, 172–176.
61. *The German Ideology*, pp. 132, 304, cf. 132–134; MECW v, pp. 128, 282, cf. pp. 128–129.
62. *The German Ideology*, pp. 255–256, 252–253, 315; MECW v, pp. 237, 232, 291–292.
63. K. Marx (1964) *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, ed. T. B. Bottomore (New York: McGraw-Hill) (henceforward cited as Bottomore), p. 202; MECW iii, pp. 332–333; G. W. F. Hegel (1970) *On Art, Religion, Philosophy*, ed. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row), p. 58. Cf. R. Norman (1976) *Hegel's Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction* (Brighton: University of Sussex Press, 1976), p. 53.
64. *The German Ideology*, p. 481; MECW v, p. 437.
65. MECW iii, p. 220.
66. Bottomore, p. 158; MECW iii, p. 299. Cf. O'Malley, p. xlv.

67. K. Marx (1973) *Grundrisse*, trans. and with introduction by Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 84.
68. Fleischmann (1971) 'The Role of the Individual in Pre-revolutionary Society' in Z. A. Pelczynski (ed.) *Hegel's Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 225.
69. Bottomore, p. 22; MECW iii, pp. 21–22.
70. O'Malley, p. xliii.
71. O'Malley, pp. 119–120; MECW iii, p. 119.
72. MECW iii, pp. 216–217.
73. *The German Ideology*, p. 82; MECW v, p. 86.
74. *Grundrisse*, p. 159; *The German Ideology*, pp. 82–83; MECW v, pp. 86–87.
75. *The German Ideology*, p. 281, cf. pp. 82–83; MECW v, p. 213, cf. pp. 86–87.
76. *The German Ideology*, p. 49; MECW, pp. 51–2.
77. *The German Ideology*, p. 49, cf. pp. 229–230, 86–87; MECW v, pp. 51–52, cf. p. 213, 81.
78. *The German Ideology*, p. 47; MECW v, p. 49.
79. *The German Ideology*, pp. 66–67; MECW v, p. 66.
80. *Grundriss*, p. 162.
81. *The German Ideology*, p. 84; MECW v, p. 88. Cf. T. Ramm (1957) 'Die künftige Gesellschaftsordnung nach der Theorie von Marx und Engels', *Marxismusstudien* (Tübingen), volume ii, pp. 77–179, *passim*.
82. *The German Ideology*, p. 405; MECW v, p. 371–372.
83. *The German Ideology*, p. 93–94; MECW v, pp. 78–79.
84. *The German Ideology*, pp. 91–92; MECW v, pp. 77–78.
85. *The German Ideology*, p. 470; MECW v, p. 427.
86. Lobkowicz, *Theory and Practice*, p. 402; Carroll (ed.), *The Ego and his Own*, p. 14.
87. *The German Ideology*, p. 315; MECW v, p. 378.
88. *The German Ideology*, pp. 412–413; MECW v, p. 378.
89. K. Marx (1972) *Theories of Surplus Value* (Moscow: Foreign languages Publishing House), vol. ii, pp. 177–178.
90. W. Breckman (1999) *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory. Dethroning the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 303, 304.

6

Max Stirner: The End of Philosophy and Political Subjectivity

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Max Stirner has often been considered a Young Hegelian, or even the 'last Hegelian'. Such a reading implies that Stirner drew the logical conclusions of Hegel's philosophy, thereby ignoring the way his thought marks a fundamental break with the philosophical tradition as a whole. Stirner's notions of 'egoism', 'ownness' and '*Der Einzige*' ('the ego') were not philosophical concepts but, in a Foucauldian sense, tools to dismantle the subject-object dichotomy and its social and political bearings in the wake of modernity. It is argued, furthermore, that his ideas cannot be reduced to a traditional philosophy of the subject (existentialism). This chapter analyses both Stirner's quest to 'dissolve' philosophy, as well as its radical implications for political theory as a whole. Stirner's notion of *Der Einzige* not only questions the revolutionary subject in a strictly Marxist sense, but eventually any form of (political) subjectivity. Stirner's radical criticism of the emancipatory claims of his contemporaries allows us to question and rethink the concepts of contemporary social and political theory, not only by criticizing the way political power is commonly conceived and by refraining from positing essentialist guarantees, but also by laying bare the problem of political subjectivity.

Introduction

The historical context of Stirner's thought has been addressed from many different angles. Historical-philosophical readings of Stirner, however, generally tend to reduce his thought to the mainstream philosophical currents of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His contemporary relevance is obscured by attempts to relate his magnum opus, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, to either a distinct form of

Hegelianism or existentialism, or even both.¹ Stirner becomes a figure trapped between Hegel and Nietzsche, and the subject of mere bemusement or philosophical integration and ethical dismissal.² His relevance, it seems, depends roughly on the extent to which he can be subdued to the entire history of philosophy. The study of the historical context of Stirner's thought remains important but calls for an approach that avoids familiar philosophical categories and premises. By understanding Stirner's thought as an attempt to break away from the history of philosophy, ample attention may be paid to his implications for contemporary social and political theory. My historical approach is, therefore, by no means an end in itself, but tries to bring to the fore several key issues that animate Stirner's work and still resonate to this very day. I will do so by analyzing important texts that have been somewhat neglected until now, such as Stirner's review of Bruno Bauer in *Die Rheinische Zeitung* and the reply to his critics (of which, no English translation exists).³ These texts were written just prior to, or right after, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. They strike us with their unusual and uncompromising radicalism and offer unexpected perspectives for contemporary critical thought. Stirner's radicalism becomes apparent when we first return to the philosophical projects of his contemporaries: the so-called Young Hegelians. His contemporaries combined a creative rendering of Hegelian philosophy with distinct political and ethical positions. This was not theoretical frippery, but an attempt to confront Restoration Prussia head on. Recent research, for example, tries to analyse the debates of the *Vormärz* (1815–1848) by relating them to the conceptual axis of crisis and criticism. The crisis of the estate order was also the crisis of philosophy as embodied by Hegel, and spawned, among other things, a series of theories of history that sought to reconcile the individual and the state anew.⁴ The struggle for emancipation tried to fill the void that was left by the destruction of corporative privileges.⁵ Thus, Hegel's metaphysical system ultimately gave way to the dialectics of revolution.

Rather than focusing on Stirner's much discussed criticism of Feuerbach, attention will be paid to the ringleader of the Young Hegelians: Bruno Bauer. Bauer's critical theory viewed emancipation as the outcome of historical struggles, of subjects' own actions. Subjectivity should not only be conceived as direct self-awareness, but as embodying universality, as the record of shared commitments and values, and of the general interests that connect the self-legislating individuals who posit them. The accord of thought (subject) and being (object) must be achieved by subjective activity, both shaping the self and transforming

the external world. The ethical ties between individuals, and the institutions which expressed them, were products of self-consciousness. Hegel's metaphysical system was thus transformed into an immanent philosophy that focused on the creative work of individuals and their strivings for rational freedom. Stirner, on the other hand, tries to do away with philosophical criticism and, indeed, modern philosophy itself. This attempt, albeit ambiguously, allows Stirner to dissolve existing philosophical categories by contrasting them with concepts that lay explicitly beyond philosophy. For Stirner, the crisis of the estate order calls neither for a new synthesis nor a new philosophy of the self, but necessitates new ways of transcending the political and societal horizon as a whole. The quest to move beyond (political) philosophy inevitably leads to new conceptions of freedom and power. We will further explore this by comparing Stirner's thought to the later writings of Louis Althusser. Indeed, French (post-)structuralist thought dealt with many issues first raised by Stirner – issues whose importance remains unabated.

Young Hegelianism and philosophical criticism

The *Vormärz* – i.e. the period preceding the Revolutions of 1848 – was marked by an explosion of philosophical creativity. The Hegelian school, however, has too often been considered an intermediary between Hegel and Marx.⁶ An overtly philosophical approach ignored the way in which philosophical issues were intertwined with a rapidly changing socio-political environment. Recent research tries to elaborate on the philosophical and political dimensions of the Hegelian school by emphasizing its creative response to the emergence of modern society as a whole.⁷ The polemics among the Young Hegelians in the *Vormärz* were obviously intensely philosophical and political. Young Hegelianism offered a new account of modernity and freedom, including a criticism of absolutism, religious dogmatism and rigid individualism. This criticism was initially tied to the question of the nature of sovereignty, linked to the Christian notion of a sovereign individual that, in turn, was derived from the 'absolute sovereignty of god'.⁸ Hegel had replaced the personal God of Christianity with an immanent god ('spirit'), thus triggering pantheistic readings of his work (Feuerbach and Strauss) that were intimately linked to a criticism of the existing socio-political order. The Young Hegelians' struggle against the political theology of Restoration Germany was ultimately a struggle over the complicity between concepts of the self and of sovereignty.⁹ Their

humanism was an immanent critique of absolute spirit as a record of historical struggles for emancipation and invoked a different conception of subjectivity, stressing its ability to free itself from particularistic identities and interests, and to embody universal rational principles. Spirit as freedom was the central idea.¹⁰ This humanist transformation of Hegelian metaphysics became a rallying cry for political and social revolution. Young Hegelianism in the 1840's sought to identify a modern political subject, whose emancipation required fundamental changes in social and political relationships. The most elaborated perspectives were developed in contrasting ways by Ludwig Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer. *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, however, deliberately obscures the differences between both by relating their philosophical positions to distinct forms of Humanism. Before focusing on Bruno Bauer, however, we will briefly discuss Feuerbach's humanism.

Feuerbach's humanism entailed more than a mere criticism of religion: it aimed to redefine the relation between the finite individual and the infinite potentiality of man as a species-being. Feuerbach's emancipatory project reclaimed the predicates of the human species that had been projected onto divinity by an alienated religious consciousness. Instead of merely criticizing alienation, Feuerbach tried to turn the predicates of the human species into human attributes. If, instead, the true infinity of human species-being was conceived as the property of a transcendent personal god, mankind would literally fall victim to 'a suffocating egoism'.¹¹ Human essence was an objective reality realized within inter-subjective relations. Through a transformation of social relationships, this collective species-being would leave behind its particularistic and egoistic activities. Feuerbach's criticism of the religious consciousness was thus firmly tied to a communitarian line of thought that considered the isolated relation between persons and their property to be an expression of egoism.¹² In his uncompromising opposition to egoism, Feuerbach tried to assimilate the individual to the generic.

Bruno Bauer opposed Feuerbach's rather static conception of the generic, and also distinguished egoism from singularity. Singularity was a form of individuality that contained within itself a universal dimension as the powers of critique and creativity that shaped the external world, a universality both immanent and active in individuals and in history. Throughout the history of self-consciousness, individuals acquired what Bauer considered the discipline of rational freedom. Individuals subjected their immediate particular interests to critique, and repudiated their attachments to alienated or merely 'given' forms

of life.¹³ Indeed, both Feuerbach and Bauer linked religious egoism to economic egoism and opposed it to the true universality of self-consciousness. From a historical-philosophical point of view, Feuerbach and Bauer tried to complete the Enlightenment project by focusing on the historical accomplishment of reason, while rethinking the forms of objective spirit. Bauer held a unique position in this respect. His thought set itself apart from other Young Hegelians in that its own revolutionary perspective was attributed explicitly to Hegel. This testifies to the manifold ways in which the Young Hegelians responded to what they clearly conceived as the end of an era: first and foremost, the end of the *estate order* and, eventually, the end of philosophy itself as it was embodied by Hegel. The absolute state seemed to have restored itself rather easily in the 1830s. This happened not despite, but rather because of, the further dissolution of the estate order which was gradually being replaced by an anonymous mass. In place of the estate order there emerged an atomistic society that was, among other things, characterized by the assertion of individual property rights. Young Hegelianism was spawned by this *crisis* and sought to reflect upon it. This would eventually lead to a quest for a new organizing principle which could forge the atomistic mass into a new whole, and produce a new series of theories of history that would project it into the future.¹⁴

The *crisis* was both of a socio-political and philosophical nature. A focus on how the Young Hegelians conceived and acted upon this *crisis* brings their quest for new forms of political subjectivity to the fore.

Bruno Bauer and ‘the victory over egoism’

Bruno Bauer derived his notion of infinite self-consciousness from Hegel’s philosophy of subjective spirit and opposed it to the pantheistic Hegelian interpretations of Strauss and Feuerbach. Hegel had stressed the concept of substance as the pure universal that absorbed the particularity of the self, and this Spinozist moment was seized upon by a number of Young Hegelians (Strauss, Feuerbach) to grant substance a certain independence over consciousness. Bauer, on the other hand, considered the universal to be the immanent history of self-consciousness: the universal was the rational concept and the particular its embodiment. The universal acquired objectivity by incorporating the particular as an aspect of itself, while the particular elevated itself and became the expression of a higher principle. Infinite self-consciousness was thus tied up in a dialectical development while demanding that individuals acquired the discipline of freedom as universality.¹⁵

Accessing universality was, therefore, the product of intellectual labour turning finite consciousness into the existent form of the rational idea of freedom as universality. The unity of the individual with the universal was both a historical possibility and thus a constant endeavour. The subject first had to appear as potentially universal, while objects were to be seen as the means to the end of the subject achieving rational freedom. The next step was to transform substance into concrete acts of conscious spirit. Substantiality was, in a sense, a merely abstract universality that would eventually be made concrete. As an immanent subjective universality, infinite self-consciousness was ultimately linked to a criticism of liberalism and socialism. According to Bauer, 'mass society' had emerged out of the French Revolution and was characterized by forms of 'particularism' that blocked any kind of criticism of the existing order. Against the political expressions of mass society, Bauer asserted his own republicanism. Liberalism translated freedom into particularistic interests and acquisition, and this was, like socialism, at odds with the goal of 'universal freedom'. The republic, however, would be founded on the victory of 'self-consciousness' over 'egoism'.¹⁶

Bauer explicitly linked religious egoism to economic egoism, as they were both opposed to the true universality of self-consciousness. Thus the egoism that Bauer ascribed to Judaism (and Christianity) was also present in his criticism of both liberalism and socialism. According to Bauer, true singularity or individuality was autonomous since it had cast aside the fixity and rigidity of particularism. Bauer always used singularity in relation to a concept of freedom as universality, thus eradicating the particular. Autonomy is a crucial notion in understanding Bauer's ethical idealism – autonomy as a duty, with freedom as its ultimate aim. It strove to bring about a new reality more closely (although never definitively) in accord with the rational concept of freedom. Subjects could thus only attain genuine universality by freeing themselves from particular interests, transcendent universals and reigning institutions that claimed autonomy over self-consciousness.¹⁷

Bauer's criticism of religion should thus be considered a tool to elaborate on alienation in history, with its specific religious and political dimensions, which, according to Bauer, shared common defining attributes.¹⁸ One of these attributes was 'exclusiveness' (*Ausschlieslichkeit*), a structure of logic common to religion and the state. Bauer's *Die Judenfrage*, for instance, analysed emancipation from a perspective that combined both theological and political traits. Emancipation, for Bauer, implied the eradication of the possible conditions of exclusion.¹⁹ This is related

to Bauer's critique of the modern economy. The crisis of the estate order had paved the way for 'atomism' and 'egoism', which translated itself into narrow economic interests, which in turn came to define subjectivity and was eventually an obstacle to political engagement.²⁰ This was not a product of religion, but a development that ran parallel to it. Both forms of alienation shared an abstract 'beyond', which eventually legitimized particular interests and egoism. It was from this alienated root that both God and the state derived.

The notion of 'egoism' as it was developed throughout the works of Feuerbach, Bauer and Marx allows us to further elaborate on this issue. Hegel had linked society to 'atomism' (individualism), and this thesis was almost literally translated into a criticism of religion by Feuerbach, Bauer and Marx, all of whom interpreted it as 'egoism'.²¹ Feuerbach drastically radicalized Hegel's remark that Judaism did not consider nature as the embodiment of the divine.²² According to Feuerbach, Judaism had reduced nature to an object of self-interest, taking 'egoism' as its basic principle.²³ Feuerbach criticized both Judaism and Christianity because they spoke of 'a creation out of nothing', and he linked this to the 'absolute personality to whom nature was nothing'.²⁴ Bauer concluded, in a similar way, that Judaism was even further removed from 'freedom' than Christianity, since it 'felt at home in egoism'.²⁵ Marx, however, argued in *Zur Judenfrage* (1843) that it was the alleged 'political emancipation' of Bauer that reduced men to members of civil society and therefore to 'egoistic men'.²⁶ The criticism of 'egoism' was both a political and social criticism, but also, implicitly, a moral criticism. What was clearly at stake in Hegel, Feuerbach, Bauer and the young Marx was the overcoming of 'atomism' or 'egoism' as it was spawned by the *crisis*. These debates will prove to be crucial in understanding Max Stirner's criticism of his contemporaries. In *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, Stirner no longer criticizes 'egoism' but embraces it fully, which is not so much a serious philosophical stance but, rather, a political one, for it implies that Stirner embraces the *crisis* and criticizes and ridicules the emancipatory project (and its implicit morality) of his contemporaries, while doing away with a philosophy of the subject. Bauer's notion of autonomy is replaced by egoism, and his Hegelian concept of freedom by ownness (*Eigenheit*). In order to understand Stirner's undertaking we will focus on his criticism of Bauer's political philosophy.

Max Stirner versus Bruno Bauer

Der Einzige und sein Eigentum contains Stirner's clearest assessment of the French Revolution. Stirner claims that it had brought about a much more

absolute monarchy than the *Ancien Régime*. The dissolution (*Auflösung*) of the estate order had left the individual powerless before the state, the sole master on high. The end of the estate order had led to the gradual annulment of the individual. What Stirner's liberal contemporaries were striving for had been achieved beyond their wildest expectations, but was confined within the boundaries of the modern state.²⁷ This is in accordance with Bauer's proper assessment of the French Revolution; however, Stirner goes on to expand Bauer's criticism of *Nivellement* (the levelling effects of the crisis) until it encompasses Bauer's 'Humane Liberalism' as well. In the chapter on his contemporaries (*Die Freien*) Stirner distinguishes 'political liberalism' (liberalism) from 'social liberalism' (socialism and communism), and eventually from 'humane liberalism' (Bruno Bauer). According to Stirner, the development of freedom throughout history means that 'spirit' or thought becomes free and thus holds the greatest possible power of subjugation over the concrete individual.²⁸ Political liberalism liberates the egoist from 'the master', but replaces the master with a 'ghost': the state. Social liberalism gets rid of the difference between rich and poor, but puts all property in the hands of a 'ghost': society. Humane liberalism (Bruno Bauer) likewise gets rid of the personal god, but replaces it with a new faith: mankind or freedom.²⁹ Bruno Bauer thus comes at the end of Stirner's parodic historical account. The development of so-called 'freedom' as the cornerstone of Hegel's entire system finds its culmination in Bauer and leads to the absolute annulment of the individual. Bauer's criticism of the levelling effects of the crisis is in itself the pinnacle of *Nivellement*. Stirner's *Einzig*e (unique), however, escapes the dialectic of *Nivellement*, for it is extra-conceptual and hence lies beyond philosophy or criticism. In answer to his critics in 1845, Stirner writes:

There is no development of the concept of the Unique. No philosophical system can be built out of it, as it can out of Being, or Thinking, or the I. Rather, with it, all development of the concept ceases. The person who views it as a principle thinks that he can treat it philosophically or theoretically and necessarily wastes his breath arguing against it.³⁰

Stirner's *Einzig*e escapes the levelling effects of the crisis because it is no longer a subject in the philosophical sense of the word. To understand this claim I will turn my attention to Stirner's earlier writings and his reviews of Bauer's *Posaune des jüngsten Gerichts* and Hegel's *Lehre von der Religion und Kunst* in particular. Stirner began publishing his

first philosophical articles in 1842, and his initial stance was heavily influenced by Bauer. His review of Bauer's *Posaune* enthusiastically supported Bauer's radicalized reading of Hegel as an 'atheist' and 'anti-Christ'.³¹ Stirner endorsed this view, turning Hegel into a weapon to confront 'egoism' head on. Particularly Bauerian is Stirner's focus on both a 'small' and 'big' war against 'egoism'. On Stirner's rendering, the 'small war' was waged against the concept of egoism itself, whereas the 'big war' opposed everything objectively related to it: religion and the state.³² However, a mere five months later, Stirner took aim at Bauer himself, and his critique of Bauer's *Hegel's Lehre* represented a full-frontal assault against Bauer's philosophy in its entirety.

It is hard to discern the causes of Stirner's sudden shift, but he begins to lay out criticisms of Bauer that he will elaborate in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*.³³ In *Kunst und Religion*, Stirner returns to Hegel's three-fold 'Kunst-Religion-Philosophie' in order to attack Bauer's criticism of religion and his entire philosophical position, which tried to reconcile thought and being through a new kind of 'Ought'. Stirner attacks Bauer by claiming that art gives birth to religion by 'satisfying the urge of some men to split themselves up (*Entzweiung*) between that which they are and that which they should become' (Stirner's ironic version of Hegel's Unhappy Consciousness).³⁴ By satisfying man's 'urge', and thus completing the unhappy consciousness, art creates an object of worship for religion.³⁵ Man is henceforth confronted with an object, which he tries to integrate within himself but fails to do.³⁶ Bauer, on the other hand, had claimed that art was much more closely related to philosophy, based on their shared determinacy and clarity, and a common ethical root.³⁷ Stirner, however, asserts that art creates an object for religion and thus cannot be related to what he considers, in opposition to Hegel and Bauer, to be 'philosophy':

It [philosophy] neither stands opposed to an Object, as religion, nor makes one, as art, but rather places its pulverizing hand upon all the business of making Objects as well as the whole of objectivity itself, and so breathes the air of *freedom*. Reason, the spirit of philosophy, concerns itself only with itself, and troubles itself over no Object.³⁸

Stirner leaves philosophy out of the dialectical triad (art-religion-philosophy) by claiming that philosophy doesn't bother itself with objects (religion), nor does it create an object (art). It is religion *itself* that 'makes the object empty' (through reflection: *Verstandesdenken*) and when it is empty, art reclaims its object by 'showing', first, that the

object is in fact empty (by turning religion into a 'ridiculous comedy') and, secondly, that 'man' should no longer hold to it. In doing so, art shakes off its 'alienation' (religion had alienated art from its object) and can now create a new object.³⁹

Some of the differences between Bauer and Stirner come to the fore through analysis of the notion of critique in Bauer's philosophy. Contrary to merely dismissive Enlightenment critiques of religion, for instance, Bauer considered religion fundamental to an understanding of the development of reason throughout history. It was an integral part of his critical theory. Critique explained why alienation occurred in the form of both rigid particularism and a hypostasized universality. In its own historical development, criticism thus had to purge itself of the positivity which the conditions of its genesis had marred it with. It was criticism's explicit task to free philosophy of its limitations, which were in part bestowed upon it by religious modes of thought. It is therefore no coincidence that Stirner tries to come to terms with 'criticism' as Bauer's *primum mobile*. By claiming that philosophy doesn't concern itself with objects, Stirner tries to ridicule Bauer's attempt at wresting a criticism of religion out of Hegel by applying Hegel's notion of the Unhappy Consciousness to both art and religion and equating it with Bauer's philosophy of self-consciousness. In doing so, Stirner deliberately leaves the terrain of both criticism and philosophy and sets the stage for the political perspectives he articulates in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. The overarching principle, however, is his replacement of criticism as a mode of argument by mere irony. Rather than criticizing either Bauer or Feuerbach directly, Stirner tries to turn their arguments against them while leaving – in his own words – the *Logos* (word) behind.⁴⁰

In short, Stirner claims that Bauer remains (in both *Die Posaune* and in *Hegel's Lehre*) stuck between art and religion; he endlessly creates and destroys religion, only to recreate it anew. 'Philosophy', on the other hand, is something completely different for Stirner. It does not concern itself with 'objects' and therefore literally remains 'indifferent' to religion or 'God', which is 'nothing but a stone' to it.⁴¹ By reconciling thought and being (subject and object), Bauer only tries to solve a problem which he himself had created, by making a division (*Entzweiung/diremption*) between subject and object (thus creating the unhappy consciousness). Stirner's definition of 'philosophy' implies that his Young Hegelian contemporaries – and Bauer in particular – are as religious as the 'object' they try to criticize; they merely create the diremption they seek to sublate. This argument contains in a nutshell what Stirner

elaborates more fully in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. *Kunst und Religion* contains, as it were, Stirner's criticism of Bauer's philosophy as it took shape around 1842, while *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* elaborates more fully its political dimensions and emancipatory claims.⁴²

Stirner's *Der Einzige* may therefore be seen as a parody of the Young Hegelian quest to identify a modern political subject. Stirner's alleged 'philosophy of egoism' should not be read as a new philosophy of the subject, but rather as an attempt to beat Bauer (and philosophy) with his own stick by touching on what had become the very heart of his emancipatory project around 1843: his criticism of 'egoism' and 'particularism' as a fully integrated part of his philosophy of self-consciousness.⁴³

Developing the legacy of German Idealism, Bauer replaced philosophy with immanent critique. In *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, Stirner claims that Bauer gradually expanded his 'criticism' to the state itself, which, according to Stirner, implies that Bauer 'sees the inhuman everywhere' except 'in his own head'.⁴⁴ In spite of his 'shift', however, Bauer still clings to his humanism and his critique of egoism, and therefore never changes any of his 'presuppositions':

It may now, to conclude with this, be clear that in the critic's new change of front he has not transformed himself, but only 'made good an oversight,' 'disentangled a subject,' and is saying too much when he speaks of 'criticism criticizing itself'; it, or rather he, has only criticized its 'oversight' and cleared it of its 'inconsistencies.' If he wanted to criticize criticism, he would have to look and see if there was anything in its presupposition.⁴⁵

Stirner's 'remark' (*Anmerkung*) to *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* contains the clearest expression of his criticism of Bauer and of philosophy itself: 'So he [Bauer] wants to break up thoughts by thinking; but I say, only thoughtlessness really saves me from thoughts. It is not thinking, but my thoughtlessness, or I the unthinkable, incomprehensible, that frees me from possession.'⁴⁶ Obscuring the differences between Bauer and Feuerbach, Stirner claims that Bauer's 'self-criticism' remains trapped in its own constructions. Bauer thus only draws the logical conclusions of his humanism. Stirner's dismissal of humanism itself was the logical outcome of his notion of 'ownness' (*Eigenheit*) as opposed to the Hegelian notion of 'freedom', and was therefore immediately implicated in his attempts at ridiculing both progressive interpretations of Hegel and their political bearings.

Bauer's review of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* might be illuminating in this regard. It was actually part of Bauer's criticism of Feuerbach, which contained both a criticism of Stirner and a very clear appropriation of Stirnerian arguments which were directed against Feuerbach. In his review of Stirner, Bauer defended his philosophy of self-consciousness against Stirner's attacks, and in fact related Stirner to Feuerbach's Spinozistic reading of Hegel, thus relating Stirner to Feuerbach just as Stirner had related Bauer himself to Feuerbach.⁴⁷ In doing so, Bauer refused to deal with Stirner's main criticism (from the *Anmerkung*) that 'he tried to dissolve thought through thought itself, while only thoughtlessness can save me from thought'. Instead, Bauer focused on Stirner's concept of *Der Einzige*. Stirner, however, never intended to present a new subject-object philosophy or a new solution (*Der Einzige*) to it, but, rather, tried to destroy it altogether, just as he had already tried to do in *Kunst und Religion*. This is the true novelty of Stirner's thought and runs counter to any attempt at integrating Stirner within traditional forms of critical theory.

Der Einzige und sein Eigentum and the end of philosophy

The obscurity of Stirner's argument in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* is notorious. If we bear in mind his review article *Kunst und Religion*, however, it becomes perfectly clear why Stirner moves beyond the philosophical practices of his contemporaries. First of all, he leaves the domain of criticism and, second, he never intends to sublimate the subject-object dichotomy. The relation between thought and being is, in his opinion, a metaphysical question, and any attempt at finding a new solution for it, or even to criticize it philosophically, will inevitably fail. In Stirner's own definition of 'philosophy' and 'reason', Hegel and Bauer become religious authors: 'Reason, the spirit of philosophy, concerns itself only with itself, and troubles itself over no Object.'⁴⁸ The criticism of religion or metaphysics is, in itself, metaphysical and religious. It can only posit a new heaven which calls for a renewed heaven-storming. If philosophy is indeed the production of concepts (Deleuze), then Stirner tries to posit the final philosophical concept that, in itself, is no philosophical concept at all: *Der Einzige*. It escapes the *logos* (word) and thought itself. It cannot be expressed and hence cannot be criticized philosophically: 'The person who views it as a principle thinks that he can treat it philosophically or theoretically and necessarily wastes his breath arguing against it.'⁴⁹ This is a radical position, which not only denounces philosophy as metaphysical sophistry, but allows us to do away with

the subject-object dichotomy which has haunted political theory for centuries. Hegel held that 'absolute spirit' knew itself only by objectifying itself in reality and reclaiming its alienated essence.⁵⁰ Similarly to Hegel, but true to his own transformative method, Feuerbach stated that man knew himself only by objectifying himself in an idea of God and then by re-appropriating this idea. This dialectical reasoning thus functioned as a theory of human emancipation and presented man as a self-creative being.⁵¹ Likewise, Bauer spoke of an eternal process of externalizing and sublating. In this dialectical process, self-consciousness, according to Bauer, eventually attained *human* self-consciousness. By externalizing itself, self-consciousness was alienated from the static objects that were the products of its own dynamic productivity. This resulted in an inversion of the subject-object relation, which eventually meant that free, creative self-consciousness re-appropriated its own objects and attained singularity.

The relation between 'the ego' and 'his own', just like the structure of the book ('man'– 'I'), refers to this relation. The Young Hegelians considered alienation as man making himself inferior to his own products and coming to see them as a strange power outside of himself. Through the overcoming of alienation, man would come to realize the state, law, morality and religion as the products of his own self-consciousness and would strive to realize his essence in free self-determination. Stirner, on the other hand, considers 'man' himself to be this strange product and argues in favour of the 'dissolution' of all the aforementioned categories in the mortal 'I'. The alleged dialectic that corresponds with this relation claims the whole of reality as 'my object [*Gegenstand*] and therefore as my property'.⁵² Egoism is the relation between the individual and the whole of reality as his property, which means that nothing *can* claim autonomy over the individual. My alienation (*Entfremdung*) of the object means that I am 'possessed' by it, that I do not own the object and thus myself, but that the object 'possesses' me.⁵³ My own creations thus have independence and force a stability and continuity upon me.⁵⁴ Possessedness makes it impossible to 'enjoy' life/property since it always sets out a calling (to become a 'genuine man').⁵⁵ Egoism, on the other hand, is the prerequisite to 'ownness', since the extent to which the individual considers the world his own determines the extent to which he is owner of himself.⁵⁶ This clarifies why Stirner uses egoism and ownness interchangeably without considering them to be synonymous. One is only alienated when one establishes a division between subject and object in the first place, and refuses to consider objects as property. If, instead, the individual does not shy away from the objects

or refuses to find his 'essence' in them, then he considers them his property, which he uses as he sees fit. To some authors this implies the quest for authenticity as developed in existentialist modes of thought.⁵⁷ Contrary to what Feuerbach claimed, however, Stirner's 'I' is not a substitute for 'man'.⁵⁸ It does not set out a new calling to realize one's own alleged true being. It is exactly this kind of reasoning that Stirner set out to destroy in the first place. The 'I' has no essence to realize, for it is in fact a field of action which allows no fixed essences.

This position is related to Stirner's denunciation of all kinds of 'spooks'. These spooks are not criticized because they distort one's 'true being', but are in fact the outcome of an essentialist conception which creates a divide between subject and object. Stirner is not the ultimate solution to the (Young) Hegelian quest to overcome alienation, but nevertheless he tries to demonstrate how philosophy itself creates the alienation which it seeks to sublimate. If Stirner destroys the objects by claiming that they are 'property', he also renders the philosophical concept of a subject devoid of any meaning. Existentialism, on the other hand, is a contradiction in itself. It tries to do away with an essentialist conception of the subject, but immediately sets out a calling to discover one's own essence and to express it in life itself. Existentialism seeks a new haven for a philosophy of the subject beyond the end of metaphysics. However, like any attempt to criticize metaphysics philosophically, it inevitably becomes a form of metaphysics itself. Authenticity is therefore a form of what Stirner calls 'possessedness'.

Stirner, therefore, fundamentally questions the existence of authenticity and refuses to succumb to yet another form of subject-object thinking. His stance is far more radical than a merely atheist form of existentialism. This can be elaborated further by seeing exactly how Stirner conceives of the relation between 'Der Einzige' and 'his property'. This is not a dialectical relation that allows a subject to express himself through the appropriation – and hence sublation – of an object. There is no expression of an essence through an object in Stirner's account. The absence of a division between subject and object (egoism) renders the existence of such an essence impossible. Authenticity, on the other hand, implies a form of alienation that is eventually sublated in a 'true self'. The quest for authenticity posits a *telos* which opens the way to dialectical or teleological modes of thought. It is therefore at odds with what Deleuze has coined *becomings*.⁵⁹ Becomings start with a destabilization of a specific identity and move towards the dissolution of identities themselves. Stirner holds a similar view, in that he leaves no room for sublation, only for dissolution. An analysis of Stirner's notion

of 'dissolution' (*Auflösung*) will make this intelligible. It will allow us to see why the concepts of the 'egoist' and 'ownness' are by no means an end in themselves or part of a new philosophy of the subject, but an attempt at destroying subject-object thinking and philosophy as a whole.

The very notion of 'dissolution' considers living human beings in terms of a field of action marked by constant change and becoming. Stirner's notion of dissolution is derived from Bauer's radicalization of Hegel's dialectic of selfhood in the *Philosophy of Right*. While Hegel considered the universal as dialectically absorbing, and thus subsuming, the particular, Bauer's concept of universality often suppressed, and eventually dissolved or eradicated, the particular. Within his teleology Hegel indeed spoke about dissolving the particular in the general.⁶⁰ Feuerbach spoke about the dissolution of religion in the essence of religion.⁶¹ Stirner, however, does not consider the relation between *Der Einzige* and his *Eigentum* to be dialectical. Property is dissolved in the mortal 'I', and nothing is brought to a higher plain or established securely. In opposition to Bauer's critical theory we are left with no form of development whatsoever.⁶² Development implies a *telos*, whereas '*Auflösung*' means that nothing lies beyond the individual and that all fixed ideas are to be dissolved, since life itself is a process of what Stirner calls 'self-dissolution'. Dissolution is not a destiny – it is part of the here and now.⁶³ Authenticity, likewise, is not something that needs to be attained, but rather a spook that is dissolved in the mortal 'I'. Stirner explicitly refers to Bauer's position that 'property' was not to become 'stable' and that it should be the object of constant 'dissolution'.⁶⁴ Bauer's critical theory, however, was a dialectical mode of thought that allowed man to find his essence in free self-determination. Bauer only dissolved thoughts in order to replace them with 'higher thoughts', according to Stirner. This leads Stirner to his famous statement that thought can never dissolve thoughts themselves. Only thoughtlessness can dissolve thought. This means that the 'I' cannot be thought and cannot be put into words (*logos*).⁶⁵ In reaction to the reviews by Feuerbach, Szeliga and Hess, Stirner writes: 'What Stirner says is a word, a thought, a concept; what he means is no word, no thought, no concept. What he says is not what is meant and what he means is unsayable.'⁶⁶

Der Einzige is fundamentally extra-conceptual. Stirner's radical nominalism places the concept of 'Der Einzige' outside of philosophy and destroys the subject-object dichotomy. This allows Stirner to mock any attempt to re-instrumentalize (Hegelian) philosophy as a whole. His notion of egoism is at odds with the subject-object division and hence with alienation. The act of appropriating the objective and destroying

it within oneself is, moreover, immediately implicated in a process of self-dissolution:

But it is not that the I is all, but the I destroys all, and only the self-dissolving I, the never-being I, the – finite I is really I. Fichte speaks of the ‘absolute’ I, but I speak of me, the transitory [*vergänglichlichen*] I.⁶⁷

If, instead, the ‘I’ is posited as a new essence, it becomes a form of possessedness and hinders the drive to self-dissolution. Stirner’s concept of *Der Einzige* is not an attempt at engendering the radical contingency of life, but is in itself radically contingent. *Der Einzige* doesn’t seek expression through objects (existentialism), but consumes them as his property and, by doing so, renders the division between subject and object obsolete. This might explain why Stirner writes *all* personal pronouns in capitals, just like all nouns, which always begin with a capital in German.

Below, I shall analyse the implications of Stirner’s thought for radical political theory by introducing Louis Althusser’s concept of ‘the aleatory’ (*l’aléatoire*). By doing away with the divide between subject and object, Stirner denies the existence of a (revolutionary) subject, while, at the same time, opening up new perspectives for radical theory.

From to contingent to the aleatory: Stirner’s critique of ideology

Althusser’s later writings make a divide between an ‘almost completely unknown materialist tradition in the history of philosophy’ and the way it had been ‘perverted into an idealism of freedom’.⁶⁸ Max Stirner, according to Althusser, is part of this unknown tradition. Althusser’s redefinition of philosophy as having no object is firmly opposed to idealism. Instead of a rather narrow definition of idealism, Althusser broadens the concept until it encompasses all forms of teleological thinking. Epicurus’ image of atoms moving in the void until they infinitesimally swerve and mark the beginning of the world is the prototype of an anti-teleological stance.⁶⁹ The void of an existing political context allows the possibility of alternatives in a radically contingent way. This contingency is expressed in the concept of the ‘encounter’ which overrules the concept of being.⁷⁰ The teleological concept of being in fact tries to crush the aleatory nature of the encounter by subjecting it to structures and *post-factum* meanings. Althusser’s materialism of

the encounter is therefore essentially non-dialectical.⁷¹ It questions a historical materialist conception of emancipation. Contrary to his earlier writings, Althusser fundamentally doubts revolutionary politics and its transformative ability as a whole. Notwithstanding his refusal to equate the aleatory to the contingent, his notion of the encounter leaves social change open to the indeterminate, and refrains from positing essentialist guarantees. Following Stirner's attempt at destroying the subject-object dichotomy, the notion of the aleatory equally questions the existence of a revolutionary subject beyond capitalism. This is not a reactionary stand if we consider Stirner a critic of ideology, who allows us to rethink the concepts of power and freedom.

Saul Newman analyses Stirner's contribution to a critique of ideology from the perspective of Stirner's inversion of the Enlightenment humanist understanding of ideology. The human essence that the Young Hegelians seek to reclaim is itself the ideological distortion. The subject is nothing but a construction of ideological mechanisms. Instead of repressing the individual, power constructs him as a (political) subject.⁷² This underlines the radical implications of Stirner's critique of the subject-object dichotomy. The importance of Newman's interpretation lies in dissociating Stirner from the history of philosophy, by focusing on his critique of essentialism without at the same time placing him within the existentialist tradition. The destruction of the subject-object dichotomy does not allow an essentialist point of departure outside ideological systems. Essences are ideological constructions from which political oppression can be exercised. Instead of merely relating Stirner to the prehistory of post-structuralism, Newman convincingly argues that Stirner theorizes a point of departure from which ideology and its political bearings can be perceived.⁷³ Such an interpretation goes beyond a structuralist theory of ideology and a post-structuralist analysis of power. Newman interprets Stirner's notion of subjectivity as a point of excess which can never be fully determined by ideology. In Stirner's words, the individual is never fully *possessed* by ideology. This does not imply that the individual is constituted by a pre-existing ('authentic') kernel which is immune to ideology, but rather that there is an ideological lack inherent to the interpellation of the individual, which is exposed through the process of interpellation itself. Newman calls this the 'distortion of ideology, a distortion of a distortion', and relates it to Stirner's notion of the 'un-man' (*Unmensch*).⁷⁴ This is 'the other of man, a force that cannot be contained, both a creation of man and a threat to it'.⁷⁵ The 'un-man' is therefore a point beyond ideology, and serves as Newman's point of

departure for a critique of ideology beyond the constraints of rationalist and structuralist accounts.

Its political implications are related to Stirner's rejection of revolution in favour of a non-essentialist form of resistance: 'the insurrection'.⁷⁶ This is, however, an incomplete translation of Stirner's notion of *Empörung*.⁷⁷ *Empörung* bears the meaning of 'indignation', making *Empörung* a form of insurrection aroused by 'men's discontent with themselves', rather than with an established condition or *status*.⁷⁸ Men resist attempts to constitute them as subjects. *Empörung* has, 'for its unavoidable consequence a transformation of circumstances, yet does not start from it'.⁷⁹ The revolution aims at 'new arrangements', whereas *Empörung* 'leads us no longer to let ourselves be arranged'.⁸⁰ In short, a revolution leads to a new constitution, whereas *Empörung* overthrows the conditions of oppression as a whole.

Empörung is a 'political' expression of Stirner's notion of egoism. To make this intelligible, we need to return to Stirner's understanding of egoism. Through the act of egoism objects are claimed and dissolved within the 'never-being I' (*das nie seiende Ich*). In the writings of both Feuerbach and Bauer, 'egoism' was considered the expression of alienation (the non-correspondence of thought and being). To the contrary, in Stirner's account, the notion of egoism renders the concept of alienation obsolete by destroying the subject-object dichotomy. Consequently, alienation stems from everything that hinders Der Einzige's drive to self-dissolution. Egoism is therefore Stirner's *primum mobile* (as opposed to Bauer's notion of 'autonomy'), and it finds its societal or political articulation in *Empörung*. The insurrection doesn't aim at 'new arrangements', for this would be at odds with 'Der Einzige's drive to self-dissolution; these 'new arrangements' would be another attempt at constituting the individual as a subject. *Empörung* should therefore be considered an insurrection of 'Der Einzige' against subjectification. This insurrection is, however, inherent to Der Einzige's constitutive openness or its 'ownness' (*Eigenheit*), which destabilizes all fixed essences.

By analyzing Stirner's notion of *Empörung*, Newman reaches conclusions similar to my interpretation of Stirner's *Der Einzige*. Contrary to the Marxist revolution, where the subject 'throws off the shackles of ideology and is allowed to develop according to his essence, Stirner's insurrection is a revolt against precisely this essence'.⁸¹ The emphasis is on the contingent, the process of self-dissolution beyond any stable identity. *Der Einzige* is not haunted by the spectre of one's own true being beyond ideology. From a socio-political point of view, however,

its constitutive openness ('ownness') should not be seen as merely contingent. In its drive to self-dissolution it is aleatory, developing the possibility of overcoming ideological domination. Not only does Stirner's radicalism not need a subject, the subject-object dichotomy itself is the spectre that haunts philosophy and political theory and explains why every revolution ultimately leads to a new constitution.

Notes

1. G. Penzo (2006) *Die existentielle Empörung: Max Stirner zwischen Philosophie und Anarchie*, (Berlin: Peter Lang); F. Copleston (2003) *A History of Philosophy: 18th and 19th century German philosophy*, (London: Continuum), p. 303; H. Arvon (1954) *Aux sources de l'existentialisme: Max Stirner*, (Paris: PUF).
2. R. W. K. Paterson (1971) *The Nihilistic Egoist Max Stirner*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
3. The existing translation is abridged: M. Stirner (1977) 'Stirner's Critics', *The Philosophical Forum*, 8/2-3-4: 66–80. In the translation of 'Kunst und Religion' the first sentence on Hegel is omitted: M. Stirner, 'Art and Religion' in L. Stepelevich (1983) *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). We will use our own translations and put the original quote in note.
4. M. Tomba (2005) *Krise und Kritik bei Bruno Bauer: Kategorien des Politischen im nachhegelschen Denken*, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang), pp. 24–27.
5. Tomba, *Krise*, pp. 2–3.
6. W. J. Brazill (1970) *The Young Hegelians*, (New Haven: Yale University Press); S. Hook (1962) *From Hegel to Marx*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press).
7. D. Moggach (2006) *The New Hegelians. Politics and Philosophy in the Hegelian School*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
8. W. Breckman (1998) *Marx, the Young Hegelians and the Origins of Radical Social Theory. Dethroning the Self*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 5–11.
9. Breckman, *Marx*, p. 298.
10. D. Moggach (2001) '“Free Means Ethical”: Bruno Bauer's Critical Idealism', *Owl of Minerva*, 33/1: 1–24.
11. Breckman, *Marx*, pp. 99–107.
12. Breckman, *Marx*, pp. 117–119.
13. D. Moggach (2003) *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 40–46.
14. Tomba, *Krise*, pp. 24–27.
15. Moggach, *Philosophy and Politics*, pp. 40–46.
16. Moggach, *Philosophy and Politics*, p. 158.
17. Moggach, *Philosophy and Politics*, p. 33.
18. Moggach, *Philosophy and Politics*, pp. 145–149.
19. Tomba, *Krise*, pp. 112–113.
20. Moggach, *Philosophy and Politics*, pp. 54, 127.
21. G. W. F. Hegel (1986) *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag), p. 534.

22. G. W. F. Hegel (1986) 'Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal (1798–1800)', in *Frühe Schriften*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag), pp. 276–311. This text remained unpublished; the most well-known statements can be found in G. W. F. Hegel (1986) *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag), pp. 61–63.
23. L. Feuerbach (1973) *Das Wesen des Christentums*, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag), pp. 208–211.
24. Feuerbach, *Das Wesen*, pp. 210–214.
25. B. Bauer (1968) 'Die Fähigkeit des heutigen Juden und Christen, frei zu werden', in *Feldzüge der reinen Kritik*, ed. H. M. Sass (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag), pp. 178–180.
26. K. Marx (1970) 'Zur Judenfrage', *Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe: Werke, Schriften, Briefe. Ed. Band I.* (Glässhütten im Taunus: Detlev Auvermann), p. 599.
27. M. Stirner, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000), pp. 136–139; M. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 111–113; M. Tomba, 'Von der Geschichtsphilosophie zur Politik. Strömungen des Radikalismus im Vormärz: Bruno Bauer, Max Stirner und Karl Marx', in *Freiheit, Gleichheit, Solidarität. Beiträge zur Dialektik der Demokratie*, ed., Werner Goldschmidt (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 113–114.
28. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, pp. 52–53, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 48–49.
29. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, pp. 158–159, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 128–129.
30. 'Es gibt keine Begriffsentwicklung des Einzigen, es kann kein philosophisches System aus ihm, als aus einem 'Prinzip' erbaut werden, wie aus dem Sein, dem Denken oder dem Ich; es ist vielmehr alle Begriffsentwicklung mit ihm zu Ende. Wer ihn als ein 'Prinzip' ansieht, der denkt ihn philosophisch oder theoretisch behandeln zu können und führt notwendigerweise nutzlose Lufthiebe gegen ihn.' Stirner (1986) 'Rezensenten Stirners', in *Parerga, Kritiken, Repliken*, ed. Bernd Laska, (Nürnberg: LSR-Verlag), p. 150.
31. M. Stirner, 'Über B. Bauer's Posaune des jüngsten Gerichts', pp. 59–74.
32. 'Hegel, who would and has elevated the human spirit into the all-powerful Spirit, and has impressed this teaching upon his students that no one has to seek salvation outside of or beyond themselves, but rather are each their own Savior and Deliverer, has never made it his particular task to lead a so-called "small war" and to hack out of its fortress the egoism which in a thousand fold forms blocks the liberation of individuals.' Stirner, 'Über B. Bauer's Posaune des jüngsten Gerichts', p. 63. 'Hegel, der den Menscheng Geist zum allmächtigen Geiste erheben wollte und erhoben hat, und seinen Schülern die Lehre eindringlich machte, daß Niemand außer und über sich das Heil zu suchen habe, sondern sein eigener Heiland und Erretter sey, machte es nie zu seinem besonderen Berufe, den Egoismus, welcher in tausendfältigen Gestalten der Befreiung des Einzelnen widerstand, aus jedem seiner Verhackle heraus zu hauen und einen sogenannten "kleinen Krieg" zu führen.'
33. John Henry Mackay and Ernst Barnikol suggest that Bauer and Stirner were caught up in a dispute over a joint project, probably *Das entdeckte Christentum*. Stirner eventually refused to collaborate with Bauer in 1843. It is however uncertain what triggered this dispute and when it started. E. Barnikol (1927) *Das entdeckte Christentum im Vormärz*, (Jena: Eugen Diederichs), pp. 38–39.

34. Stirner, 'Kunst und Religion', p. 99.
35. Stirner, 'Kunst und Religion', p. 100.
36. Stirner, 'Kunst und Religion', p. 101.
37. B. Bauer (1842) *Hegel's Lehre von der Religion und Kunst von dem Standpuncte des Glaubens aus beurtheilt*, (Leipzig: Wigand), p. 197; D. Moggach, *Philosophy and Politics*, p. 37.
38. 'Ihr steht weder ein Object gegenüber, wie der Religion, noch macht sie eines, wie die Kunst, sondern sie legt vielmehr ebensowohl auf alle Objectmacherei als auf die ganze Objectivität selbst die zermalmende Hand und athmet die Freiheit. Die Vernunft, der Geist der Philosophie, beschäftigt sich nur mit sich selbst, und kümmert sich um kein Object.' Stirner, 'Kunst und Religion', p. 110.
39. Stirner, 'Kunst und Religion', p. 108.
40. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 201, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 164.
41. Stirner, 'Kunst und Religion', p. 110.
42. This probably explains why Stirner continues to criticize 'egoism' in another article just before *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, and claims that it is in fact opposed to 'self-determination'. See: Stirner's *Einiges Vorläufige vom Liebesstaat* (1843), pp. 123–126.
43. For an elaborated analysis of Stirner's critique of Bruno Bauer, see W. De Ridder (2008) 'Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians', *History of European Ideas*, 34/3: 285–297.
44. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 161, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 130–131.
45. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 167, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 134–135.
46. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 164, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 132–133.
47. B. Bauer (1845) 'Charakteristik Ludwig Feuerbachs', *Wigands Vierteljahrschrift* III, pp. 86–146.
48. Stirner, 'Kunst und Religion', p. 110.
49. Stirner, 'Rezensenten Stirners', p. 150.
50. G. W. F. Hegel (1986) *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag), pp. 575–586.
51. H. Pepperle (1986) *Die Hegelsche Linke: Dokumente zu Philosophie und Politik im Deutschen Vormärz*, (Frankfurt: Röderberg Verlag), pp. 35–39.
52. 'und weil mein Gegenstand, darum mein Eigentum', Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 153, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 125.
53. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, pp. 326–328, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 259–261.
54. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 215, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 175.
55. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, pp. 358–359, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 282–283.
56. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 316, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 252.
57. Penzo, *Die existentielle Empörung*; F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*; H. Arvon, *Aux sources de l'existentialisme*. A more recent attempt at existentialist integration can be found in Bernd Kast's edition of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. M. Stirner (2009) *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum. Ausführlich kommentierte Studienausgabe*, (München, Verlag Karl Alber), pp. 391–393.
58. Stirner, 'Rezensenten Stirners', pp. 148–149.
59. G. Deleuze & F. Guattari (1980) *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit), p. 304.
60. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, pp. 310–327.
61. L. Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, pp. 17–18.

62. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 167, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 134–135.
63. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 373, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, 294.
64. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 157, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 127.
65. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, pp. 163–164, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 131–132.
66. 'Was Stirner sagt, ist ein Wort, ein Gedanke, ein Begriff; was er meint, ist kein Wort, kein Gedanke, kein Begriff. Was er sagt, ist nicht das Gemeinte, und was er meint, ist unsagbar.' Stirner, *Rezensenten Stirners*, p. 149.
67. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 199, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 163.
68. L. Althusser (2006) *Philosophy of the Encounter. Later Writings 1978–1987* (London: Verso), p. 167–168.
69. Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, p. 260.
70. Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, p. 192.
71. L. Althusser (2005) 'Du matérialisme aléatoire', *Multitudes* 21, p. 189.
72. S. Newman (2001) 'Spectres of Stirner: A contemporary critic of ideology', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 6/3: 320–321.
73. Newman, 'Spectres of Stirner', p. 325.
74. Newman, 'Spectres of Stirner', p. 326.
75. Newman, 'Spectres of Stirner', p. 326.
76. Newman, 'Spectres of Stirner', p. 327.
77. To avoid prosecution, Stirner explains in footnote that he uses the word *Empörung* 'beyond its limited sense which is disallowed by the penal code'. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 355, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 280.
78. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, p. 354, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 279.
79. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 280.
80. Stirner, *Der Einzige*, translation: Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 280.
81. Newman, 'Spectres of Stirner', p. 327.

Part IV
Contemporary Relevance

7

Why Anarchists Need Stirner

Kathy E. Ferguson

Stirner is a hard thinker to categorize. He has been called a nihilist, one who advocates ‘heartless frivolity and criminal irresponsibility’ above the necessities of social revolution.¹ Some readers debate, rather ponderously, whether or not he is a psychological egoist.² Others find him to be a radical individualist who is ‘wrong in his fundamental pre-supposition’, about society,³ or a ‘radical nominalist’ who launches ‘a comprehensive attack on the world, generally’.⁴

Perhaps we can learn from these earnest ventures to eschew the desire to pin Stirner down, and instead let him float a bit. My goal in this essay is not to categorize Stirner, but to plunder him for the ideas most important to radical critique as well as to the imaginative improvisation of a more emancipatory society. With political theorist Wendy Brown, I understand critique as ‘a practice of affirming the text it contests’, a passionate re-engagement that reclaims through ‘insistent rereading’.⁵ I also draw on political theorist Michael Weinstein’s idea of restoration:

Using the metaphor of art restoration loosely and heuristically, the restorationist cleans up texts, repairs them and enhances them. By cleaning is meant removing the ‘dust’ of neglect, by bringing the author forth with clarity and precision (whenever they apply). By repairing is meant fixing what has been mangled in the historical memory by whacks of misguided criticism. By enhancing is meant bringing contemporary discourses and all commentaries on the author to bear on the author’s texts (updating, retro-reading) and identifying structures that are immanent to them, but that are not explicitly acknowledged in them.⁶

Appropriately for Stirner, given his influence in the world of art, restoration can beckon us toward an approach to critique that survives its own desires and, as Brown imagines, 'remains incitational of thought and possibility rather than turning fundamentalist'.⁷ Certainly the essays in this volume work toward the removal of the 'dust' that periodically settles on Stirner because so many readers just don't know what to do with his eclectic and rowdy interventions. In this essay I aspire, in Weinstein's lovely phrase, to bring forth a valuable aspect of Stirner's ideas 'with clarity and precision' and offer a retro-reading – inspired by encounters with Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek's analysis of ideology – of the problematic relation of desire to politics.

In their otherwise excellent book on global anarchism and syndicalism, *Black Flame*, South African writers Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt offer some 'whacks of misguided criticism' that are perversely helpful in theorizing Stirner's value. Schmidt and van der Walt announce that they are throwing Max Stirner and several others out of the anarchist canon: 'Godwin, Stirner, and Tolstoy have no place at all in the broad anarchist tradition.'⁸ Even Proudhon and Tucker, they claim, cannot 'truly' be called anarchists.⁹ Schmidt and van der Walt make three related claims against Stirner: first, his inclusion in anarchism makes that body of ideas inconsistent and unpersuasive; second, his advocacy of insurrection rather than revolution compromises anarchism's radicalism; and third, his advocacy of ownness weakens the crucial barrier between anarchism and right-wing libertarianism.¹⁰ Only Bakunin and Kropotkin, in their view, are anarchism's rightful fathers.

Focusing on *Black Flame*'s misplaced anxiety about Stirner regrettably calls attention away from the book's remarkable scholarly contribution, which is its global recovery of neglected anarchists and syndicalists. Schmidt and van der Walt effectively challenge the common notion that the anarchists' successes during the Spanish Civil War are the lone example of effective, grounded anarchist and syndicalist activism. Instead, they bring to life a compelling international network of anti-imperial, anti-capitalist struggles, connecting rural and urban movements, and linking well-known western anarchists with lesser-known struggles in Asia, South America, eastern Europe, and Africa.¹¹

However, for purposes of this chapter, I am setting aside their riveting historical and global analysis in order to focus on and respond to Schmidt and van der Walt's challenges to Stirner's utility for anarchism. Schmidt and van der Walt's discussion of Stirner deserves this degree of attention because it comes from within anarchism itself; they are

not dismissing Stirner because he is an anarchist, and therefore outside the pale of proper thought, but precisely because he is not anarchist enough. It is because they have written a ground-breaking book – only Jason Adams' earlier and much shorter book, *Non-Western Anarchisms*, has a comparable global sweep – that their dismissal of Stirner merits careful consideration.¹²

While Schmidt and van der Walt worry about 'the destructive impact and troubling implications of Stirnerism',¹³ I see Stirner as central to a key aspect of anarchist struggle: the struggle against fixed ideas. Reflecting on ideas that come to master us, Stirner famously announces:

Man, your head is haunted; you have bats in your belfry! You imagine great things, and depict to yourself a whole world of gods that has an existence for you, a spirit-realm to which you suppose yourself to be called, an ideal that beckons to you. You have a fixed idea!¹⁴

Those who cling to fixed ideas, like 'fools in a madhouse', are possessed by the ideas they claim to hold; they 'only seem to go about free because the madhouse in which they walk takes in so broad a space'.¹⁵ Stirner does not encourage us to give up passionate commitments – indeed, he is passionately committed to ownness – but to hold them differently so that they cannot hold us:

I am not unselfish so long as the end remains my *own*, and I, instead of giving myself up to be the blind means of its fulfillment, leave it always an open question. My zeal need not on that account be slacker than the most fanatical, but at the same time I remain towards it frostily cold, unbelieving, and its most irreconcilable enemy; I remain its *judge*, because I am its owner.¹⁶

Ownness differs from freedom in that it is not an ideal to be sought, but a way of being oneself, of having oneself within one's power.¹⁷ Along with Nietzsche, Stirner has pushed anarchists to conceptualize thinking and being as mobile processes, not fixed structures, and to be vigilant against the effect of frozen ideas, or what Nietzsche refers to as winter doctrines.¹⁸ Yet the ideas and values around which anarchists often rally – the People, the Toilers, the Revolution, Justice, Freedom – are susceptible to becoming exactly the sort of fixed idea against which Stirner railed. These vague but potent signifiers can operate in the ways that Slavoj Žižek indicates with regard to the sublime – they become the anarchist 'big idea', the 'real thing' for which anarchists struggle.

Sublime values beckon people, yet are too large and amorphous to be fully captured in concepts; that very resistance to articulation is taken as evidence that the sublime towers over us. Then, Žižek suggests, people look to authoritative others, ‘the subject presumed to know’, to comprehend the sublime value that beckons with its promise but escapes full understanding.¹⁹ Žižek’s line of thinking suggests, ironically, that anarchism, which is thoroughly dedicated to the value of freedom and independence of thought, can undermine itself by becoming its own fixed idea. This essay looks to Stirner for resources to critique and resist the gathering of winter doctrines and fixed ideas within anarchism.

What’s wrong with Stirner, Part I: he’s not really an anarchist

One of Schmidt and van der Walt’s concerns is to represent anarchism historically, not as a timeless rebellious impulse but a historically situated struggle for freedom. This is an admirable goal; however, Schmidt and van der Walt undermine their goal by their insistence on policing the anarchist tradition for its outliers. They are worried about ‘incoherence’, about ‘the impression that anarchism is contradictory as well as unfocused’.²⁰ But they make no persuasive case for the benefits of ironing out tensions and disciplining anarchism’s inheritance into a single consistent system. Other students of anarchism have celebrated anarchism’s manyness; Saul Newman, for example, attributes anarchism’s consistent radicalism to its ‘heterodox nature, to the way it cannot be encompassed within a single system of ideas or body of thought, but rather refers to a diverse ensemble of ideas, philosophical approaches, revolutionary practices and historical movements and identities’.²¹ The editors of *Contemporary Anarchist Studies* similarly conclude that ‘any attempt at creating some monolithic “anarchism” is doomed to failure’.²² Given that many anarchists celebrate their diversity, Schmidt and van der Walt’s commitment to expunging substantial elements of their inheritance provokes attention.

Schmidt and van der Walt’s dismissal of Stirner reflects an implicit understanding of anarchism as largely an identity category, something one ‘is’ or ‘is not’, rather than a set of ideas and practices that one can engage with. The authors of *Black Flame* are not alone. As with feminism and other radical political projects, many people often feel a need to declare themselves in or out of the category: ‘I’m one. Are you?’ But this impulse to join or quit the team is exactly the sort of impulse that Stirner helps us to scrutinize for its implicit will to

power over claims to truth. Schmidt and van der Walt worry that, without a clear and coherent definition of anarchism, there will be no 'basis for analysis and research' and anarchism 'cannot be subjected to a rigorous theoretical interrogation'.²³ Yet they do not establish that useful analysis requires a single systematic definition; this most conventional of doctrines from the social sciences smuggles into anarchism a problematic Aristotelian longing that we must have clear rules for knowing whether things are or are not the same as other things. *Black Flame's* authors appeal for 'a clear understanding of what ideas we mean by anarchism' without considering that the urge for clarity is itself ideological, a desire that needs to be interrogated, not simply accommodated.²⁴

I want to approach this impulse toward systematization both historically and conceptually. Historically, Stirner's fingerprints are all over classical anarchism in ways that Schmidt and van der Walt must either rationalize or erase. Their efforts to write Stirner out of the anarchist tradition, while still accounting for his continuing influence, are understandably contorted. Schmidt and van der Walt recognize that Stirner's ideas 'came to exercise a powerful attraction on anti-organizational anarchists', while they continue to insist that these ideas 'were not integral to the broad anarchist tradition'.²⁵ The attraction of Stirner's thinking for stalwart publisher and translator Benjamin Tucker, veteran intellectual and activist Rudolf Rocker and historian Max Nettlau, in Schmidt and van der Walt's analysis, are taken as signs of the harm that Stirner did. His 'ego-anarchist poison' spread and, in their reading, undermined proper revolutionary struggle.²⁶

This historical account is troubling. It underestimates, or simply ignores, the contributions of these and other radicals whose attraction to Stirner was fuel for their ideas. Benjamin Tucker was more than simply 'a disciple of Proudhon'.²⁷ Tucker made his own profound contributions to anarchism: he translated Bakunin as well as Stirner, Proudhon and Tolstoy; his journal *Liberty*, according to historian Paul Avrich, was 'the best anarchist periodical in the English language'.²⁸ He flourished in part because classical anarchism's tent was a large one, gathering many voices and practices into its cacophonous fold. Similarly, Emma Goldman integrated Stirner's radical individualism into her communist-anarchism. In her key essay 'Anarchism: What It Really Stands For', Goldman insisted, 'with Stirner, that man has as much liberty as he is willing to take'.²⁹ Goldman's impulse toward Stirner's radical individualism was the opposite of Schmidt and van der Walt's: she made use of the aspects of Stirner's thinking that enhanced her anarchism,

bypassed those that did not, and went on, looking for more grist for the anarchist mill.

The vigorous world of anarchist publishing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was enlarged by the work of those influenced by Stirner, including several Italian anarchist publications, among them *Nihil* and *Cogito, Ergo Sum* in San Francisco, and *Eresia* in New York City.³⁰ In the second decade of the twentieth century, the Kropotkin Literary Society translated works by Stirner, as well as Kropotkin, Bakunin, Proudhon, and Marx, into Yiddish for the enthusiastic Jewish anarchist community.³¹ E. H. Fulton's *Age of Thought: A Radical Weekly Paper and Advocate of Equal Freedom and Voluntary Cooperation* (Columbus Junction, Iowa), *The Eagle and the Serpent* (first published in London, later in Chicago), several journals variously entitled *Ego*, *Egoist*, and *Egoism*, Dora Marsden's journal *The New Freewoman* (and other titles) from London, and others around the world were influenced by Stirner's ideas. These journals regularly interacted with those of writers and editors who count as anarchists, within the terms offered in Schmidt and van der Walt's calculus: Emma Goldman's *Mother Earth* (New York), Alexander Berkman's *The Blast* (San Francisco), Jay Fox's *The Agitator* (Home, Washington), and Dwight Lum's *The Alarm* (Chicago), to take only a few examples, frequently shared writers and essays with the individualist publications.³² They advertised each other's activities and, in general, recognized a kinship that Schmidt and van der Walt labour to erase. Contrary to Schmidt's and van der Walt's assertion, there is no way that this diverse crew can be considered 'anti-organizational'. The May 1907 issue of *Mother Earth* carried a review of *The Ego and Its Own* by Max Baginski, long-time editor and activist as well as a comrade of Goldman and Gustav Landauer. Baginski concludes that, while 'Stirner loftily ignores the fact that property is the enemy of individuality', there were nonetheless significant 'points of contact': 'Individualism and Communism go hand in hand.'³³ Given *Black Flame's* goal of situating anarchism historically, and looking at the ways it was knitted into different times and places, the specific value given to Stirner's legacy by anarchists around the world requires a more open consideration.

Schmidt and van der Walt are not wrong to point out that the agendas of revolutionary anarchists and individualist anarchists were often incompatible. But so, sometimes, were the agendas of those influenced by Bakunin versus those following Kropotkin; the infamous 'brothers war' between Johann Most and Joseph Peukert in New York City in the late nineteenth-century is only one example of explosive confrontations among those whom Schmidt and van der Walt nonetheless

accept as proper anarchists.³⁴ Like the differences between Bakunin and Kropotkin, the contrasts between Stirner's radical individualism, Proudhon's mutualism, and other strands of anarchism are better understood as arguments *within* the fertile and turbulent anarchist tradition, rather than borders that distinguish ideas belonging in the tradition from those that require expulsion.

While I regard the above historical links of Stirner to other anarchists as crucial to appreciating, rather than dismissing, his influence, the conceptual arguments for retaining Stirner as a worthy contributor to anarchism are equally compelling. Emma Goldman, Gustav Landauer, Alexander Berkman, Rudolf Rocker, and other revolutionary anarchists liked Stirner for the same reason they liked Nietzsche: he is a potent foe of reification. In the June 1907 issue of *Mother Earth*, Emma Goldman warns us to 'Beware of systematists'. She quotes Nietzsche: 'We sometimes meet a certain amount of false pretence in systematists: in trying to complete a system and round off its horizon, they have to endeavor to make their weaker qualities appear in light of their stronger ones. They wish to personate complete and uniformly strong characters.'³⁵ Schmidt and van der Walt's attempt to systematize anarchism, to discipline its glorious sprawl into proper revolutionary order, excludes a key resource that anarchists need in order to attend to the tensions that arise in the process of political thinking: the capacity to think critically about cherished values, and to nourish commitments while retaining the capacity for critique.

In his 1907 review of *The Ego and Its Own* in *The North American Review*, writer James Huneker, a long-time friend of Emma Goldman, Justus Schwab, and their circle of anarchists, doubts that Stirner is a philosopher, but recognizes him as 'a political pyrrhonist'.³⁶ Huneker praises Stirner's 'magnificent honesty...that proclaims him to be no vender of prophylactics'. Rather, Huneker finds him to be 'an iconoclast...the frankest thinker of his century...a Teutonic Childe Roland who to the dark tower comes, but instead of blowing his horn – as Nietzsche did – he blows up the tower itself'.³⁷ Huneker's reflections are suggestive. We might think of Stirner, like Nietzsche, as more of a poet than a philosopher, or as the kind of philosophic thinker for whom poetic excess and extravagant rhetorical gestures are valued practices. Huneker writes,

Unlike his great contemporary, Joseph Proudhon, Stirner is not a constructive philosopher. Indeed, he is no philosopher. A moralist (or immoralist), an *Ethiker*, his book is a defence of Egoism, of the submerged rights of the ego, and in these piping times of peace

and fraternal humbug, when every nation, every man embraces his neighbor preparatory to disemboweling him in commerce or war, Max Stirner's words are like a trumpet-blast. And many Jericho-built walls go down before these ringing tones.³⁸

Some contemporary commentators have also taken this approach: Stirner's refusal of 'any and all forms of enslavement', writes Jason McQuinn in *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*, highlights Stirner's unwillingness to accept any form of reification. McQuinn writes, 'Stirner scandalously exposes every attempt not only by reactionaries, but by self-proclaimed radicals and alleged anarchists to recuperate rebellion and channel it back into new forms of alienation and enslavement.'³⁹ Similarly, Bernd Laska finds in Stirner a bold critic of the radicals of his time who only 'murdered God' but were still 'pious atheists'.⁴⁰ Alfredo Bonanno characterizes Stirner as 'savage', 'a sharpened blade that penetrates in depth'; the journey that Stirner takes us on, Bonanno remarks, is 'a short path over unknown territory'.⁴¹ Stirner's key insight here concerns the ability of a great cause, a noble set of ideas, to morph into the sort of confinement and degradation that the cause itself opposes: the rebel sets out to bring down an unjust authority, but then discovers that 'only the god has changed'.⁴² To understand how this process works, Stirner calls our attention to our desire for authority: it is not simply repression, but the recruitment of desire toward the workings of power, which is the enemy of ownness. Piety and awe for that which we hold sacred has to be interrogated, Stirner urges, because they are grounded not simply in what we want, or even what we fear, but in what we love.

For help in understanding the relation between love, piety and power, I turn to the analysis of ideology by Slavoj Žižek. Žižek argues that political beliefs are grounded in an attachment to the sublime, to some awesome, grand, and vague concept that provokes reverence, wonder, fear, and a sense of grandeur for the world. For many anarchists, it is The People, The Masses, or the Revolution that provides this heightened sense of purpose. These concepts function as master signifiers, potent rallying points that gesture toward the sacred purpose for which anarchists must struggle. Žižek argues that a successful political ideology must allow its practitioners to cultivate and cherish some distance from their sublime value while continuing to negotiate their relationship to it. We are pulled toward our sublime, our 'big thing' that overshadows all else with its grand promise. We see ourselves reach for something more, something better, but it is bigger than we are, so

we can never fully grasp it: The People never quite fall into our hands. Seeing ourselves continuously reaching for that which eludes us, we put our faith in those who appear to know; we 'believe through the Other'. Someone else who appears to have touched the sublime is the 'one who knows', the one through whom we can affirm our commitment to our values. Žižek calls this 'ideological disidentification', a kind of transference by which believers offer their allegiance to the extraordinary value that compels them, while maintaining a needed distance from it. Žižek offers the remarkable example of Catholic parishioners listening uncomprehendingly to Latin Mass; they do not know what it means, but they do not need to know because the priest knows, and the congregation can believe through him, through their Other.⁴³ Similarly, anarchists do not have to know what an anarchist society would look like, or exactly how an anarchist revolution would proceed; they don't have to know because there are authoritative others who know, the true and proper anarchists who link us to our master signifiers. The 'other supposed to know' orients our lived relations to our ideals, cementing our connection to the deeper truths about the world while, at the same time, alleviating our need to fully grasp these truths. The anarchist, too, Stirner warns, can 'carry the *gendarme* in his breast'.⁴⁴

Žižek argues that the language of politics often functions more to facilitate identifications among people than to analyse or explain the world. Followers 'do not know what they are really doing' when they believe in the words of their leaders.⁴⁵ Stirner disrupts the relation between the leaders (who can also be followers) and the followers by explaining, in painfully clear terms, what we are doing when we believe. He addresses the level of '(unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself'.⁴⁶ Because anarchists generally reject the idea of bowing to the judgments of others, they think of themselves as 'the unruly fellows' who 'overlap all bounds of the traditional and run wild with their impudent criticism and untamed mania for doubt'.⁴⁷ Yet Stirner insists that anarchism itself, or its master signifiers, can come to be 'the "true God"... fully adequate to us – to wit, our own "*self*"; we ourselves, but separated from us and lifted above us'.⁴⁸ The anarchists who seem to most fully understand the world, the 'friends of freedom', may themselves be unable to 'free themselves from that sublime thing, "self-renunciation"'.⁴⁹ 'The most revolutionary persons of our day want to subject us to a new "sacred law"'.⁵⁰ There is pleasure in giving oneself over to those who know: 'Only when I expect neither from individuals nor from a collectivity what I can give to myself, only then do I slip out of the snares of – love; the rabble cease to be rabble only when it *takes hold*'.⁵¹

Stirner tries to teach us to love in a different way: not to love our own possession by fixed ideas, or our closeness to the ones who are supposed to know, but to love the unique in ourselves and in each other, and the pleasure that one non-haunted person can find in another:

If I cherish you because I hold you dear, because in you my heart finds nourishment, my need satisfaction, then it is not done for the sake of a higher essence whose hallowed body you are, not on account of my beholding in you a ghost, an appearing spirit, but from egoistic pleasure; you yourself with *your* essence are valuable to me, for your essence is not a higher one, is not higher and more general than you, is unique like you yourself, because it is you.⁵²

He anticipates that we might get paralyzed midway to our goal, demystifying the sacred enough to weaken its claim, but 'not yet reckless enough to live wholly to egoism'.⁵³ Crippled by 'the curse of *halfness*', one might become a skeptic, but not a 'self-owning man'.⁵⁴ The 'habit of renunciation' tames passion, 'gags the lawless word'.⁵⁵ Stirner urges attention both to how we love and to how we habituate ourselves to our loves.

For Schmidt and van der Walt, I conjecture that proper anarchism has itself become the sublime, Bakunin and Kropotkin the ones who know. They are the Big Others who are supposed to know for anarchists, the ones around whom anarchism's ideological quilt can be fixed, its sliding held firm.⁵⁶ Stirner has become 'the other of the other' who endangers proper order by remobilizing the elements, opening up the sliding chains of signifiers and disrupting the sought-for totality. Žižek mentions Kafka as one who cultivates the shift of perspective needed to reformulate authoritative pronouncements; he was the master of 'a weird and innocent new gaze'.⁵⁷ Stirner, too, is such a master, making his ousting from the field of relevant speakers not only short-sighted but actually dangerous for anarchists. Schmidt and van der Walt are in danger of moving toward a kind of anarchist fundamentalism, distinguished not so much by the content of the belief but, in Žižek's words, 'the way he relates to his beliefs'.⁵⁸ 'Belief', Žižek insists, 'is a reflexive attitude: it is never a case of simply believing – one has to believe in belief itself'.⁵⁹ Like Žižek, Stirner understands that politics is about love, including a disturbing attachment to domination, and that critique requires us to examine our enjoyments. Learning to recognize this attachment to the spooks that haunt us, and to renegotiate the way we live with those spooks, is the challenge Stirner poses.

What's wrong with Stirner, Part II: he's not really a revolutionary

Stirner has declared himself out of bounds for anarchists, according to Schmidt and van der Walt, because he favours insurrection rather than revolution. They cite this passage (twice) from *The Ego and Its Own*: 'My object is not the overthrow of an established order but my elevation above it, my purpose and deed are not...political or social but...directed toward myself and my ownness alone...an egoistic purpose and deed.'⁶⁰ Yet, many radicals whom Schmidt and van der Walt consider proper anarchists, including Rudolf Rocker and Emma Goldman, argue for a combination of insurrection and revolution, insisting, in fact, on an intimate link between change within individuals and structural change in communities.

In my view, Schmidt and van der Walt truncate Stirner's discussion because they have reduced his thinking about ownness and ego to a thin bourgeois version of possessive individualism. I will develop this argument below; here I want to take insurrection seriously as a radical project, and ask about its possibilities. Insurrection, Saul Newman argues, works at the level of micro-politics, addressing the power that works on us within our subjectivity.⁶¹ Stirner did not aim to substitute insurrection for revolution; he thought they were two very different forms of resistance:

Revolution and insurrection must not be looked upon as synonymous. The former consists in an overturning of conditions, of the established condition or *status*, the state or society, and is accordingly a *political* or *social* act; the latter has indeed for its unavoidable consequence a transformation of circumstances, yet does not start from it but from men's discontent with themselves, is not an armed rising but a rising of individuals, a getting up without regard to the *arrangements* that spring from it. The Revolution aimed at new arrangements; insurrection leads us no longer to *let* ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves, and sets no glittering hopes on 'institutions.' It is not a fight against the established, since, if it prospers, the established collapses of itself; it is only a working forth of me out of the established.⁶²

Stirner's voice is an important supplement to collective revolutionary change. Revolutions that are not also insurrections are dangerous to anarchist politics: revolution without insurrection is only a change of

masters. Insurrection, Stirner insists, is self-liberation: 'I can have only so much freedom as I procure for myself by my ownness. Of what use is it to sheep that no one abridges their freedom of speech? They stick to bleating.'⁶³ Insurrectionary micro-politics struggles with the will to power within ourselves; this process might well stand in tension with efforts to create new institutions, but this is a necessary tension within anarchism, not an assault on it from outside.

Ownness and the struggle against possession often resonate well in the arts, where possibilities for insurrection and '*refractoriness*' can be nurtured, often in conjunction with movements organized around labour, education, ecology, or other activist sites.⁶⁴ Anarchism (broadly defined) has a long history of interaction with radical artists. The painter Gustave Courbet, an anarchist and friend of Proudhon's, established the Federation of Artists during the Paris Commune.⁶⁵ A decade and a half later, anarchist art critic Felix Feneon coined the term neo-impressionist to describe a school of painters including Camille Pissarro, George Seurat and Anna Bloch, who were 'avowed anarchists' and whose graphics and illustrations in anarchist journals were important to the French anarchist movement.⁶⁶ Picasso was strongly influenced by the anarchists in Barcelona, particularly by the execution of Spanish educator Francisco Ferrer in 1901.⁶⁷

Stirner was central to the Artistocrat movement in France. *The Ego and Its Own* was translated into French as *L'Unique et sa propriété* in 1900. The critic André Colomor, the revolutionary Mexican painter Atl, and others invoked Stirner, Nietzsche, and Henry Bergson as their philosophical inspiration. Their journal *L'Anarchie* (1905-14), and a related journal *Action d'art*, along with a bookstore and discussion group, provided face-to-face as well as textual spaces for discussing Stirner's ideas.⁶⁸

Stirner's influence was strong in the Dadaist movement in Europe and the United States during the early twentieth century. Painter Marcel Duchamp studied *The Ego and Its Own* in Munich in 1912, and said that it brought about his 'complete liberation'.⁶⁹ When asked to describe his philosophical orientation, Duchamp named two philosophers: Pyrrho (a student of the ancient Greek Anaxarchus) and Stirner.⁷⁰ Duchamp introduced Parisian painter Francis Picabia to Stirner's ideas. Duchamp, writer and painter Manual Komroff, sculptor and poet Adolf Wolff, novelist Mike Gold, photographer Albert Stieglitz, and many, many other artists and writers were active in the Ferrer Center, where Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman arranged art classes by Robert Henri and George Bellows.⁷¹ The artistic movement known as 'vorticism',

involving painter and photographer Man Ray, called on Stirner's individualism for its creative energies.⁷² Essayist Benjamin De Casseres and playwright Eugene O'Neill were influenced by Stirner.⁷³ The 1913 Armory Show in New York City, and the Ashcan School of radical art, were largely organized by anarchists and artists from the Ferrer Center, where Stirner's ideas were very much present.

During the Russian Revolution, many artists allied with anarchists. The Moscow Federation of Anarchists, strongly influenced by Stirner through its secretary, Lev Chernyi, sponsored at least twenty-five clubs combining political activism with painting, printing, poetry, and drama.⁷⁴ The journal *Anarkhiia* was a site where painters, including Aleksandr Rodchenko, Kazimir Malevich and others, promoted their 'suprematism' as 'the visionary individualism of the anarchist revolution'. Malevich wrote this statement, echoing the tone and cadence as well as the ideas of *The Ego and Its Own*, in *Anarkhiia* on March 27, 1918:

We are revealing new pages of art in anarchy's new dawns...The ensign of anarchy is the ensign of our 'ego,' and our spirit, like a free wind, will make our creative work flutter in the broad spaces of the soul. You who are bold and young... Wash off the touch of dominating authorities. And, clean, meet, and build the world in awareness of your day.⁷⁵

Quotations from Stirner annotated their exhibits. They held onto their anarchist approach to art until the Cheka shut down their exhibitions and imprisoned many of the artists following the Kronstadt rebellion in 1921.⁷⁶

After World War II, André Breton and the surrealists were allied with anarchists. Anarchist poets Robert Duncan and Kenneth Rexroth set up the Libertarian Circle in San Francisco, launched the journal *Ark*, and linked anarchism to homosexual liberation. Duncan teamed up with painter Jess Collins, creating opportunities for painting and exhibitions which combined a forthrightly gay sensibility with critique of capitalism and war.⁷⁷ From the 1960s to the present, anarchism has energized the cultural and political activities of youth culture. Allan Antliff's remarkable volume, *Only A Beginning*, documents a rich outpouring of art, music, film, poetry, literature, drama, and more in Canada in the last quarter of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century.⁷⁸ To take only one specific example, the anonymous graffiti artist and filmmaker Banksy offers the sort of gleaming,

sarcastic denunciations of capitalism, war, and the state that we would expect from an artist who has read his Stirner.

This small sample of alliances among anarchists and artists, with Stirner the leading anarchist voice, suggests that capacities for insurrection and refractory engagements abound in the art world. This story of creative improvisation does not replace the saga of revolutionary class politics told by Schmidt and van der Walt, but it does supplement and extend it.⁷⁹ There is no need to throw Stirner and the creative world of anarchist art out of the tradition in order to tell the rich story of anarchism's labour history. Schmidt and van der Walt toss Stirner out, I speculate, because doing so firms up their idea of the proper anarchist inside by creating a despised outside against which to position themselves. Imagine a companion volume to *Black Flame*: a thick, detailed account of insurrectionary artists from the Paris Commune to the present. If the story of global anarchism were anchored in the art world, Stirner would be its heart.

Characteristically, Stirner warns us that 'artistic genius' can be dangerous in the same way that political genius can: the creativity and capacity to inspire us can result in 'worship'.⁸⁰ Again, we can see Žižek's warning about the Big Other in Stirner's passionate prose: we worship those who create ideals, not primarily because the creators demand obedience, but because we desire to be near to them, we feel 'the burning urge in man which drives him not to single but to duplicate himself, not to be satisfied with himself as the natural man, but to seek the other, the spiritual man – this drive is satisfied through the work of the genius, and the splitting in two is completed'.⁸¹ This splitting is profoundly reassuring: it takes what one cannot fully comprehend but nonetheless loves, and it puts it outside of us, in the hands of the one who knows/creates. 'For the first time man breathes with relief, for his inner confusion is resolved, the disturbing presentiment is *thrown out as form*: man stands *facing* himself.'⁸² A person can keep reaching for her big idea, her sublime value, without ever grasping it: 'it is his *beyond*, to which all his thoughts and feelings flow without quite reaching it'.⁸³ It is not the final holding of our sublime value, in this form of alienation, that we actually want, but rather the comforting, habitual process of repeatedly reaching for it, 'with all its pain and all its ecstasy'.⁸⁴ We remain 'captive in the circle of belief'.⁸⁵ Stirner invites us out of this captivity by way of our ownness:

If they nevertheless give you freedom, they are simply knaves who give more than they have. For then they give you nothing of their own, but stolen wares; they give you your own freedom, the freedom

that you must take for yourselves, and they *give* it to you only that you may not take it and call the thieves and cheats to account to boot. In their slyness they know well that given (chartered) freedom is no freedom, since only the freedom one *takes* for himself, therefore the egoist's freedom, rides with full sails. Donated freedom strikes its sails as soon as there comes a storm – or calm; it requires always a – gentle and moderate breeze.⁸⁶

What's wrong with Stirner, Part III: He's not really a leftist

Schmidt and van der Walt are concerned that accepting Stirner as an anarchist weakens the barrier between proper anarchism and its remote, disquieting cousin – right wing libertarianism. They point out that, 'If an anarchist is someone who "negates" the state, it is by no means clear how anarchism differs from the most radical economic liberals, like Murray Rothbard, who envisage a stateless society based on private property and an unrestrained free market.'⁸⁷ They recognize that Stirner 'was not an advocate of the free market', yet they say that he cooperated with *laissez-faire* capitalism in endorsing 'unrestricted pursuit of personal advantage'.⁸⁸ In order to evaluate this claim, we need to look more closely at what 'personal advantage' meant for Stirner, as well as ask what is at stake for Schmidt and van der Walt in policing anarchism's boundaries.

The kind of person that Stirner wants us to be, and insists that we can be, has little to do with reckoning of monetary advantage. 'Property', John Carroll notes in a commentary on Stirner, is 'the rediscovery of man's proper-ties'. Stirner values the enjoyment of things, not their accumulation and investment. He scorned '*Homo-economicus*, the cleric in material garb.'⁸⁹ 'I am proprietor', Stirner declared, 'but property is *not sacred*.'⁹⁰ The personal advantage to which Schmidt and van der Walt allude is not, for Stirner, in the holding, but in the enjoying of material objects: 'If the enjoyment of life is to triumph over the longing for life or hope of life, it must vanquish this its double significance...it must crush spiritual and secular poverty, exterminate the ideal and – the want of daily bread.'⁹¹ Stirner is not sanguine about economic inequality; he does not accept vast differences between rich and poor as the natural result of market activity. When he blames the poor for their poverty, it is not because they didn't work harder and apply themselves more diligently, but because they failed to overthrow the rich: 'Property, therefore, should not and cannot be abolished; it must rather be torn from ghostly hands and become my property; then the

erroneous consciousness, that I cannot entitle myself to as much as I require, will vanish.⁹² 'Free competition' is a piety uttered by those who already benefit from capitalism.⁹³ Both the capitalist's 'restless acquisition' and the communist's 'all belongs to all' violate the egoist's stance: 'to me belongs only as much as I am competent for, or have within my competence'.⁹⁴

There is nothing quietist about ownness; it is temporal, engaged, and transgressive. Stirner's 'creative nothing' is fully embodied: 'Not till one has fallen in love with his *corporeal* self, and takes a pleasure in himself as a living flesh-and-blood person . . . not till then has one a personal or *egoistic* interest.'... 'for it is only when a man hears his flesh along with the rest of him that he hears himself wholly.'⁹⁵ Stirner rejects any sort of *telos*, whether it is religious, revolutionary, or ontological, because it seizes control of the time that ownness requires:

A man is 'called' to nothing, and has no 'calling,' no 'destiny,' as little as a plant or a beast has a 'calling.' The flower does not follow the calling to complete itself, but it spends all its forces to enjoy and consume the world as well as it can – it sucks in as much of the juices of the earth, as much air of the ether, as much light of the sun, as it can get and lodge. The bird lives up to no calling, but it uses its forces as much as is practicable; it catches beetles and sings to its heart's delight... A calling [man] has not, but he has forces that manifest themselves where they are because their being consists solely in their manifestation, and are as little able to abide inactive as life, which, if it 'stood still' only a second, would no longer be life.⁹⁶

Stirner recognizes that a 'beaten man' probably has used up his forces, that 'hostile resistance or friendly assistance' might be needed to provoke or support our forcefulness. But neither the individual nor others can rightfully command one's forces: 'the command to use them would be superfluous and senseless. To use his forces is not man's *calling* and task, but is his *act*, real and extant at all times. Force is only a simpler word for manifestation of force.'⁹⁷

I recognize the sense of urgency that Schmidt and van der Walt express with regard to distinguishing anarchism from radical neo-liberalism. This distinction is important for us, now, much more so than it was for the classical anarchists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The reason is not so much that anarchism has changed – although it has – but that capitalism has changed. During anarchism's classical age, when most people lived outside of cities, the idea of a small

property holding as a buffer against dependence – a sort of nineteenth-century version of the yeoman farmer – may have been nostalgic, but it wasn't yet ridiculous. Today, when concentrated mega-corporations combine with evangelical Christianity and right wing media to create what political theorist William Connolly aptly calls 'an evangelical-capitalist resonance machine', appeal to an unregulated market as the site of freedom cultivates a frightening fantasy as well as an 'ethos of existential revenge'.⁹⁸

However, I wonder, is it really so important whether these supporters of predatory capitalism call themselves, or are called, 'anarcho-capitalists'?⁹⁹ The important thing, I suggest, is to show how their thinking is wrong, not to establish that they are 'really' not anarchists after all. Schmidt and van der Walt are outraged that anarchism's coherence is damaged by all the undisciplined debris allowed to fly around in its name. They regret that '[David] Miller even suggests that anarchism is not in fact an ideology but a "point of intersection of several ideologies"'.¹⁰⁰ Yet it is just such an assemblage, bringing together queer, environmental, feminist, race, indigenous, and other strands of critique and modes of vision, that makes anarchism so fertile. The desire to clarify once and for all who is and who is not on the team is a dangerous desire. In Stirner's eyes, our problem is not that we are selfish but that we are pious, and that it is possible to be pious toward anarchism itself.

Conclusion

Stirner's insights, I have argued, help us to create what Alejandro de Acosta calls 'an ethics or a politics of the libidinal economy', one that can 'analyze its own micro-politics of desire'.¹⁰¹ There are many remaining political questions that Stirner does not answer; my point is not that that he is sufficient for anarchism, only that he is necessary. His relentless critique of piety, and his bold hopes for ownness, open doors. Through Stirner, we can trace anarchism's links to postmodernism's restless energies.¹⁰² We can appreciate the intense, creative improvisations of anarchist-inspired artists and we can think more critically about the workings of all ideologies, including our own, in recreating the sort of authority we want to combat.

Schmidt and van der Walt desire to systematize anarchism, to make it clear who is in and who is out, to make sure that the positions we embrace have nothing at all in common with those we oppose. Stirner helps us understand why this impulse is dangerous for thinking in general, and

for anarchist thinking in particular. Stirner helps us understand *how* ideologies work, how we become calculators rather than creators:

The thinker is distinguished from the believer only by believing much more than the latter, who on his part thinks of much less as signified by his faith (creed). The thinker has a thousand tenets of faith where the believer gets along with few; but the former brings *coherence* into his tenets, and takes the coherence in turn for the scale to estimate their worth by. If one or the other does not fit into his budget, he throws it out.¹⁰³

One who is not possessed is able to circumvent the lure of serving either an ideal or the One who knows the ideal. Even the best idea can possess us:

you address yourself to thoughts and notions, as you do to the appearances of things, only for the purpose of making them palatable to you, enjoyable to you, and your own: you want only to subdue them and become their owner, you want to orient yourself and feel at home in them, and you find them true, or see them in their true light, when they can no longer slip away from you, no longer have any unseized or uncomprehended place, or when they are right for you, when they are your property. If afterwards they become heavier again, if they wriggle themselves out of your power again, then that is just their untruth – to wit, your impotence. Your impotence is their power, your humility their exaltation.¹⁰⁴

Stirner applauds the passion of ownness while warning against the common transference to the Big Other, the one who knows. Ironically, this could potentially make him a wry sort of Big Other, the one who understands the danger of the transference so that the rest of us can understand it through him. Yet the true Stirnerian moment in that relation is when the rest of us realize our unthinking dependence on our Big Other, when we refuse to be the radical equivalent of Žižek's uncomprehending parishioners, counting on the priest to know, and instead struggle against that dependency by thinking and creating for ourselves.

Notes

1. R. W. K. Paterson (1971) *Stirner: The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 138.

2. See D. Leopold (2003) 'A Left-Hegelian Anarchism', *The European Legacy* 8/6: 777–786, and J. Jenkins (2009) 'Max Stirner's Egoism', *The Heythrop Journal*: 243–256.
3. J. P. Clark (1976) *Max Stirner's Egoism* (London: Freedom Press), p. 100.
4. D. Nielsen (2005) *Horrible Workers: Max Stirner, Arthur Rimbaud, Robert Johnson, and the Charles Manson Circle* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield), p. 21.
5. W. Brown (2005) *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p. 16.
6. M. Weinstein (2003) presentation, American Political Science Association annual meeting: 2.
7. Brown, *Edgework*, p. 114.
8. M. Schmidt and L. van der Walt (2009) *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press), p. 18.
9. Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, p. 18.
10. A fourth point against Stirner, in Schmidt and van der Walt's assessment, is that he is insufficiently rationalist (p. 69). I neglect this charge here, but for an insightful discussion that critiques *Black Flame's* reliance on a Eurocentric understanding of reason, see George Ciccariello-Maher (2011) 'An Anarchism That is Not Anarchism: Notes toward a Critique of Anarchist Imperialism' in *How Not to be Governed: Readings and Interpretations from a Critical Anarchist Left* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books), chapter 3.
11. For a fuller discussion of Schmidt's and van der Walt's contributions to our understanding of global anarchist history, see my discussion in *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield; 2011), chapter five.
12. J. Adams (2003) *Non-Western Anarchisms: Rethinking the Global Context* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Zabalaza Books).
13. Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, p. 242.
14. M. Stirner (1971) *The Ego and His Own*, introduction by John Carroll (NY: Harper and Row), pp. 58–59 [originally published in 1845].
15. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 59.
16. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 71 [italics in original].
17. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 112.
18. F. Nietzsche (1954) *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for None and All*, translated by Walter Kaufman (NY: Penguin Books), p. 201.
19. S. Žižek (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 187.
20. Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, p. 18.
21. S. Newman (2010) 'Voluntary Servitude Reconsidered: Radical Politics and the Problem of Self-Domination', *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies*, Volume 1: <http://www.anarchist-developments.org/index.php/adcs/article/view/13/3> (accessed 15 February 2011).
22. R. Amster, A. DeLeon, L. A. Fernandez, A. J. Nocella II, and D. Shannon (2009) 'Introduction' in *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy* (NY: Routledge), p. 2.
23. Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, p. 43.
24. Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, p. 43.
25. Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, p. 241.
26. Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, p. 242.

27. Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, p. 18.
28. P. Avrich (1988) *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p. 144.
29. E. Goldman (1969) 'Anarchism: What It Really Stands For' in *Anarchism and Other Essays* (NY: Dover Publishers), p. 65 [originally published by Mother Earth Publishing Co, 1910].
30. Avrich, *Portraits*, p. 171.
31. Avrich, *Portraits*, p. 193.
32. For a fascinating overview of anarchist journals, see E. A. Longa (2010) *Anarchist Periodicals in English Published in the United States, 1833–1955: An Annotated Guide* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press); and P. Avrich (2005) *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Oakland: AK Press).
33. M. Baginski (1907) 'Stirner: "The Ego and His Own"', *Mother Earth* II no. 3 (May): 150, 151.
34. A. Butterworth (2010) *The World that Never Was: A True Story of Dreamers, Schemers, Anarchists, and Secret Agents* (NY: Pantheon Books), p. 237.
35. E. Goldman (1907) *Mother Earth* II, no.2 (April): 85.
36. J. Huneker (1907) 'Max Stirner', review of *The Ego and Its Own*, *The North American Review*, 185 no. 616 (June 7): 335 [inclusive pages 332–337].
37. Huneker, 'Max Stirner', 334.
38. Huneker, 'Max Stirner', 335.
39. J. McQuinn (2009) 'Max. Stirner: the anarchist every ideologist loves to hate', *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*. Issue 68/69: 2.
40. B. A. Laska, 'Max Stirner: A Durable Dissident – in a Nutshell' *L.S.R.: A philosophical project* <http://www.lsr-projekt.de/poly/eninnuce.html> (accessed 13 February 2011).
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42. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 53.
43. Žižek, *Sublime Object*, p. 89.
44. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 66.
45. Žižek, *Sublime Object*, p. 31.
46. Žižek, *Sublime Object*, p. 33.
47. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 95.
48. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 107.
49. Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 123, 124.
50. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 126.
51. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 168.
52. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 58 [italics in original].
53. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 67.
54. Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 67, 70 [italics in original].
55. Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 72, 74.
56. Žižek, *Sublime Object*, pp. 73–74.
57. S. Žižek (2006) *Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), pp. 334–335.
58. Žižek, *Parallax View*, p. 350.

59. Žižek, *Parallax View*, p. 353.
60. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 219, in Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, pp. 36, 67.
61. Newman, 'Voluntary Servitude Reconsidered'.
62. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 219 [italics in original].
63. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 122.
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65. A. Antliff (2007) *Anarchy and Art: From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press), p. 33.
66. Antliff, *Anarchy and Art*, p. 39.
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69. Antliff, *Anarchy and Art*, p. 55.
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72. A. Antliff (2001) *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 76–80.
73. Avrich, *Modern School Movement*, pp. 130, 153.
74. Antliff, *Anarchy and Art*, pp. 74, 77; A. Antliff (2007) 'Anarchy, Power, and Poststructuralism', *SubStance* #113, 36 no. 2: 60–61 [inclusive pages 56–66].
75. Antliff, *Anarchy and Art*, p. 83.
76. Antliff, *Anarchy and Art*, p. 89. See also P. Avrich (1967) *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
77. Antliff, *Anarchy and Art*, pp. 117–121, 124.
78. A. Antliff, (ed.) (2004) *Only a Beginning: An Anarchist Anthology* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press).
79. I am borrowing the felicitous phrase 'creative improvisation' from Judith Butler.
80. Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 231–232.
81. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 232 [italics in original].
82. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 232 [italics in original].
83. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 232.
84. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 232.
85. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 234 [italics in original].
86. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 122.
87. Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, p. 17.
88. Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, p. 52 [italics in original].
89. John Carroll, in Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, p. 160 fn 1 [italics in original].
90. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 169 [italics in original].
91. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 226.
92. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 169.
93. Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 172–173.
94. Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 176–177.
95. Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 48, 74 [italics in original].
96. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 229.

97. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 229 [italics in original].
98. W. E. Connolly (2008) *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham: Duke University Press), xiii, 4.
99. Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, p. 35.
100. D. Miller (1984) *Anarchism* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons), p. 3, cited in Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, p. 40.
101. A. de Acosta, 'Two undecidable questions for thinking in which anything goes', in Amster et al. (eds) *Contemporary Anarchist Studies*, 29.
102. See, for example, Todd May, 'Anarchism from Foucault to Rancière', and Gabriel Kuhn, 'Anarchism, postmodernity, and poststructuralism', both in Amster et al. (eds) *Contemporary Anarchist Studies*; R. Day (2005) *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (London: Pluto Press); S. Newman (2001) *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield).
103. Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 243–244 [italics in original].
104. Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 251–252.

8

Stirner's Ethics of Voluntary Inservitude

Saul Newman

My aim in this chapter is to show how Stirner's critical post-humanist philosophy allows him to engage with a specific problem in political theory, that of voluntary servitude – in other words, the wilful acquiescence of people to the power that dominates them. Here it will be argued that Stirner's demolition of the abstract idealism of humanism, rational truth and morality, and his alternative project of grounding reality in the singularity of the individual ego, may be understood as a way of countering and avoiding this condition of self-domination. In contrast to various claims that Stirner's thought is nihilistic, one finds in Stirner a series of ethical strategies through which the self's relation to power is interrogated, and in which the possibility of alternative modes of subjectivity is opened up, where the subject can invent for himself new forms of existence and practices of freedom that release him from this condition of subjection. There emerges, from Stirner's thought, a certain kind of micro-political ethics that has important implications for any consideration of radical politics today.

The problem of voluntary servitude

The question posed in the mid-sixteenth century by Étienne De La Boétie in *Discours de la servitude volontaire* remains with us and can still be considered the fundamental political question:

My sole aim on this occasion is to discover how it can happen that a vast number of individuals, of towns, cities and nations can allow one man to tyrannize them, a man who has no power except the power they themselves give him, who could do them no harm were they not willing to suffer harm, and who could never

wrong them were they not more ready to endure it than to stand in his way.¹

La Boétie explores the subjective bond which ties us to the power that dominates us, which enthralls and seduces us, blinds us and mesmerizes us. The essential lesson here is that the power cannot rely on coercion, but in reality rests on our power. Our active acquiescence to power at the same time constitutes this power. For La Boétie, then, in order to resist the tyrant all we need do is turn our backs on him, withdraw our active support from him and perceive, through the illusory spell that power manages to cast over us – an illusion that we participate in – his weakness and vulnerability. Our persistent servitude is a condition of our own making – it is entirely voluntary. Domination rests on a sort of perversion or misdirection of the will: individuals somehow lose their will to be free, and come to actively desire their own subjugation. What must therefore be explained is the pathological bond to power which displaces the natural desire for liberty and the free relations that would otherwise exist between people.

This question of our subjective bond to power was taken up in more recent times within psychoanalytic thought, particularly by thinkers like Herbert Marcuse and Wilhelm Reich. Reich, for instance, in his Freudian analysis of the mass psychology of fascism, pointed to a desire for domination and authority which could not be adequately explained through the Marxist category of ideological false consciousness.² Approaching the problem from a different angle, the anthropologist Pierre Clastres showed us that domination was not inevitable: voluntary servitude resulted from a misfortune of history (or pre-history), a certain fall from grace, a lapse from the condition of primitive freedom and statelessness into a society divided between dominators and the dominated. Here, man occupies the condition of the *unnameable* (neither man nor animal); so alienated is he from his natural freedom that he freely chooses, *desires* servitude – a desire which was entirely unknown in primitive societies.³ Following on from Clastres' account, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari explored the emergence of the state, and the way in which it relies not so much on violent domination and capture, but rather on the self-domination of the subject at the level of his or her desire – a repression which is *itself* desired.⁴

Stirner makes a significant contribution, I would argue, to this line of enquiry. For Stirner, voluntary servitude is not so much rooted in the interiority of the psyche, or in some sort of historical condition, but rather in a certain idealization of the real which derives from religious

modes of thinking. Just as, for La Boétie, individuals are enthralled to the figure of the tyrant, who is after all is only an ordinary man, for Stirner, they are enthralled to the universal figure of Man, whose moral and rational authority is simply an alienation of the individual's own power over himself. The domination that the humanist figure of Man exercises over us is thus even more unaccountable than that exercised by the tyrant, as the former is not even a real person but an illusion, a metaphysical abstraction, one, moreover, of our own creation. Stirner describes a process by which people willingly constitute their identity around this abstraction – which is nothing but a remnant of religious thought – and, in doing so, subordinate themselves to an ideological realm of 'fixed ideas', and thereby to the political institutions which derive their authority from them. Like La Boétie, Stirner diagnoses a kind of moral sickness that robs people of their will and desire for self-determination, inducing them to give themselves up freely to the power that oppresses them.

Critique of humanism

To understand this process of subjectification more precisely, we must turn to Stirner's critique of humanism and idealism as the dominant modes of thought and existence in modernity. *The Ego and Its Own* is a rejection not only of Hegelian idealism but, more explicitly, of the humanism of Ludwig Feuerbach, who believed that in displacing God with Man, he was emancipating humanity from religious alienation and oppression – and yet who, as Stirner showed, had only succeeded in inaugurating a new form of humanist, secular oppression.

According to Stirner, Feuerbach's humanist project had merely turned man into a God-like figure, thus sustaining rather than transcending the religious illusion. The place of the absolute, once occupied by God, is now occupied by man. However, religious authority is retained and, indeed, universalized, now taking on the guise of the rational and the secular. Stirner therefore sees human essence, which for Feuerbach was alienated under religion, as an alienating abstraction itself – an abstraction which now becomes, under the reign of humanism, a universal ideal:

The supreme being is indeed the essence of man, but, just because it is his *essence* and not he himself, it remains quite immaterial whether we see it outside him and view it as 'God', or find it in him and call it 'Essence of man' or 'man'. I am neither God nor *man*, neither the

supreme essence nor my essence, and therefore it is all one in the main whether I think of the essence as in me or outside me.⁵

So, man has replaced God as the new ideal abstraction – an abstraction that denies the individual. In humanism, man becomes like God, and just as man was debased under God, so the individual is debased beneath this perfect being, man. Man is just as oppressive, if not more so, than God: ‘Feuerbach thinks that if he humanizes the divine, he has found truth. No, if God has given us pain, “man” is capable of pinching us still more torturingly.’⁶ Feuerbach, then, is the high priest of a new religion. Humanism is the new secular religion, based on human essence. It constitutes a different kind of religious illusion, yet is just as oppressive and alienating as the one it supplanted. This is why Stirner sees Enlightenment humanism, with its rational and moral discourses that were supposed to free people from religious mystification and idealism, as merely Christianity reinvented: ‘The human *religion* is only the last metamorphosis of the Christian religion.’⁷

In revealing this theological remnant that haunts humanist and rationalist thought, Stirner points to a new kind of ideological domination. Humanism creates a world of abstractions to which the individual subordinates himself, to which he seeks to conform, thus alienating himself and destroying his uniqueness. The idea of human essence – the idea that within us there is a stable, universal set of properties that we all share – is an illusion that we have taken as reality, and which serves as a moral standard determining our perception of ourselves. So, this double apparition of God-Man haunts our consciousness, founding a spectral world which derives its authority from human essence and traps us within its rigid paradigms. ‘Man,’ declares Stirner, ‘your head is haunted... You imagine great things, and depict to yourself a whole world of gods that has an existence for you, a spirit-realm to which you suppose yourself to be called, an ideal that beckons to you.’⁸ These apparitions or ‘spooks’ are what Stirner calls fixed ideas – abstractions like essence, rational truth, morality – which have been raised by the discourse of humanism to the absolute level of the sacred, and which come to govern our thought. We are, as Stirner puts it, possessed by these fixed ideas, which have invaded and colonized our conscience. The modern passion for rationality and morality is just as fanatical as the religious passion they supplanted – if not more so.

However, Stirner’s point is that these idealizations, which seem to have such a hold over us, are not external material entities, but simply illusions of our own making; they are merely ‘spooks’, ‘wheels in the

head'. The only power they have over us is the power we give them. We have conjured them into existence through an abdication of our own self-will. What Stirner describes here, then, is a condition of self-subjection, whereby the individual, through an internalization of fixed ideas and moral absolutes, renounces his or her own autonomy or self-ownership to the divine authority of humanism. Abstract ideals and ethereal spectres come to take the place of the individual's will, and create a set of moral and rational criteria by which we judge and condemn ourselves, thus inducing a split between our 'essential' and 'un-essential' selves. In unveiling not so much the real behind the illusion, but the illusion behind the real – or rather, the way that our real subjection to humanist discourses and their political forms is really only a self-subjection to fictions and ghosts of our own making – Stirner's ethical project becomes one of re-empowering the individual or, rather, showing how the individual might re-empower himself. However, before discussing these ethical strategies of resistance to humanism, we must first explore the political paradigms that arise with humanism, paradigms which rely on the individual's self-subjection.

Disciplinary liberalism

The political counterpart to humanism's domination over our consciousness is liberalism – a supposedly secular and rational form of politics which takes as its emblem this ideological figure of man, with his essential needs, interests and aspirations. However, by 'liberalism' Stirner does not mean simply a political philosophy based around the idea of individual rights and freedoms. Rather, liberalism should be understood as a certain rationality of government; a technology of normalization which relies, in large part, on the individual's self-subjection. Indeed, we could say that liberalism governs through forms of individualization in which the subject conforms to disciplinary norms in the name of 'freedom' and 'humanity'. In Stirner's analysis, liberal political technology can take a number of forms – political, social and humane – each succeeding the other in a dialectical process of human emancipation, and yet each coinciding with a further subordination of the individual ego to the humanist machine.

Political liberalism, according to Stirner, emerges with the development of the modern secular state. However, Stirner perceives behind the edifice of the liberal bourgeois state a hidden religiosity, a theological politics that enshrines an idealized absolutism in secular, rational clothing.⁹ Stirner unmasks the domination behind the formal

institutional veneer of rights, freedom and neutrality. The notion of formal equality of political rights, for instance, does not recognize individual difference. There is nothing wrong with equality as such; it is just that in its embodiment in the liberal state, the individual is reduced to a fictional commonality which takes an institutionalized form. The 'equality of rights' means only that 'the state has no regard for my person, that to it I, like every other, am only a man...'¹⁰ In other words, what Stirner objects to is the way that the state, through the doctrine of equality of rights, reduces all individual difference to a general, anonymous political subjectivity in which individuality is swallowed up; rights are granted to man – to this abstract spectre – rather than to the individual. Stirner shows us the ultimate meaninglessness of the idea of rights, which, like freedom, are in reality based on power and can be easily violated or removed by governments – something which seems to be happening on an ever-wider scale today as liberal states transform themselves seamlessly into post-liberal security regimes, and as rights are all too easily removed or curtailed.

Moreover, rather than giving the individual autonomy from the state, as conventional accounts of liberalism claim, it actually *binds* the individual to the state through the idea of citizenship. In other words, political liberalism may be seen as a logic which regulates the individual's relationship with the state, cutting out the complex intricacies of hitherto existing social relationships and allowing a more direct and absolute connection with the state. While this ostensibly frees the individual from certain forms of arbitrary rule, it also removes the obstacles and plural arrangements that hitherto stood between political power and the individual, thus shutting down autonomous spaces upon which the state did not intrude. Therefore, just as Marx contended that religious liberty meant only that religion was free to further alienate the individual in civil society, so Stirner claims that political liberty means only that the state is free to further dominate the individual:

'Political liberty', what are we to understand by that? Perhaps the individual's independence from the state and its laws? No; on the contrary, the individuals *subjection* in the state and to the state's laws. But why liberty? Because one is no longer separated from the state by intermediaries, but stands in direct and immediate relation to it; because one is a – citizen...¹¹

This question of citizenship brings us to the further problem. For Stirner, political liberalism constitutes a certain form of subjectivity – that

of the bourgeois citizen – which the individual is required to conform to. Citizenship is a mode of subjectivity based on obedience and devotion to the modern state. In order for the individual to attain the rights and privileges of citizenship, he must conform to certain codes of morality and behaviour. Behind the visage of political liberalism, then, there is a whole series of normalizing strategies and disciplinary techniques designed to subjectify the individual as ‘citizen’. The existence of an excluded class of vagrants, paupers and vagabonds with no place in society is the dangerous, unruly excess produced by this form of liberal subjectification.¹²

The second articulation of liberalism – ‘social liberalism’, or as we might understand it, socialism – produces another kind of normalization, but one which is nevertheless still part of the logic of liberal domination. Whereas in the discourse of political liberalism equality was restricted to the formal level of political and legal rights, socialists demand that the principle of equality be extended to the social and economic domain. Property is to be owned collectively and distributed equally. Where the individual once worked for himself, he must now work for the benefit of the whole of society. It is only through a sacrifice of the individual ego to society, according to social liberals, that humanity can liberate itself and develop fully.

However, behind this discourse of social emancipation and equality lies a resentment of difference and a further denial of individual autonomy. What social liberals find intolerable, according to Stirner, is individual egoism: ‘We want to make egoists impossible!... all of us must have nothing, that “all may have”.’¹³ What little space for autonomy there was left under political liberalism – in the notion of property – is done away with under social liberalism in the name of social equality and commonality. ‘Society’, this ideological abstraction, thus becomes the new locus of domination, subordinating the individual, who is encouraged to see himself as an intrinsic part of this commonality. Once again, the individual is alienated by an abstract generality. Like the liberal state, the idea of society is seen as sacred and universal, demanding of the individual the same unquestioned obedience. Just as the individual under political liberalism is sacrificed on the altar of the state, so under social liberalism he is sacrificed on the altar of society.

However, the inexorable dialectic of liberalism continues – and now even the idea of society is said to not be universal enough. Because social liberalism was based on labour, it is seen as still caught within the paradigm of materialism and, therefore, egoism. The labourer in socialist society is still working for himself, even though his labour is regulated

by the social whole. Humanity must instead strive for a more perfect, ideal and universal goal. Here, according to Stirner, the third and final stage of liberalism emerges – ‘humane liberalism’, in which humanity is finally reconciled with itself. Where the previous two stages of liberalism still maintained a distance between humanity and its goal through a devotion to an external idea – the state and society – humane liberalism claims to finally unite us with our ultimate goal: humanity itself. In other words, the *internal* ideal of man and the essence of humanity are what people should strive for. To this end, every particularity and difference must be overcome for the greater glory of humanity. Individual difference is simply transcended through the desire to identify the essence of man and humanity within everyone: ‘Cast from you everything peculiar, criticize it away. Be not a Jew, not a Christian, but be a human being, nothing but a human being. Assert your humanity against every restrictive specification.’¹⁴

However, this final stage in man’s emancipation is also the final and complete abolition of the individual ego. For Stirner, as we have seen, there is nothing essential about humanity or mankind – they are ideological apparitions that tie the individual to external generalities. There is no essence of humanity residing in each individual which he or she must realize fully, as the discourse of humanism would have it. Rather, human essence is simply a spectral alienation of the individual ego. Therefore, Stirner sees the proclaimed liberation of humanity as the culmination of the progressive subordination and alienation of the individual. In other words, it is through the humanist drive to overcome alienation that the alienation of the concrete individual is finally accomplished. Even the last refuge of autonomy – the individual’s own thoughts and opinions – has been abolished; ‘egoistic’ and particular perspectives have now been taken over completely by *general human opinion*. All traces of difference and particularity have been transcended, and anything that would allow some form of separateness, singularity or uniqueness recedes into a universal humanity. Thus, we see in humane liberalism the complete domination of the general over the particular.

Governing through the subject

The rationality of liberalism works, as we see from Stirner’s account, through the self-subjection of the individual to prevailing moral and rational codes. If we are oppressed by fictions such as ‘humanity’ or ‘society’, this means that we allow this oppression to take place. We

give these spectres free rein over us; we believe in them, and attribute to them a reality and materiality which they do not have. What distinguishes liberalism as rationality of government from previous forms of power, is the transition from top-down coercion to a more subtle form of control, in which the subject constitutes himself around certain established norms of identity in the name of 'humanity', 'equality', 'freedom' or 'society'. This is why there is little need for overt oppression. Indeed, Stirner makes the important point that the power of the state itself is, in a sense, imaginary, and that in reality it rests on our power:

The state is not thinkable without lordship [*Herrschaft*] and servitude [*Knechtschaft*] (subjection)... He who, to hold his own, must count on the absence of will in others is a thing made by these others, as a master is a thing made by the servant. If submissiveness ceased, it would be all over with lordship.¹⁵

The power of the state is dependent on the abdication of the individual's free will and self-mastery. We *allow* the state to dominate us. Therefore, all that needs to happen for the state to be overthrown is the reclaiming or reassertion of this will by individuals: 'The *own will* of me is the state's destroyer.'¹⁶ What must be confronted, then, according to Stirner, is not so much the state itself but self-subjection or voluntary servitude – the condition of submissiveness which makes the state possible. Despite Marx and Engels' infamous attack on 'Saint Max' in *The German Ideology*, where they accuse him of idealism and of ignoring the reality of the state and the materiality of the economic relations which give rise to it, what Stirner reveals to us is the spectral, ideological dimension that sustains 'real' material relations and institutions. To say that the state is an idea – or better, the embodiment of a misdirected desire – is not to deny its reality, but to highlight the subjective attachment that we have to state power. And so the state is an idea that must be dislodged from our minds first, before it can be dislodged in the real – or rather, these are two sides of the same process.

Stirner's diagnosis of liberalism and the state as being the political expression of a dominant humanism in many ways anticipates Michel Foucault's explorations into modern regimes of subjectifying and disciplinary power. As is well known, Foucault maintains that liberal forms of power and government cannot be adequately grasped by the traditional concepts of sovereignty, law and contract, but have to be understood as diffuse and decentralized relations of power that are coextensive with

social life. Foucault also questions the notion of the sovereign state as a unified, all-powerful institution, suggesting – in a manner similar to Stirner – that it may be no more than a ‘mythicized abstraction’.¹⁷ It is more productive, according to Foucault, to see political power being articulated through multiple discourses, practices, techniques, institutional mechanisms and rationalities which permeate society and produce certain forms of normalization and subjectification. Governing should be understood as a practice which weaves itself into the fabric of social life, and which functions through an intensive interaction – not simply one-sided and repressive, but also, indeed primarily, productive and reciprocal – with those who are governed. We think here of diverse governing practices such as disciplining, educating, healing, caring, coordinating economic life, punishing and securitizing. What is important here is that the governing operates through strategies of subjectification; that is to say, it constructs certain normalized subjectivities and behaviours which act as discursive thresholds, tying the subject to governmental power. For instance, in his explorations of liberalism, Foucault shows how liberal governmentality functions through a construction of the individual subject as ‘free’: the liberal subject is seen to be self-governing and as having a certain freedom of choice – for instance, a freedom in consumption, market transactions or choice of lifestyle – and it is through the exercise of this freedom that the subject is imagined to express his essential interests or discover his true self. And yet, it is precisely through this freedom that the individual submits to certain norms of behaviour, thus inscribing himself further within networks of power and the strategies and calculations of government: ‘...this freedom, both ideology and technique of government, should in fact be understood within the mutations and transformations of technologies of power’.¹⁸

Moreover, in a further parallel with Stirner, Foucault traces the origins of modern modes of government to religious practices and modes of thought – specifically, to early and medieval Christian ideas of the pastorate, which involved a relationship of governing the conduct of people in the form of a discourse of caring for the soul, just as the shepherd cares for his flock.¹⁹ Do we not find, as Stirner would claim, the same kind of pernicious idea of ‘care’ in the discourse of humanism,²⁰ in which the Christian soul has been replaced by human essence – which is nevertheless still regarded as a kind of sacred property which must be tended and cared for, and in whose name our conduct is guided and regulated? In this sense, freedom is always associated with a further subjection precisely because it is limited by this idea of a human

essence which, according to the logic of 'humane liberalism', must be not only exalted but also liberated. The discourse of humanism exhorts us to 'Assert your *humanity* against every restrictive specification; make yourself, by means of it, a human being, nothing but a human being, and free from those limits; make yourself a "free man", that is recognize your humanity as your all-determining *essence*.'²¹ As is revealed in both Stirner's and Foucault's accounts, humanism and liberalism are modes of government which rely upon the subjectification of individuals as both human and free – or at least whose inner humanity must be liberated and brought to light – and yet whose freedom is inevitably bound up with a more subtle and imperceptible form of domination. Once again, this is a form of domination which relies in large part on self-subjection or voluntary servitude: we participate in this domination, imagining our freedom to lie in voluntarily conforming to the truths of subjectivity and the norms of conduct that have been laid down for us.

From freedom to ownness

So if, as Foucault puts it, critical thought is guided by the question of 'how not to be governed', and if the aim of critical practices is the encouragement of 'voluntary *inservitude*',²² then we must devise new ways of thinking and practicing freedom. It is clear that the language of freedom, as prescribed within the discourses of liberalism and humanism, has reached a dead-end and is no longer politically useful unless it undergoes radical modification. Here Stirner identifies a number of problems with the existing idea of freedom. Freedom is one of the universal abstractions or spooks, which, while it is promulgated widely by liberalism and humanism, means little to the concrete individual – indeed, we have seen that 'being free' at the same time marks a deeper domination. Furthermore, freedom is usually limited to a negative model, at least within liberal discourse, and this means that freedom is still defined and limited by the idea of what one is supposedly 'free from'. Even though, as we shall see, Stirner wants to propose a new understanding of freedom that is perhaps closer to 'positive' freedom – in the sense of freedom as a capacity to do something – he would be equally wary of any attempt to construct a particular rational and moral ideal of freedom whose standard the individual would be expected – forced, even – to live up to and reflect in one's thought and behaviour. Both conceptions of freedom, negative and positive, have been tarnished with humanist idealism and its moral and rational injunctions. So, the

problem with freedom is that its proclaimed universality disguises a particular position of power – it is always someone's idea of freedom that is imposed coercively upon others: 'The craving for a *particular* freedom always includes the purpose of a new *domination*...' ²³

So, for Stirner, to pose the question of freedom as a universal aspiration is always to pose the question of which particular order of power imposes this freedom, thereby inevitably limiting and constraining its radical possibilities. Freedom, therefore, must be left to the individual to determine for himself. It should be seen as an ongoing project of individual autonomy rather than a general political and social goal: freedom as a singular practice, unique to the individual, rather than a universally proclaimed ideal and aspiration. Freedom, in other words, must be divested of its abstractions and brought down to the level of the individual. This is why Stirner prefers the term 'ownness' to 'freedom', ownness implying self-ownership or self-mastery – in other words, a kind of autonomy – which means *more* than freedom because it is something that gives one the *freedom to be free*, the freedom to define one's own singular path of freedom: 'Ownness *created* a new *freedom*.' ²⁴ Rather than conforming to a universal ideal, something which is so often accompanied by the most terrible forms of coercion, ownness is project of open-ended creation and invention, in which new forms of freedom can be experimented with. As Stirner says:

My *own* I am at all times and under all circumstances, if I know how to have myself and do not throw myself away on others. To be free is something that I cannot truly *will*, because I cannot make it, cannot create it... ²⁵

This reconfiguration of freedom as ownness – as a potentiality and a power of self-determination that is always present in the individual, even in the most oppressive of circumstances – can be seen as a way of countering the problem of voluntary servitude that is central to Stirner's concerns. Ownness is a way of restoring to the individual his capacity for freedom; of reminding the individual that he is free and that he always was free – or at least much freer than he thought – and, moreover, that the seemingly overwhelming power wielded over him by political institutions and humanist ideals was illusory, simply an abstraction of the power that he voluntarily surrendered. If freedom is largely disempowering and imaginary, ownness is a way of making freedom concrete and real, and, moreover, of revealing to the individual what he had long forgotten – his own power.

Ownness, therefore, has to be understood in relation to power. Whereas freedom claims to situate itself in opposition to power – and yet, as we know it is always a form of disguised power – ownness, in contrast, *affirms* its intimate connection to power. Indeed, for freedom to have any meaning, it must assert the capacity and will to power of the individual: 'I am free from what I am rid of, owner of what I have in my *power* or what I *control*.'²⁶ Foucault also highlighted the inextricable connection between power and freedom, seeing freedom as a complex 'game' that one plays with power and within a field of possibilities structured by power. Rather than being ontologically opposed, power and freedom exist in a relationship of mutual incitement, one presupposing the other and providing conditions for the other's realization, while at the same time limiting one another. As Foucault said, 'power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free'.²⁷ However, this does not mean that freedom is always rigidly limited by power or always serves as a conduit for domination; if we accept the idea of power and freedom as being relational – as both Stirner and Foucault do, in their own ways – and if we recognize the inherent instability of this relationship, this means that while we will never be entirely free from power – what would this be but another form of power? – we can nevertheless radically modify the field of possibilities structured by power, limiting, suspending, reversing and transforming our relationship to power.

This reconfiguration of freedom is given greater clarity if we think about it in terms of a project of autonomy or self-mastery. The ethical and political question that Stirner engages with is how the individual can resist, and counter, humanism's subjectifying strategies; how he can work himself out of this subjective bond to power, which both designates him as free, or as needing to be liberated, while at the same time denying him autonomy. Ownness should therefore be understood as the freedom to invent for oneself new modes of subjectivity, new behaviours and ways of life which evade, undermine and destabilize the subjective positions established by power. So freedom, in this sense, is not a final state of emancipation that one reaches, but rather an ongoing practice, or series of practices, in which the individual constantly experiments with different forms of existence, different ways of relating to oneself.

Of course, it was precisely this sort of ethical project that Foucault became interested in, and his writings on forms of 'care of the self' in ancient Greek and Roman and early Christian societies could be seen as an exploration of what he called 'counter-conducts' and practices of

freedom in which, in the absence of, or in opposition to, institutional and pastoral power, the individual sought new ways of relating to himself and others. What is central here, for Foucault – and where we find once again an important parallel with Stirner – is the emergence of a different relation to truth. In contrast to the modern humanist conception, in which the essential truth of one's identity must be revealed, confessed, brought to light – an injunction that mobilizes all sorts of institutional, disciplinary and governing practices, and medicalizing discourses – what Foucault uncovers in the societies of antiquity is a series of 'techniques of the self' – ethical, ascetic and spiritual – in which one interrogated oneself, one's desires, appetites, fears and dreams, not with the intention of producing an essential, stable truth about oneself, but rather with the aim of increasing one's power over oneself through a form of self care. In other words, while the modern humanist regime of truth, which derives from the confessional apparatuses of Christianity, seeks to reveal the essential truth and knowledge of the subject in order to allow him to be more effectively governed, the early 'techniques of the self', according to Foucault, were used by the individuals who practiced them in order to enable them to more effectively *govern themselves*. Whereas the former model has as its effect the extension of power over the individual, the latter strategy has as its effect – or at least this was its intention – an increase in the power the individual has over himself: a strategy, in other words, of self-government or autonomy. As Foucault says, '...being free means not being a slave to oneself and one's appetites, which means that with respect to oneself one establishes a certain relationship of domination, of mastery...'²⁸

Stirner sees ownness in similar terms: it is the ability to exercise over oneself a certain power or self-discipline – and this is not only in order to avoid being dominated by others, but also to avoid the more intricate problem of being enslaved to one's own desires and passions. Here, for Stirner, egoism or self-ownership is to be distinguished from what he calls 'possessedness', where a particular passion or appetite – a desire for power, for instance – comes to consume one's entire person, becoming another kind of fixed idea. This is a condition which Stirner considers just as bad as moralistic self-abnegation and self-sacrifice; they both indicate a kind of disempowerment and self-enslavement. In contradistinction to this, for Stirner, 'I am my own only when I am master of myself, instead of being mastered by either sensuality or by anything else (God, man, authority, law, state, church)'.²⁹

Moreover, this idea of freedom as self-mastery and self-empowerment has nothing to do with the freedom of the individual to exercise power

over others. On the contrary, it entails a certain ethical relation of *non-domination* towards others, because what it seeks to ward off is the excessive desire for power within the individual – a desire which is not only dangerous to others, but also is dangerous to oneself, because it means that one becomes enslaved to one's own appetites, just as in ancient Greek thought being a tyrant was equated with a certain powerlessness and lack of self-control. Ownness or self-mastery could not be further from some sort of realist strategy of power politics; rather, it has to be seen in terms of an ethos of non-domination.

Contrary to many critical commentaries, which claim that Stirner's philosophy of egoism and ownness is nihilistic,³⁰ what we find here is a kind of ethics. Stirner wants us to interrogate our relation to ourselves and to others, and to find ways of dislodging, undoing, working ourselves free from our own attachment to power – both the power one is submitted to and the power one seeks to submit others to, which, after all, are one and the same thing.

The 'creative nothing'

Stirner's project of ownness as a release from voluntary servitude suggests a new way of thinking about the subject. The subject can no longer be founded on some sort of human essence or stable set of properties, as these are precisely the idealizations and abstractions that bind us to the subjectifying power of humanism. The only way to escape this subjectifying power is to abandon essences and fixed identities altogether, and to assert a notion of the subject as radically *unfounded* – in other words, without a stable, fixed identity. The question posed by Stirner's rejection of humanism is what subjectivity can be beyond existing forms of subjectification, and the answer for Stirner is the 'ego'. However, the ego should not be thought of as a kind of determining core or fixed identity; rather, the ego is a sort of radical absence, an ontological field of possibilities and potentialities which is always in flux, always becoming. That is why Stirner refers to the ego as a 'creative nothingness' – it is a void from which emerges a continual process of self-creation: 'I do not presuppose myself, because I am at every moment just positing or creating myself, and am I only by being not presupposed but posited, and, again, posited only in the moment when I posit myself'.³¹ In other words, it is meaningless to talk about the self as a stable foundation or basis from which all identifications emerge, because the self is always being reconstituted through every identification. There is no secret to our beings that remains to be discovered, and the 'truth' of the self lies

not in its depths but in the constant play and movement of its surfaces. It is therefore ridiculous to see Stirner's philosophy as a self-interested liberal individualism, or indeed as promoting any sort of model of agency, whether amoral, acquisitive or utility-maximizing; *any* sort of pre-established identity or model of agency is radically destabilized and 'consumed' in the open-ended 'nothingness' of the ego.

So we should see in Stirner's notion of the subject – which seems to anticipate postmodern or post-structuralist conceptions of subjectivity³² – a way of freeing us from ourselves, from a fixed essence to which we have chained our identities, an essence that is fabricated by humanist ideology. Thus, it opens up to the subject a certain radical freedom, a freedom from subjectification, or at least a freedom to experiment with new modes of subjectification.³³ To unmoor the self from the 'self', to *dis*-identify the subject, to show that the way we have hitherto lived and perceived ourselves is not the only existence available to us, is central to Stirner's ethics of voluntary, wilful inservitude.

Post-foundational ethics and politics

Stirner's philosophical project might be understood, then, as one of clearing the ontological ground of all essential foundations. 'I set my affair on nothing', he declares. Universal categories of truth and morality, the idea of society, human essence and the stable identities that are based on this – all these assorted 'spooks' and abstractions are swept away; everything is reclaimed by the individual, who, cleared of the dust in his eyes and phantoms in his mind, realizes that these were simply obfuscations of his own making, that the world is radically contingent and can be made and remade at will. There is a radical and almost excessive voluntarism here, but, for Stirner, the rediscovery of the will and the release from voluntary servitude is a moment of joyous exuberance, a revelling in one's new found sense of power. So this demolition job that Stirner performs on the foundations of humanism, where he seems to remove the ground from under our feet, is a way of revealing to us our radical freedom. Rather than view this as nihilism, I think we should see this in terms of a post-foundational ethics: ethics is something to be created by us, rather than abstracted into absolute moral codes beyond our grasp.

But what forms of politics are conceivable here? How might Stirner's post-foundational thought and ethics be understood politically? Stirner does not offer any sort of political program; he has no desire to be prescriptive, of course, wanting to leave political life to individuals to

freely determine for themselves. He puts forward, tentatively, certain suggestions of egoistic forms of association – the ‘union of egoists’, for instance, which is a voluntary association formed without any sort of binding obligation, and which is an alternative to the fixed ideas of ‘society’ and ‘community’, with their moral constraints and injunctions, or to the state with its numerous coercions.³⁴ The union of egoists as a political form is something that is consciously *willed* and *constructed* – made and actively affirmed by individuals for their own purposes – rather than an entity founded on some sort of imagined essential commonality or generality over which one has no power. The union should not be taken as a precise model of politics to be followed, but rather as something revealing the openness, contingency and multiplicity of the political as such. Stirner wants to clear the political field of all fixed and universalizing identities – such as society and the state – and to affirm politics as a site of continual invention and creativity, from which multiple forms of action and association can emerge. However, this understanding of politics in terms of multiplicity, rather than uniformity, should not be seen as giving rise to any sort of ‘identity politics’. On the contrary, the implications of Stirner’s critique of essences is a post-identity and post-representational form of politics in which fixed identities, with their established differences in position and interests, are radically transcended. Indeed, what we find in Stirner, if we are to consider his philosophy of egoism in political terms – and I think we should – is a problematization of the binary of individualism and collectivism: the union, while it allows and encourages collective action, at the same time seeks to preserve and even enhance the autonomy and singularity of its participants. The relationship between participants is one of *affinity* rather than merely belonging.³⁵ So the union is a political figure that allows us to think individual difference and collective association together, as a kind of multiple body or as multiple singularities. Moreover, it reminds us that the release from voluntary servitude cannot be a solely individual enterprise, but also has to be thought of and practiced associatively, in terms of one’s relationship to others.

One detects, in this idea of voluntary association, a kind of anarchism. Indeed, Stirner’s rejection of the state and all forms of political authority certainly bears much resemblance to anarchism, which embodies an implacable hostility to hierarchy, centralization and authority. However, by no means can we simplistically assimilate Stirner within the anarchist tradition: his critique of Enlightenment humanism and rationalism, and his rejection of human essence, unsettles the very

epistemological and ontological foundations upon which the classical anarchists like Kropotkin, Bakunin and Proudhon based their attack on political authority.³⁶ So if we are to derive from Stirner some kind of anarchist politics and ethics, it must surely be an anarchism of a different kind – a post-foundational anarchism or, what I have termed elsewhere, *postanarchism*.³⁷

Indeed, one of the major contributions that Stirner makes to a revitalization of anarchist thought – something that is very much needed today in the face of a certain exhaustion of the radical political horizon – is to point out the futility of founding political action on metaphysical ideas of human nature, science, historical laws and assumptions about a shared rationality and morality. Instead, we need to think about an anarchism without foundations, or without foundations that are absolute and fixed – an anarchism without an *arché* as a guiding and determining ontological principle. Indeed, we might have to rethink anarchism through a notion of *an-archy*, as the instability or, as Reiner Schürmann puts it, the ‘withering away’ of founding principles and ontological truths. Here Schürmann talks about an ‘anarchy’ principle, which he sees as a weakening of determining rational principles for action: “‘anarchy’... always designates the withering away of such a rule, the relaxing of its hold’.”³⁸ This operation is made possible, indeed inevitable, Schürmann argues, by Heidegger’s idea of the closure of metaphysics, the dissolution of the epochal rules that guide actions in different historical periods. However, we could just as easily say that this anarchic displacement of ontological foundations was first made possible by Stirner. Stirner’s philosophy might be seen, in other words, as an *ontological* anarchism.³⁹

The other major contribution of Stirner’s thought to anarchism, and indeed to radical politics generally today, is to bring to light what was the blind spot of revolutionary discourses based on the idea of universal emancipation – this problem of voluntary servitude. In supposing an essential opposition between man and authority, society and the state, classical anarchism – as well as other forms of revolutionary socialism – found it difficult to conceive of the ways in which we might be subjectively attached and bound to the power that dominates us; that power might even dominate us *through* our humanity, through what we imagine is our true essence. The other side to revolutionary politics are the myriad micro-political attachments to power that we reaffirm and intensify in our daily lives and our relations to others. That is why micro-political and ethical strategies, such as the ones to be found in Stirner, are so important in prompting us to reflect on our subjective

attachment to power, our capacities for freedom and our relationship to ourselves and others. Without a transformation in our relationship to ourselves and to others – one that counters the authoritarianism in our heads and hearts – the state will simply be reinvented in a different form after the revolution. We need to think of a micro-political anarchism that starts at the level of the subject; an ethical discipline of indiscipline, a politics of wilful indocility.

It is therefore important to conceive of revolution in new ways, and to consider supplementing – or even replacing – it with a different form of politics that takes account of the ways that we are complicit in our own subjection, and which strives to loosen these complex and molecular bonds, attachments, idealizations, fantasies, dependencies and desires. In thinking of politics in this way, as a micro-politics against voluntary servitude, Stirner makes an important distinction between revolution and insurrection:

Revolution and insurrection must not be looked upon as synonymous. The former consists in an overturning of conditions, of the established condition or *status*, the state or society, and is accordingly a *political* or *social* act; the latter has indeed for its unavoidable consequence a transformation of circumstances, yet does not start from it but from men's discontent with themselves, is not an armed rising but a rising of individuals, a getting up without regard to the *arrangements* that spring from it. The Revolution aimed at new arrangements; insurrection leads us no longer to *let* ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves, and sets no glittering hopes on 'institutions'. It is not a fight against the established, since, if it prospers, the established collapses of itself; it is only a working forth of me out of the established.⁴⁰

So, radical political action must be aimed not only at overturning established institutions like the state, but also at attacking the much more problematic relation through which the subject is captivated by and dependent upon power. The insurrection is a process of separation and detachment, not from the real world, but from the world of illusions that hides the reality of one's own power. It is a rebellion against the metaphysical abstractions, fixed ideas and established identities which have held us in such thralldom, and have built for us a prison house out of our own consciousness. Stirner's work may be seen, then, as an ethical insurrection, as the first incendiary bomb, the first Molotov cocktail hurled against our condition of voluntary servitude.

Notes

1. E. De La Boétie (1988) *La Servitude Volontaire* [Slaves by Choice] (Egham: Runnymede Books).
2. W. Reich (1980) *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux).
3. P. Clastres (1994) *Archaeology of Violence*, trans., Jeanine Herman, (New York: Semiotext(e)).
4. Deleuze and Guattari: 'The State is assuredly not the locus of liberty, nor the agent of forced servitude or capture. Should we then speak of "voluntary servitude"?' See (2005) *A Thousand Plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, (University of Minnesota Press), p. 460.
5. M. Stirner (1995) *The Ego and Its Own*, ed. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 34.
6. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 156.
7. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 158.
8. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 43.
9. As Carl Schmitt declared, in words that seem to echo Stirner's politico-theological diagnosis of modern liberal politics, 'All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development - in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent god became the omnipotent lawgiver - but also because of their systematic structure...' See (2005) *Political Theory, Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 36.
10. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 93.
11. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 96.
12. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 105.
13. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 105.
14. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 114.
15. Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 174–175.
16. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 175.
17. M. Foucault (2007) *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, ed. Michel Senellart; trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 109.
18. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 48.
19. See Foucault's extensive discussions on the history of the Christian pastorate throughout *Security, Territory, Population*.
20. Here Stirner, in a strikingly similar manner to Foucault, associates the modern humanist idea of healing (both physical and mental) with the older, more 'irrational' forms of punishment that they supposedly replaced: the wayward, sick, abnormal and insane are now said to sin against their own humanity, their own 'health', just as the criminal is said to sin against the law and morality, and as the unbeliever or heretic was said to sin against religion and the church: '*Curative means or healing is only the reverse side of punishment, the theory of cure runs parallel with the theory of punishment; if the latter sees in action a sin against right, the former takes it for a sin of the man against himself, as a decadence from his health.*' *The Ego*, p. 213.
21. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 114.

22. See M. Foucault (1996) 'What is Critique?' in *What is Enlightenment: Eighteenth Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 386 [Emphasis added].
23. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 145.
24. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 147.
25. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 143.
26. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 143.
27. See M. Foucault (2002) 'The Subject and Power' in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, Volume 3*, ed. J. Faubion; trans. R. Hurley (London: Penguin) p. 342.
28. M. Foucault (2002) 'The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom' in *Ethics: subjectivity and truth, Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, Volume 1*, ed. P. Rabinow; trans. R. Hurley (London: Penguin), pp. 286–287.
29. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 153.
30. An example of this would be R. W. K. Paterson's (1971) *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner*, (Oxford University Press).
31. Stirner, *The Ego*, p. 135.
32. The destabilization of pre-existing conceptions of subjectivity that derive from humanism can be found throughout Deleuze and Guattari's collaborative works *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, where the subject is seen as a haphazard assemblage of parts, flows, becomings, intensities and linguistic statements.
33. As Foucault puts it, in a similar vein, 'Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover who we are, but to refuse who we are...' 'The Subject and Power', p. 336.
34. See Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 275–277.
35. This idea of 'affinity' is used to characterize recent forms of collective association and decentralized 'network' politics emerging with global anti-capitalism. Indeed, Simon Tormey sees Stirner as, in a sense, prefiguring contemporary forms of activist politics. See (2007) 'Consumption, Resistance and Everyday Life: Ruptures and Continuities', *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 30: 263–280.
36. I have discussed the consequences of Stirner's thought for classical anarchism extensively in (2001) *From Bakunin to Lacan: anti-authoritarianism and the dislocation of power*, (Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books).
37. See S. Newman (2010) *The Politics of Postanarchism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).
38. R. Schürmann (1987) *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, trans. Christine-Marie Gros, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), p. 6.
39. This term is owed in part to Hakim Bey's notion of 'ontological anarchy'. See (2004) *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 2nd edn). See also (1994) *Immediatism: Essays by Hakim Bey* (AK Press).
40. Stirner, *The Ego*, pp. 279–280.

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