

# **Max Stirner and the Philosophy of the Individual**

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# I. THE PARADOX IN STIRNER'S MESSAGE

It is nowadays rather the fashion, even among professional philosophers, to consider philosophy a sort of game or diversion rather than a serious and weighty affair. Compare with this attitude the remark of William James, that nothing is so important for the landlady of a lodging house to know about her tenants as their philosophy, If they believe that honesty is not the best policy, the fact that they are sober and evidently hard-working means nothing.

The philosophy of an ordinary individual is of course something vastly different from the complex system, founded more or less upon an original scheme of logic, which the professional philosopher works out. The philosopher may come through many winding paths to the conclusion that it is the duty of the individual to be honest, or that it is his duty to be faithful only to himself, or that, if he is one of a group of Higher Spirits, he may be dishonest. The philosopher does not always act according to his own system of ethics.

The same man, then, may have two philosophies; one the system that he gives to the world; the other the overtones about the body of impulses that regulate his own actions. Let us consider, for a moment, the amateur philosopher. To that class most of us belong. Many men, as we know, proclaim, in and out of season, that they are successful because they have been honest and have obeyed the Ten Commandments. Some of these same men, as we also know, break these same commandments quite as often as it serves their purpose to do so. Are these men conscious hypocrites? In some cases, yes. Tartuffery is usually self-deception, however. Casuistry is no invention of the Jesuits. It is as old as man.

Perhaps the first simian that spoke used his words for the purpose of making love. I am of the opinion, however, that we are to consider the words but animal grunts and the speaker but our anthropoid ancestor until the first man arose and proved he was a man by making an excuse for himself.

To this very human characteristic of defending past actions I wish to bring my own little sacrifice. When I was ten years old or so, my teacher asked the class, "What makes man different from the lower animals?" After vigorously waving my hand in the air, I was permitted to state my opinion that man differs from the lower animals in being able to speak.

"But a parrot can speak," said the teacher. While I looked thoroughly crestfallen, some other child gave the supposedly correct answer, that man is he who thinks.

Yet I still believe that my childhood answer is close to the truth. The parrot does not speak at all, any more than the infant does when it comes to understand that "Da da" is a certain individual, a known composite of sound and sight and touch impressions. In other words, there is no speech without certain mental processes that are connected with the words.

We are safer in saying that the parrot thinks than that the parrot speaks. We can not measure reason, certainly not the reason of the "lower animals." We can not be certain, for instance, that ants are not rational. There is evidence to the contrary. It does not seem, though, that the ant talks.

Man is unique—the only self-excusing animal.

The most selfish man in the world will tell you that he has the interests of his fellow-men at heart. If he refuses an alms to a beggar, it is because the gift would tend to degrade the recipient. If he declines to run an errand for an acquaintance, it is because only the person concerned can take care of it properly, or at any rate, because the selfish man happens to be busy with other matters.

Who confesses himself to be a self-seeker and an egotist? Nobody, it seems, except Max Stirner. Here is the paradox: Max Stirner, who denounced philanthropy, who called himself an egoist, was not nearly so much the egoist as all our politicians and philanthropists are.

## II. JOHANN CASPAR SCHMIDT

The meager facts about Max Stirner's life were painstakingly gathered by John Henry Mackay and published in "Max Stirner. Sein Leben und sein Werk." (Third edition, Berlin, 1914.) This biography was to have been translated into English and published serially in 1908 in Benjamin Tucker's anarchistic magazine, "Liberty." However, the Parker Building (New York) fire of that year broke up Tucker's plans, and the book is still unavailable in English.

Max Stirner's real name was Johann Caspar Schmidt. He was born in 1806 in Bayreuth, the city best known to us in connection with Richard Wagner. He was the only child of a flutemaker, who died half a year after his son's birth. Two years later the widow married a druggist, with whom she finally settled in Kulm. When Johann Caspar was twelve years old, he went back to Bayreuth to school. Just what this proves about his relations with his stepfather we can only guess. At school the boy usually ranked in the first quarter of his class, but he did this only by taking special private lessons. He was no precocious genius.

When young Schmidt was twenty years old, he matriculated at the University of Berlin. His teachers there were almost all distinguished men. Especially to be noted are Schleiermacher and Hegel, under whom, in his first semester, he studied respectively ethics and the philosophy of religion. Theology he studied under Neander, the great church historian, and the classics under such men as Boeckh and Carl Ritter.

After two years at Berlin, Schmidt studied for a semester at Erlangen. In the summer of 1829 he made a tour through Germany. Evidently his mother was able to keep him supplied with the necessary money. He registered at the Koenigsberg University, but actually attended no lectures there. He stayed with his mother at Kulm for a year. Her mental derangement was perhaps showing itself now for the first time.

In 1830 Schmidt—was at Koenigsberg, where he was excused from military service because of physical unfitness. In 1832, when he was 26 years old, he resumed his studies at Berlin. In 1834 he left the University, without attempting to secure the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Then as now the doctorate meant a great deal in Germany.

He applied for a license to teach in the upper classes of gymnasia or preparatory schools. Although his examination showed certain deficiencies, he was given his license, together with instructions to make good these deficiencies. Despite the fact that he was not required to take any later examinations in mathematics, the history of philosophy, and his other weak subjects, we find him conscientiously applying himself to these studies. Nevertheless he does not seem to have found it easy to secure a position.

In 1837 Schmidt's stepfather died, and the young man went to Kulm. His mother, definitely insane, went first to an asylum, then to a private sanitarium.

This same year young Schmidt had married Clara Kunigunde Burtz, the illegitimate granddaughter of his old landlady in Berlin. He had known Clara for about five years. Nine months after the wedding, his wife died, and with her the child about to be born.

We do not know much about this marriage. However, we have one anecdote tending to show that Schmidt was too finicky, too easily disgusted, to enjoy or to make a success of married life. Probably the widower did not deeply lament over his loss.

Before this marriage Schmidt had taught Latin for a year and a half at a technical gymnasium in Berlin, on trial, receiving no pay for this work. It was not until October, 1839, or a year after his wife's death, that he obtained a paid position. Up to now this egoist had been studying and teaching conscientiously without any remuneration.

Schmidt never taught for pay at any public institution. His only paid teaching position (1839–1844) was in a Berlin private school for girls. His classes were in German language and literature.

We can be quite sure that his teaching didn't entirely occupy his mind. He was more interested in the ideas which circulated at the inn kept by Jacob Hippel.

The circle which met there, although not a society or club, was sufficiently unified to possess a name. "Die Freien," the Freemen, it was called. Among the important members were the brothers Bruno and Edgar Bauer. Bruno Bauer was an important leader of the Critics, a group of philosophic liberals. At one time professor of theology at Bonn, he had lost his position because of the novelty of some of his views. He argued, for instance, that Seneca was the founder of Christianity. He has been called the Voltaire of modern Germany. Another member of the group was the anarchistically-inclined Ludwig Buhl, well known as a translator.

The various members of the Freemen did not share any set of tenets. They were all more or less liberal in their views, but the sparks flew in their discussions. They were not always arguing, however. There was plenty of drinking and card-playing. In this crowd, as previously at the university, Johann Caspar Schmidt was commonly called Max Stirner. This name appears to have been given on account of his high forehead. (in German, *Stirn*). So far as we can learn, Schmidt (or Stirner) had no personal enemies and no intimate friends.

As to his character, Mackay tells us that he was a man of aloof and sensitive personality. "Probably he was passionless. Certainly there was no brutality in him." He was without a sense of jealousy, and without much sense of honor. He was temperate in his wants, except that he liked good cigars.

In 1841 appeared the first literary work signed "Stirner," being a criticism of one of Bruno Bauer's books. The next year Stirner wrote some articles for the "Rheinische Zeitung" which show he already possessed a sense of irony. One of his principal essays declared that in education the chief thing was the development of personal individuality. Uniqueness—this was already the chief virtue for "Stirner."

Among the "Freemen," Stirner first met Marie Daehnhardt. She had come to Berlin "to live her own life." Gutzkow was the Ibsen of those days, preaching the emancipation of woman, and causing many girls to leave home. In 1843, when Stirner was 37 years old and Marie 25, they were married. Two and a half years later they were separated. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Marie had inherited a considerable sum of money. Despite what Mackay tells us of his simple tastes, Stirner managed to spend this money. Perhaps this separation was due to the philosopher's inability to make friendships. He could not even become friendly with his wife. When their money was at an end and Stirner appeared incapable of earning a living, Marie, went off to London to shift for herself. Years later, when she was asked about her life with Stirner, she had nothing good to say for him.

Late in 1844 (although the date on the title page is 1845) appeared "Der Einzige und sein Eigen-thum," issued by a reputable Leipzig publisher. The author is stated to be Max Stirner. Shortly

before the book appeared, Schmidt resigned his position as teacher. Clearly, then, he did not lose his job on account of it, as has sometimes been said. However, it is possible that he would have looked for a school position later had he not felt that the book made this impossible. The book sold perhaps a thousand copies. Neither this nor any later literary work brought Stirner in much money.

The censors decided that Stirner's book was too absurd to require suppressing. Perhaps they were right. At any rate, it won Stirner no disciples. The book is altogether too logical. It destroys so much that it makes its own foundations totter.

After the publication of this book, and his later desertion by his wife, we have little to tell except that Stirner was forever struggling against poverty. Before Marie left, the two worked out a plan for supplying Berlin with milk from a central warehouse. They advertised sufficiently among the dairymen, but not among the consumers. Consequently their supply greatly exceeded the demand. After this failure, Stirner does not seem to have nourished any commercial ambitions.

He did literary hack work of various sorts. He wrote for newspapers. He edited compilations. The pay was hardly sufficient to support him even in his bachelor existence.

His book had aroused something of an interest among literary and philosophical people, and there were several criticisms published. Most prominent among the critics was Feuerbach. To these criticisms Stirner replied at some length, but still won nobody over to his views.

In 1853 we find Stirner arrested twice for debt. Also, when he was out of jail he was continually moving from one lodging to another to escape his creditors. At one time he advertised in the newspapers, under the name of Stirner, for a loan.

The next year he raised—some money on his prospects of inheriting property in Kulm from his mother. If his mother had not been insane, he could no doubt have obtained this money more directly. During the last few years of his life, having thus been financially aided, he lived comfortably. How he spent most of his time we do not know, except that he was always willing orally to describe his philosophy. Yet he won no disciples and made no intimate friends. In 1856 (at the age of fifty) he died rather suddenly, of blood-poisoning from a carbuncle on his back.

Was Stirner a paranoiac? This has been asserted, chiefly on the ground of his mother's insanity. There is no evidence of it in his writing. Yet philosophers who climb too logical a Cliff are in danger of falling down a precipice. Isn't that what happened to Nietzsche?

Blessed is the muddlehead. His brains never disturb him.

### III. WHEELS IN THE HEAD

“Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum” is known in Mr. Steven Byington’s English version as “The Ego and His Own.” More accurate would be “The Unique One and His Property” or possibly “The Individual and His Properties.”

That is, Stirner groups the external and the internal possessions of a man together. His land and his money are in a manner extensions of his thrift, courage, acquisitiveness, and so on. Both a man’s arm and his gold-bags he speaks of as “mine.” Whatever a man is given or takes to himself as his own is his property. He owns, then, the love of his wife or sweetheart, the esteem of his business associates, a slight equity in his flapper daughter, a rather myopic pair of eyes, seventeen pretty certificates showing ownership of worthless oil stock, and so on.

Taken in this broad sense, property is all that matters to any individual. Stirner begins and ends his book with a quotation from Goethe, “I have decided to concern myself with nothingness.” However, Stirner is no Buddhist seeking Nirvana. Really he is pretty much the Epicurean.

What he means is this: “Nothing concerns me except my own property. Your religions, good causes, ideals, are nothing to me.” However, he sets up a sort of religion of his own.

“Whom do you think of under the name of egoist?” Stirner asks. His own answer is, “A man, who instead of living according to an ideal and sacrificing his personal advantage to it, sets his own advantage above the ideal.”

The selfish man, though, doesn’t proclaim his own selfishness. He is very likely to preach to others the advantage of being unselfish. The best place for a self-seeker—is in a crowd of altruists.

Let us imagine a group of noble-minded persons inspired with the ideal of the supremacy of yellow, Confucian, foreign-born non-citizens. Pretty soon an insurance-agent joins the movement, swearing to devote his life to it. What does he think of at the meetings? Partly how to exalt yellow Confucianists, and partly how to sell a lot of endowment policies. Along comes a rubber boot manufacturer, and declares that foreign non-citizens will never rule until they parade the streets in boots of his manufacture. In comes a professional organizer, who enlarges the membership and scope of the movement. It is “only fair that he should receive half the dues. If he does not get along well with the officers, he sells out his rights for a lump sum.

The insurance-agent and the boot manufacturer and the organizer in my imaginary movement do not proclaim from the housetops that they are egoists. No, they shout that they are faithful workers for humanity. At the very least, they are in the movement heart and soul for the advancement of yellow, foreign-born Confucianists who are not citizens. These selected people are the salt of the earth, the hope of civilization—especially if they pay their dues promptly, provide themselves with the regulation boots, and patronize fellow—members who have automobiles or insurance to sell.

Most of us take things at their face values. That would in some cases be necessarily so, even if we were all wholly intelligent. We can to some extent investigate the things that immediately concern us, but we must perforce leave the intricacies of politics to the politicians, the genuineness of paintings to the critics, the regulation of lodge-treasuries to the duly—elected High Muck-



amucks. When we wish the universe explained logically, simply, and directly, we turn to our favorite preacher or to our favorite philosopher.

When Stirner starts out by calling himself an egoist, most of us are not willing to wade through many pages to discover at last that his philosophy is an unselfish one. I will freely confess that I myself did not discover that fact when I first took up his book.

Yet the book is not difficult to understand, read patiently and carefully. To be sure, Stirner addressed himself to the people of his own time, and those of his allusions which are most difficult for us to follow have to do with certain pamphlets and propagandas and government regulations of the 1840's. The manner in which certain matters are introduced is to be explained by the fact that a censorship existed. Stirner had no special desire to go to jail for the sake of his opinions.

We do not read Max Stirner primarily now for the light he can shed on the Germany of those troubled times. What he has to say, if valid then, is valid to-day and will be equally so to-morrow. Stirner makes it perfectly clear that republics and democracies, socialistic and communistic governments, repress individuality quite as much as do constitutional monarchies or tyrannies.

Loyalty to a majority is quite as deadly as loyalty to a king. Loyalty to any man, to any idea, to anything but one's own property, is, in Stirner's eyes, ridiculous.

To all who believe in the sacredness of one or more ideas, Stirner cries out, "Man, your head is haunted; you have wheels in your head!" The idealist, he says, is a lunatic. He imagines a good many things which have no existence. He is obsessed with a fixed idea, a delusion He is a monomaniac.

The fact that most human beings are idealists of one sort or another does not turn Stirner away from the conclusions of his plain logic. As it seems to me, Stirner too has an ideal. He too has "wheels in the head," if we are to judge him by his own logic.

There is a story about the madman who insisted that all human beings are crazy. "Only," he added sadly, "there aren't enough straitjackets to go around."

For my own part, I have never met, personally or in a book, any man or woman without an ideal. No, I will set down an exception. However, the poor creature is half-witted—and he probably has an ideal or two tucked away somewhere in his poor simple head. Where is the iconoclast who leaves no image unbroken? Consider how Voltaire set up the good god Reason. Finding no existing god to his taste, he made one of his own.

## IV. THE BASIS OF BENEVOLENCE

Max Stirner's ideal is this: a world in which men, unbound by laws, untrammelled even by any maxims of morality or right, will nevertheless live together like affectionate brothers. That is anarchism carried to its logical conclusion. Tolstoi, rejecting man-made laws, yet would have us observe the ordinances of Jesus of Nazareth, as recorded in the Gospels. Proudhon and other anarchists who reject religious teachings yet bid us heed the promptings of our conscience or the teachings of a rationalistic and utilitarian code of ethics.

Stirner's position may be summarized as follows: we are bound by shackles of religion, by chains of law. Why should we throw off these binding and confining elements, only to tie ourselves, or to ask our neighbor to tie us, with ropes of an ethical system?

Indeed he speaks of the "war of all against all," and if we read hurriedly, we are likely to mistake Stirner for a pre-Nietzschean advocate of the rights of the Superman. However, he clearly says, "I have a sympathy with every fellow being, and their pain is painful, their pleasure pleasing to me."

In other words, Stirner is pretty much the regulation philosophical anarchist. Yet his logic, his rationale, his system of paradoxes, differ so much from those of any other anarchist, that they are well worthy of special study. It is a revelation of philosophical method to read first Proudhon's "What is Property?", then Stirner's comments on certain points Proudhon makes.

Proudhon continually denounces property as theft. Stirner, with a different definition of property, says that "my" property is rightly "mine," while the property of yonder rich man is "a gift from me."

Who was the fool who wanted to set up a dictionary of philosophical terms, so that all philosophers in using a given word would attach to it the same meaning? He would deprive most of our philosophers of an excuse for existence.

This isn't to say that because Stirner wasn't the first philosopher of anarchism, his doctrines are unimportant. "What is Property?" is perhaps a clearer exposition of the anti-government principle than "The Unique One and His Property," but it a far less brilliant exposition. Strangely, though, Proudhon inspired Bakunin and a host of other leaders in the anarchist movement, while Stirner has had practically no influence on the later anarchists. He was too deadly logical. It appears highly probable, by the way, that Nietzsche learned much from Stirner. However, the implications of the two philosophies diverge widely.

From Proudhon to Bakunin to the syndicalists—that is one chain of influence, although the syndicalistic doctrines are far from pure anarchism. Proudhon's doctrines were up in the air. Bakunin, and then the syndicalists (including the I. W. W.) of to-day, in coming down to earth, necessarily changed from the views of the pure theoretician. If anarchism ever should be put into operation (which is not very likely) it would probably be as the result of a bloody revolution, or at least of a campaign of industrial sabotage. This fact, which Bakunin saw, became to his followers more important than the philosophical bases of anarchism.

What would Max Stirner think about bomb-throwing? “I feel a sympathy with every fellow being,” remember that he said. No doubt he would see, too, that much of the anarchistic activity of recent times has been so much effort wasted. The general strike, however, as well as a universal plan of sabotage, we feel he would have approved.

It is difficult to find any concrete suggestions in Stirner for the salvation of humanity from the bonds which hamper it. He was not a practical man. Moreover, he had to watch out for the censorship. To advocate revolution or revolt was a serious crime against the Prussian laws. For that matter, those who advocate revolution to-day are not generally rewarded with Congressional Medals.

Stirner says enough to make it fairly clear that he was no sadist, no lover of pain for its own sake. How, then, are we to connect him with Nietzsche, whose work is almost incomprehensible unless we recognize his joy in pain?” How are we to call Nietzsche a follower of Stirner, when the apostle of the Superman spoke so contemptuously of the “anarchist dogs”?

It is quite true that the two men worked for very different ends. Nietzsche declared himself for the improvement of the race through the unrestricted activity of the strong individuals, which would weed out the weak. The influence of Darwin is here as well as that of Stirner. Stirner wanted strong men and weak men (and women, too, no doubt—as Mr. J. L. Walker has pointed out) to work for their own selfish purposes. However, he felt that this selfishness would by no means exclude love. The strong man, once rid of his superstitions, would be willing to allow” the weak man to live and prosper.

The apparent influence of Stirner upon Nietzsche (evidence of which Dr. Eduard von Hartmann has assembled) is in some ways analogous to that of the Victorian Samuel Butler upon Bernard Shaw. In each case the literary tricks have to some extent passed over. In each case the disciple and the teacher hold some diametrically opposite views. I am thinking especially of Butler’s exceedingly clever satire against the vegetarians, in “Erewhon.” Shaw, advocating the very practice at which Butler directs his laughter, uses Butler’s own paradoxes to drive home his points.

It is seldom wise to dwell overlong on literary influences. If Stirner mattered to us only for what Nietzsche may have borrowed from him, we would be losing nothing by leaving him to the tome-grubbers who wish to become Doctors of Philosophy.

As it seems to me, Stirner is valuable largely because he helps us to understand our own character, and those of our neighbors. Whether we are not better off ignorant or only dimly conscious of our own limitations is a question that is fairly debatable. However, in practice, such people as read this booklet are not lovers of obscurantism. They are seeking from me, or from the man whose views I am attempting to present, some measure of enlightenment.

It so happens that I disagree at many points with Stirner’s teaching. Very few of his readers, I think, have altogether agreed with him. Nobody, though, who reads Stirner with the concentration and the sympathy that should be given to any book worth reading at all, can fail to gain much from him. There is much knowledge and much wisdom about human hearts and human masks here, for anyone who has the power to understand. That Stirner finally shows us his own mask makes the reading still more interesting.

The mask he wears is of a sort totally unexpected by the reader who thinks of anarchists only as assassins. Your real believer in a New Jerusalem where there will be no laws, no government, no restrictions except those the individual voluntarily places upon himself, this man is pretty sure to be a benevolent fellow. His whole scheme is based on the assumption that human beings

when uncorrupted are naturally friendly and helpful to their fellow men. No one who is himself villainous is likely to hold such an opinion. Furthermore, anarchism has never been so popular a philosophy that anyone not sincerely believing in it would care to speak in favor of it.

When I say, then, that Stirner wears a mask, I do not mean to deny that this reproduces his spontaneous and unselfish feelings. It is rather as though he had, in proclaiming himself an egoist, lacerated and distorted his own features. Then, with the mask of his selfish benevolence, he reproduced the impression of his original visage.

“Nothing concerns me!” is Stirner’s cry. “Except my property,” is his reservation. “My love for you is part of my property,” he adds. Consequently, “My love for you concerns me.” Then, “You concern me.” This bit of logic I have worked out myself, but there is nothing in the book to contradict it.

Stirner’s individual or “unique one” is not a hermit. He is not self-centered, except in a formal or technical sense. Stirner’s “I” or “own man” is in each case a sun, about which the other “I’s” revolve like dependent planets. Yet the sun shines warmly and benevolently down upon them all. Each man a well-intentioned and absolute monarch—so it is in the world of Stirner’s dreams.

As it seems to Ego A, Egoes B, C, D and E revolve about him. As it seems to B, he is the center, with A, C, D, and E whirling around him. We all do feel more or less like that, especially those of us who happen to be the only sons of fond mothers.

Are men born benevolent? Are they born neutral, but capable of being educated into virtue? These are matters which Stirner does not discuss, but which other critics of the present social order have considered in detail. No doubt Stirner took it for granted that benevolence is inherent.

The philosophy underlying majority rule seems to be that enough people are good to control those naturally bad. If a few people are wicked enough to drink whiskey or commit murder or go to the movies on Sunday, why, their more virtuous neighbors can clap them into jail, mulct them of goodly fines, or gently remove their immortal souls from their mortal bodies.

## V. THE POSSIBILITY OF LIBERTY

“Liberty, equality, fraternity!” shouted the revolutionists of France. “Simplicity, imbecility!” we might well reply. There is no equality without identity, and nature contains no duplicates. We can set up x’s and y’s in equations, but we can validly balance men and women in this fashion. Perhaps men can be as brothers, but brothers and sisters are usually quarrelsome. As for liberty, that is possible for a few only, and to a limited extent.

John and James both want the same piece of cake, let’s say. They can not both have it. They may agree to take each half of the portion. In so doing they both give up part of their liberty of choice. Suppose, however, that John is master. The lady of the house, as in the fairy tales, is John’s fond mamma, but Jimmie’s cruel step-mother. John, having the ability to exercise his liberty of choice, gets the cake; James, being without this liberty, gets none.

Lincoln, who was a very shrewd person, but probably not much of a philosopher, declared that a nation could not exist partly enslaved and partly free. This is exactly the state of this and of every other nation. Both from within and from without, the freedom of every individual is restricted.

“Of what good is it to a sheep,” Stirner asks. “to be permitted liberty of speech? It will nevertheless stick to bleating.”

Human sheep, too, will only bleat, no matter what freedom the law may permit them. Again Stirner disposes lightly of a serious philosophical problem. Wise men have debated long over the question whether men have freedom of will or are bound by circumstance. It is good to believe that we are the masters of our fates, the captains of our souls. It would tend to paralyze our actions if we thoroughly believed that the events of our future life are fore ordained and unalterable. Yet free will is a myth. Within and without we are directed by Kismet, Anangke, Necessity.

“The dog returns to his own vomit,” says a Biblical wise man. The sheep bleats though permitted freedom of speech. The negro stays black, though he fain would be white. The Semite has discovered how to have his nose made Japhetic, but yet he remains a Semite. The idiot can not make his brain grow. The cripple joins the Christian Science Church, and yet his right leg remains shorter than his left. The American citizen becomes enamored of a British earldom, but he can not free himself from his childhood in Hicks Center, Ohio. Who is free?

The sadist flogs or strangles, pursuant to his own free will, but soon he is behind prison bars, obedient to the will of others. Perhaps he can encounter a masochist, one who enjoys having pain inflicted, to beat. That is a limitation on the sadist, however. One, who enjoys inflicting pain is limited in his pleasure when the recipient enjoys that pain. The greatest pain is mental, as most women—and women are the most common sadists—intuitively know.

There have been monarchs who, taking pleasure in whipping the ladies or the gentlemen of their Court, have been in a position to indulge their desires. There have been sadists in a position to start wars and massacres in order to satisfy their pleasures. There have been slaveholders able to torture their slaves for their sport. What happened, then, to the freedom of the courtiers, the massacred, the slaves?

We have an inner freedom, it is sometimes said, that no men, no circumstances, can force from us. At this notion Stirner scoffs. Of what practical use is this inner freedom, he asks, to a man bound hands and feet in a dungeon? It might still be of some use, I should imagine. The man who didn't let despair take hold of him, yes, the man who had a god to pray to and hope in, would probably be better off under such circumstances than the man who bowed to fate. The man who thought of ways and means of getting untied would be in a still better position.

When we bring in a god, or God, it is plain that we remove all opportunities for liberty. He who is bound by a religious care is far from free. He who is bound by a conscience is to that extent enslaved. He whose actions are limited by his own benevolence or consideration for his fellow-creatures is far from being free.

This fact Stirner recognizes. Freedom, he tells us, is nothing more than a dream. Being oneself and being true to oneself, he says, are more important than being free.

Freedom would not be proper for him to advocate, anyway, he decides, for it is a Christian ideal. He quotes passages from the New Testament in which Christians are exhorted to be free. They are to be free from the old law, that is, but subject to the new.

What shall we say of the freedom granted by a republic or a constitutional monarchy? Political liberty, says Stirner, means the freedom of the state. "State, religion, conscience, these despots make me a slave, and their liberty is my slavery."

A free state is not a state of free individuals. Although Stirner lived before Prohibition became an issue, and under a rule by no means democratic, he seems to have foreseen what utterly foolish things a majority might do. Probably he had the French Revolution in mind. An absolute monarch is at least responsible for what he does. In some measure he considers himself and is considered a servant of his people. The majority, however, is always irresponsible.

"Passing the buck" is an expression that originated in the American game of poker. It is a phrase commonly used in a democracy. The political party "points with pride" to the good crops grown under its administration, and views with alarm the droughts that the rule of its opponents has caused. For a real achievement all claim the credit. For a blunder or a piece of dishonesty there is no one to blame.

One can not appeal to the reason of a mob. Conceivably a single king or an individual commoner might be able to do some thinking. Put all the kings together, or all the commoners together, and they will either trample over one another or follow some demagogue.

If we want freedom we must find it, as the popular jest has it, in the dictionary. We may, in other words, make a Platonic idea of it. In any absolute sense, however, we can not take hold of it and make it our own.

It is impossible to live in a vacuum, without parents, without an environment. No slave, no free man, no king, can live without obligations. The Descendant of the Sun had duties to perform in honor of his ancestor. The free Greek had to worship the gods. The North American gets down on his knees before Law and Order.

Stirner, while freely admitting the impossibility of full liberty, speaks out boldly against what he calls the shackles which bind individuals. Observe, however, that in abolishing Law and Order as deities, Stirner does not favor disorder or the rule of villainy. Some anarchists favor a period of disorder in which the present social order is to be overthrown. None of them believe in immorality—that is, violation of their own system of morals—or in permanent disorder.

Stirner considers that the present conception of morality is at the root of all evil. Nobody, he points out, is thoroughly moral: "The hypocrisy of today ... no longer vigorous enough to

save morality without doubt or weakening, not yet reckless enough to live wholly egoistically, trembles now toward the one, now toward the other.”

That is to say, understanding good and evil is the basis on which good may arise. Virtue without a knowledge of the opposite has no solid foundation. Stirner pays no especial attention to sexual ethics, but Dr. Iwan Bloch, in “The Sexual Life of Our Time,” develops the thesis that there can be no sexual morality without free love. Possibly Dr. Bloch would not wish to be considered an anarchist, but that is certainly an anarchistic notion.

While we are on the subject of sexual liberty, it is well to explain what Bloch and many others mean by free love. They do not mean sexual promiscuity, which, they say, exists in effect under the present moral order. They mean a marital union terminable without formality at the Will of either party. In other words, easy divorce. They assert that their system would actually increase the number of couples living happily and permanently together.

Just such a paradox is the foundation of anarchism. Liberty, say these political homeopaths, will destroy licentiousness. Virtue will not exist until religious and ethical systems are abolished. Even if it were possible for an internal restraint to take the place of an external one it would still remain a restraint, a restriction of liberty.

Of what good is it to a sheep to be allowed free speech? Of what good is it to the driver of an old car, capable of going ten miles an hour and no faster, to have the speed limit removed? Or, to make the illustration still more apposite, suppose a truck is limited by an engine governor to a speed of twelve or fifteen miles an hour. The driver is in a hurry; seeing no motorcycle policemen about, he would willingly go the rate of thirty. There is no external control—but there is an even more efficacious inner one.

Although Stirner repudiates conscience as something arising out of superstition and religion, he takes eager possession of that very thing. That and the equally—despised human emotion of love.

To be sure, he says that men love their neighbors selfishly. They love them because it pleases them to love and do good. This is only to be understood if we assume that the human race is by nature benevolent.

Is that so? Consider maternal love. We take it for granted that the mother is naturally in love with her offspring. That is almost universally a fact, no doubt, during early infancy. There is an ancient instinct which makes the mother cherish and protect the babe suckling at her breast. Love of the older child, however, or love of the adult son and daughter, depends little on this instinct: It arises chiefly out of rational considerations.

There are selfish mothers and there are unfeeling fathers. When parents spend money lavishly on their children, send them to expensive schools, buy them fast automobiles, they are not necessarily indicating their love. They are, in many cases, merely displaying their wealth. Or else they may be hypocritically bowing before the current ideal of love for one’s children.

Stirner would not remove the compulsive force of public opinion. He carefully explains that in his Utopia men would not be able to do villainous things with impunity. They would not suffer any criminal penalties, but merely the natural consequences of their acts. However, these so-called natural consequences would be quite as efficacious as statute laws in keeping men from doing the evil things they might feel inclined to do.

Where is the freedom of the rogue, then? Where is the freedom of the murderer to murder or of the flagellant to flog?

“That is not liberty but license,” is the stock patriotic answer. Why isn’t it liberty? Why not admit at once that liberty is a ridiculous ideal?

“The truth will make you free,” many of us believe. Perhaps it will, if truth is what Stirner says it is. Truth, he says, is not a fixed thing. It is merely what an individual has made his own.

How shall we answer bewildered Pilate, then? “What is truth?” he asks, and receives a mocking smile for all answer. No wonder that philosophers grow mad!

If my truth be my truth, and your truth only your truth, how shall we twain converse? To the churchman freedom means certain approved external chains. To Stirner it means certain internal ones, although not the ordinary chains of conventional conscience. As I see freedom, it means throwing chains away. Probably Stirner saw that logically my definition is the only correct one, for he tells us that liberty isn’t so important as self-fidelity.

“I am myself,” he cries. “That is all that matters.”

There is an old Oriental story about a number of people, deformed in various ways. Give the chance to exchange their infirmities and deformities for those of other persons, they prefer to retain their own. The blind man prefers to remain blind and handsome rather than to regain his sight in exchange for assuming the humps and the ugly face of the man living across the street. The hunchback, no matter how little he cares for his hump, does not wish to become blind for the sake of being straight and good-looking.

We hug close our own deformities, and are pretty well satisfied with ourselves as we are. I have heard people talk disparagingly about themselves, of course. People afflicted with the inferiority complex do not necessarily consider themselves lower than their fellow-men. though. Who has fallen so that no vanity remains? What being remains human, and yet does not seek to blame his faults on another?



## VI. SELF-OWNERSHIP

Supposing the inner “I” approves itself, what then? Is that sufficient guerdon? Is that liberty for the free individual?

“Alas, not my Spirit alone, my body ‘too thirsts hourly for freedom,’ Stirner tells us. The poor man flattens his nose against the bakery window, but he is not free to enter and take the fine pastries, and to absorb them into himself.

“What do you want to become free from?” he asks. “From your hardtack and your straw bread? Then throw them away.” Ah, but men don’t want merely to throw away poverty. They want also to acquire riches.

“Are men to grant you this ‘freedom,’ are they to grant it to you? You do not expect that of your philanthropy, because you know they all think like you. Each thinks first of himself!”

It is curious to see how Stirner derides the faith in philanthropy, and yet returns to it himself and makes it the basis of his Utopia. It is the one chain that equals all the others which he casts contemptuously off.

The more fetters we cast off, as he himself says, the more we have. “To the extent that I conquer freedom for myself I create new limits and new tasks for myself. If I have invented railroads, I feel myself still weak because I can not sail like a bird through the skies.”

The solution of one problem brings on others. “Being then made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness,” Stirner quotes from the Epistle to the Romans (VI, 18).

Being then freed from religion, Max Stirner, you go the way of unforced benevolence. Really you are still a servant.

“Freedom is to become our own,” and thus to be saved for us. “My own I am at all times and under all circumstances, if I know how to have myself and not throw myself away on others.” But freedom, as Stirner elsewhere says, is a ghost, an ideal.

What I have, though, is that my own if I share it with others? What becomes of my self-love, Max Stirner, if I crumble it and cast it on the waters as my benevolence?

Prince Metternich, the old tyrant, the old servant of tyrants, once said he had found “the path of real freedom.” Stirner set down the fact without comment. He laughed inwardly, we may be sure. Who may say that without being laughed at? Who has verily found “the path of real freedom”?

Nature is a tyrant, as well as the kinds and politicians. Emerson, when he speaks of natural “compensations,” clearly tells us that we have no absolute freedom. Emerson’s view is plainly very close to Max Stirner’s. Both consider man on the whole a virtuous animal. Both tell us that when man departs from virtue, he suffers certain natural unpleasant consequences of his vice.

Of course Emerson did not advocate revolution. He felt that things left to themselves turn out fairly well. Stirner seems to say—we must remember that he wrote with a censorship in mind—that free spirits should make themselves by a concerted action possessors of the wealth of the world.

Common ownership, however, is in his opinion no ownership at all. What is left a man, if he gives up the control of his own property, that is, by Stirner's definition, of himself?

As Stirner sees it, the duty of a man is not to work for a commonwealth or for the perfection of the race, but for the free development of his own ego. To be sure, Stirner would not use the word *duty*. He would call self-development the natural result of the impulses within the ego.

Yet, as he points out, men seek freedom from one thing only to run under the slavery of something else. He insists that "a piece of freedom" is not freedom. Supposing that (complete freedom is a phantom, and they that desire complete freedom, madmen—what then?

Why not therefore renounce freedom, Stirner proposes. This is a tough morsel for us to swallow who are used to Fourth of July speeches. Recently a Convention speaker said that he and his associates wanted to follow the Declaration of Independence literally. Undoubtedly he was day-dreaming.

Cast away your dreams, your idols, your God—so Stirner bids us. Be true to yourself. "If it is said that even God proceeds according to eternal laws, that also suits me, since I can not get out of my skin either, but have my law in my whole nature, that is, in myself."

However, men object that they must follow a moral law. Else where can they find the right path? To quote Stirner again, "'What am I?' each of you asks himself. An abyss of lawlessness and unregulated impulses, desires, wishes, passions, a chaos without light or guiding star! How am I to obtain a correct answer if, disregarding God's commandments and the duties prescribed by morality, disregarding also the voice of reason, which in the course of history, after bitter experiences, has exalted the best and most sensible thing into law, I appeal simply to myself? My passion would advise me to do the most senseless thing possible."

Without a moral law, man is as the beasts. However, Stirner tells us, unmoral animals do the right things. We must not feel that, left to ourselves, we will follow the Devil. How do we know, he asks, that the talk of God and of conscience with which our parents and our preachers fill us is not itself the talk of the Devil? We must never be too sure about our consciences. We must never forget our grain of salt when we swallow the conventional moral teachings.

Stirner objects to religion because it interferes with our uniqueness and with our ownership. There are tithes to be paid, not merely out of our external but also out of our internal (or spiritual—although Stirner would not use this word) possessions.

Why do we listen to God, Stirner asks. For God's Sake? No, for our own sakes. Whosoever believeth, we are told, shall not perish but have everlasting life.

If, then, all belief and all conformity are merely for the sake of the believer and conformer, he does well to cast them away when they become irksome. For his own sake he will assert his individuality.

Thus the Christians threw off their submission to the heathen gods as soon as they felt that their souls would be better off under Christ. From the very actions of the Christian disciples Stirner thus derives his argument that Christianity need no longer be held sacred.

With their individuality they created a new religion. "Individuality created a new freedom; for individuality is the creator of everything."

Exalting the individual, Stirner declares that you and I, if we wish to assert ourselves, should rid ourselves of "everything that is not you, not I." The limit of freedom is the ego. From that there is no more restraint to remove. Our banner, then, he declares, should not read "Liberty!" but "I!"

I am real to me and you are real to yourself, and Johann Caspar Schmidt was real to himself. As for liberty, it is an ideal, a dream, a ghost.

But Stirner is concerned less with philosophical abstractions than with the problem of how to act. "Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum," without a censorship or fear of penal laws, would probably have assumed the form of a call to arms. Yet Stirner was incapable of addressing himself to the masses.

Clearly enough, the ordinary defender of capitalism is an egoist. John Jones and Heinrich Schmidt, who live and toil without worrying much about the system which regulates all their actions, are likewise egoists. Why, then, need men be incited to egoism?

They needn't be, Stirner says. They need only be reminded of what they already are. People torment themselves with the thought that they are called to be good men and women, followers of ideals. There is no freedom in self-denial. No religion is without its promise's of reward. Abstract virtue is nothing. Men are told to be good in order that they may live long, or have a happy eternity, or in some way be rewarded for their goodness.

"Just recognize yourselves again, just recognize what you really are, and let go your hypocritical endeavors, your foolish endeavors to be something else than you are." This pleasant advice has a most seductive sound, and yet following it might have unpleasant consequences. To use Stirner's Own instance of the wild beasts, we may readily admit that animals (except in some atypical cases) look out for themselves. The result is that the strong eat the weak. If the Self-sufficient beast does not actually devour the self-insufficient of the same kind, it monopolizes the available food and so weeds out the weak.

Good, Nietzsche cries. Thus is the race improved, for the strong alone breed, and the strong beget the strong. Stirner is by no means an apologist for "the blonde beast." Rather he is in favor of cooperation. As we read his fierce-sounding arguments for individual action, for unrestrained individual aggrandizement, we must remember the qualifications and limitations he himself makes.

Understand your own egoism, is in effect what he tells us. Exploit your own power. However, know how to check—your own egoism for your own ultimate advantage. This advice, which Stirner tells us is acted on by all philanthropic capitalists, he passes on to all the oppressed.

As a matter of psychological rather than of philosophical interest, we may inquire why Stirner (or, to pin him down to his non-writing personality, Johann Caspar Schmidt) didn't make use of his own calculated egoism instead of presenting it to all who cared to read his book. Well, he did try to become a wealthy business man, as we have seen. If he had made his millions out of milk, perhaps he would have grinned cynically and proceeded to endow churches, libraries, and universities. More than mere egoism is necessary to become rich, of course. More than egoism plus brains, even.

Perhaps if Stirner had had accumulative powers, he wouldn't have written the book. But he didn't. He found himself unable, after years of conscientious study, to find any paid position at all. Then, when he had a job, he gave it up, evidently supposing that authorship would be a profitable career. He was a pretty poor egoist, all things considered; he went through his wife's money, it was with no clear idea of what he was going to do after it was gone. Of his class of the men who find it difficult to adjust themselves to their environment, many prophets, many inventors, many great artists arise. These are all men to whom the development of the ego is a difficult matter. Had Stirner possessed the power to work steadily and thoroughly for himself, he would never have written the bible of egoists.

We may smile, then, at Stirner's talk of making the earth "his own." Napoleons don't chatter about bringing the world under their control for selfish purposes. They merely do it, and then announce that they have acted as humble agents of God, or, with humble spirit, to advance the glory of the nation.

"I secure my freedom with regard to the world in the degree that I make the world my own, gain it and take possession of it for my own use." However, each freedom brings a corresponding bondage, as Stirner says. Whoever has many possessions or many honors has also many responsibilities and many honors. Stirner shows no way of escaping from the vicious circle. The more freedom we get, the more we lose."

We give power to secret votes, and the secret voters take away the things that make life worth while. Yet Prohibitionist leaders make speeches on Independence Day, declaring what a wonderful thing freedom is. Where, oh where, would this old world be if all inconsistencies had suddenly been ironed out?

Stirner is a little sophomoric in his enthusiasm for egoism as a panacea. He is a little bit too certain that the destruction of religion and superstition would make the World perfect.

Supposing children were taught to despise the Lord, what then? Would they be any wiser? Stirner's answer is an emphatic Yes. So long as man is possessed by religion, he does not possess himself. Self-ownership to Stirner is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. Given that, all the rest of wisdom falls easily into place. Thus, clearly, is sabotage justified. However, when I say that, I should repeat the fact that Stirner's writing has probably not had any influence on the leaders of, the Industrial Workers of the World or on other organized syndicalists.

Aside from benevolence toward brother and sister egoists, Stirner's liberated Unique One recognizes no limitations: "I secure my freedom with regard to the world in the degree that I make the world my own, that is, gain it and take possession of it for myself, by any possible force, by persuasion, begging, direct demand, even by hypocrisy, cheating, and the like; for the methods I use are determined by what sort of man I am. If I am weak, I have only weak methods, like those I have mentioned, which yet are good enough for a large part of the world. Anyway, cheating, hypocrisy and lying sound worse than they are. Who has not cheated the police and the law, quickly assumed a loyal air in the presence of a law officer, in order to conceal some irregularity he has committed? He who has not done it has merely let violence be done to him; he was a weakling from conscience."

What we can not destroy by force, he says, it is best to get around as best we can. "I evade the laws of the nation until I have accumulated sufficient strength to overthrow them," he says. Nothing is sacred to the Unique One simply because it is beyond his control. He attempts to make it come within his reach, or he suffers it without bowing down reverently before it. He retains in this way the fullest possible strength of his freedom.

"My freedom is fulfilled only when it is my power; but thus I cease to be merely a free man and become a self-possessor." Without power, no freedom. The proletariat in a democracy is free in name only, so long as might is not in its hands.

Stirner made this point and developed it at length because the Liberals of his time and country were clamoring for a constitutional monarchy. If a king gives you liberty, he says, it is-nothing. All freedom worthy of the name is self-earned. That is of course the same thing that radical labor agitators say now about voluntary offers "to share profits among employees.

Just how the Unique Ones should get together and control industry Stirner does not say. Probably Herr Schmidt was not much of an economist, although he later compiled an economic

work. Though communism, the ownership of all by all, was an ideal against which he spoke violently, it is not clear that his Utopia would have been much different from a communistic state.

As Stirner would establish things, the state would be abolished. In its place would come “a general condition of prosperity, the prosperity of all.” Common property is nobody’s property, he “explicitly states. “Property is what is mine,” not mine and yours together. However, “I do not step timidly back from your property, but look upon it always as my property. Please do the same thing with what you call my property. Thus shall We most easily come to an understanding with each other.”

## VII. OWNING THE WORLD

Max Stirner was a dreamer, perhaps a prophet. No doubt it is unfair to ask him for all the details of organization of the state in which all men are to be rich. We do not ask Blake for a list of ordinances in his New Jerusalem. Sufficient that,

I will not cease from mental fight  
Nor shall my sword rest in my hand,  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant land.

Stirner is a poet as Nietzsche is a poet (leaving his verses out of consideration). Both are such especially according to Shelley's definition: "Poets are the trumpets which sing to battle. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." However, merely being a trumpeter or a legislator is not—if I may be permitted to point this out—not sufficient to make one a poet.

In our world of hard reality, politicians and statemen alike believe in compromises, in smooth and well-joined surfaces. Poets follow a gleam.

Yet there are many readers of Stirner, and perhaps some readers of this booklet, who will not be content to give him a poet's license and therefore let him escape, "by benefit of clergy," scot-free. Why not make him explain how his state is going to work?

I don't know how to clear up his contradictions. I don't know, I can't even begin to imagine, how we are all to become rich. Neither do I know how I can let my fellow egoist claim my property for my own, at the same time keeping it thoroughly and entirely mine.

Probably Stirner meant something of this sort: "A" has a lawn. He will not mind "B's" pick-nicking on it. Also he will feel free to picnic on "B's" or on "C's" lawn. However, when such use becomes frequent, we have in effect communal ownership, the thought of which was so repugnant to Stirner.

I think the difference between Stirner and the communists is largely one of temperament. Stirner, having built his New Jerusalem in the air, is anxious not to have it dominated by a new set of bureaucrats.

He would object chiefly to the "Keep Off the Grass" and "Don't Pick Flowers" signs in our city parks. He would object to the rule by policemen and revenue agents to which we so tamely submit.

Now, I don't like the signs and the guardian policemen at all. But, without these things, how are we to have common property at all? Seeing this, Stirner proceeds to condemn communism. By the way—since the word has a horrible sound in America nowadays—we are all to a certain extent communists. We are willing that streets, parks, playgrounds and schools should be operated by public bodies for the general welfare.

A socialist or a communistic anarchist would wish to spread ownership by the community over all industry, possibly over all property. The progressive defender of capitalism wishes to

extend communal ownership and control over all or part of the “basic industries,” howsoever these may be defined and limited. Stirner does not advocate more public ownership, but less, or none. Communism enrages him.

Thus, he condemns Christianity as advocating not only the living together of men with men, but also of men With God. Under the Christian system, there is (theoretically) no room for selfishness, self-love, self-admiration. Stirner is always insisting on the rule of selfishness.

Only in discussing egoism is Stirner instructive and sound. When he forgets selfishness, he pins on wings and leaves realities behind him. Denying’ idealism, he would yet abolish the forces that hold selfishness within reasonable bounds. This is because at heart he is himself an idealist.

Stirner is always ready, like a true philosopher, to fight over a word. He attacks Proudhon, With whom he is fundamentally in full accord, as violently as he does any defender of capitalism. Proudhon says, “Property is theft.” Stirner says, “No, property is mine. Why bring a religious word like *theft* into the discussion?” (All words relating to ethics, laws, and ideals he lumps contemptuously as religious.)

Both Stirner and Proudhon say that Dives has property which should go to them. Proudhon calls Dives a criminal, a thief, Stirner replies, “No, he is just a clever fellow—but I have had enough of his cleverness.” Yet both would pluck Dives, and to the plucked goose it matters little, whether his feathers have been removed because of his wickedness or because of his weakness.

Both Proudhon and Stirner are opposed to political freedom alone, because it leaves Dives full-feathered. Liberalism is not for, either of them a way out. The Liberals of Stirner’s day talked much of the rights of man, and Man in the abstract they were almost ready to deify, They seemed to argue from the proposition, “The voice of the people is the voice of God,” that “The people (or Man) is God.”

Stirner does not want to be respected as Man, but as a unique man. Therefore he does not care for equality in the eyes of God, or in the eyes of the law. He insists on the differences rather than on the similarities between individuals. This is distinctly not the Socialistic way of looking at the matter. Your old-line Socialist insists that all men, under similar conditions of environment, are pretty much alike.

“My being a man,” says Stirner, “is only one of my attributes.” He is not only a man, but also a German, a Berliner, a teacher, a white man, a married man, and, so on.

Liberalism, he says, is the religion which worships Man. It may be called the religion of the free state. As the members of a family hold the blood-fie sacred, so must the members of a liberal state hold every other member of the state hotly. However, the state holds a man sacred only insofar as he conforms to the abstraction Man. If he is a criminal, Stirner points out, he is excluded from society, and his manhood does not save him from prison. Even the most enlightened of communists would thrust the criminal of violence into an asylum or a hospital.

In Stirner’s opinion, only he who departs from the abstract Conception of Man is really a man at all. The nonconforming individual not being the Man of the liberals, is humorously named by Stirner a ghost. “I am really Man and the inhuman one both together, for I am a man and yet more than a man That is, I am a man of my special qualities.”

It is impossible, Stirner says, to be the ideal Christian. It is equally impossible to be the ideal Man of the Liberals. Anyway, even the freest of states requires of her citizens a religiousness in addition to the state of being man. “Even the North Americans still presuppose in theirs that they have religion, at least the religion of integrity, of respectability.”

The courts have held that America is a Christian country. The precedent in the case of *People versus Ruggles*, decided in the New York Supreme Court, 1811, has not, I believe, been rejected in later decisions.

Chief Justice Kent said, "The people of this state, in common with the people of this country, profess the general doctrines of Christianity, as the rule of their faith and practice; and to scandalize the author of these doctrines is not, in a religious point of view, extremely impious, but even in respect to the obligations due to society, is a gross violation of decency and good order."

Man becomes unique and self-possessed, says Stirner, when he renounces religion. Note what he means by religion—not only faith and worship, but all the respect men feel for virtue. "Morality is not compatible with egoism," he says, "because it does not allow any value to me, but only to humanity as it is represented in me."

The state, however, according to Stirner's view, emphasizes morality or its equivalent, humanity. It is an organization of human being based on their humanity, not on their individual and unique qualities. Only if the state were a free union of egoists could it dispense with morality.

"Therefore," says Stirner, "we two, the state and I, are enemies. I, the egoist, have not at heart the welfare of this human society. I sacrifice nothing to it, although I do make use of it. To be able to utilize it completely, though, I change it into my property and my creature. That is, I annihilate it, and form in its place the Union of Egoists."

So long as the individual is a member of a state, Stirner goes on to say, he must be conventional Man. He must not depart from the ideal. He must be respectable, upright, moral, a good citizen.

Stirner argues that a majority has no more right than a tyrant to control the acts of an individual. The only right in either case is that of might. This, note well, is more than a denunciation of the rights of a majority to enact sumptuary laws, it is also an attack on the right to set up laws declaring larceny, assault and murder to be punishable crimes.

Stirner declares that there are no rights, and quite logically deduces that no man or group of men has the right to define a felony. The power to do so they may have, and also the power to enforce their definitions and their penalties. Out of force alone arise common and statute law.

Though Stirner declares that his Utopia is to be attained by means of the "war of all against all," we must not assume that he advocates bloodshed. The general strike is evidently what he means. As we have seen, fear of the censorship kept him from being explicit. If he had made detailed plans for a revolution, the censors would not have characterized the book as "absurd," but as dangerous and treasonable.

I doubt whether anarchists will ever be able to organize and smoothly carry out a revolution. The temperament which makes a man an anarchist makes it difficult for him to follow a leader. Whenever a leader is set up, there is temporarily at least an end to anarchism. As for the Union of Egoists, even if it could be established, it would soon fall beneath its own weight. Why? Because man is not inherently benevolent, or at least not primarily so. Brute beasts may run together for the common good, but not so man. Twining in among his instincts, removing their full force, perverting them in the strangest of ways, is a parasite we sometimes deify under the name of Reason.

No wonder, then, that Rousseau placed his ideal world in the pristine age when men were pure of heart. Anthropologists have shown that such an age probably never existed. It is all such stuff as dreams are made of. Real life, too, is a dream, and sometimes this dream is a nightmare.



Stirner does not pause to inquire whether life is worth living. If he can own himself and the universe, he will be happy enough. He is something of a Don Quixote, to be sure, tilting at windmills.

Stirner shows conclusively that man in the abstract is not worth a row of pins. Yet we can not do without idols and gods and deifications. Without abstractions, what would human intelligence have to work with? Without abstractions, how could Stirner have written his book at all?

We all need gods. Nietzsche shrewdly suggested that we don't all need the same ones. We can believe him when he says he does not favor equality. We can hardly believe that of Stirner. If we all break the same idols, we shall finally stand together in the same nakedness. Often I have felt some cherished belief of mine appear suddenly ignoble when I found some silly person sharing it. Surely it is better to be uniquely wrong than one of the many right ones.

Stirner would say: so long as I remain faithful to my own qualities, I can not be wrong. Why do we find this man offering his thoughts to the herd? He sings as the bird sings, he tells us, in Goethe's words. Yet the song that rises from his throat is not sufficient guerdon. The old exhibitionistic tendency is what makes people strive to get their work published, even at a financial loss to themselves. It is what makes people say "smart" things, though those often prove to be boomerangs.

Nietzsche's vanity made him want to climb a steep peak, where he would stand alone. Max Stirner's made him wish to bring all men to the high peak, to acclaim him as their Moses. Real qualities of leadership he had none.

He was a pedagogue, not a demagogue. His paradox is the unpopular one. We would rather be egoists and proclaim ourselves idealists than be idealists and proclaim ourselves egoists.

Probably there will never be many philosophers glorifying the rights of the individual. While the progress of invention has nullified many of the terrible calamities Malthus prophesied, yet it is likely that the world will become increasingly more and more cramped. Under such conditions and value of an individual life, or of the free thought of any one person, vastly decreases. Only manhood will be respected. Already for many hundreds of years it has been considered fitting and proper to die for one's country. Recently it has also been a popular form of martyrdom to die in the course of experiments designed to increase the length men live in some tropical country. One unique individual dies so that many human beings shall live.

We remain faithful to our flags and to the loyalties that are inculcated in us. The naval officer is presented with the opportunity of becoming wealthy and a noble if he will give up certain plans. Not only in the moving picture melodramas, but also in real life, he chooses to remain poor but faithful to his holy things. Stirner would call this officer a tool. Perhaps he is, if we examine him with a logical magnifier. But what shall we do without our idols and without our dreams?

## VIII. THE OWNER'S CLUB

Of the building of Utopias there is no end. Some are on this earth, some on another. Some are labelled Heaven and some Commonwealth. Many interesting people have preferred Hell—or tyranny.

Would Max Stirner's land of egoists be an exciting place to live in? Not, I think, if all the inhabitants were like Stirner. The "Darling" to whom his book is dedicated was his wife. He was no wild fellow, in spite of the fact that he spent his wife's money. Most of it must have gone into the unsuccessful milk business. If all the thirsty Berliners had applied to his warehouses for milk, and his business had grown large and profitable, it is pretty certain that his darling Marie would have remained with him.

Would intoxication be permitted in Stirner's commonwealth? If a man while drunk made himself a nuisance to the neighbors, he would simply suffer their displeasure. No officer would arrest him, but he would suffer the consequences of his action. His neighbors would be less friendly. They might, I suppose, decline to give him the eggs or the garden vegetables which he had been receiving from them so long as it pleased them to give these.

Stirner nowhere concerns himself with the details of reorganizing society. He suggests that he would not let idlers have an easy time. However, any entertaining beggar could get along, so long as he convinced the food-producers that it was worth their while to let him live.

If toiling Peter should desire to give lazy Paul a slice' of his bread, well and good. No one would interfere with this vagary of Peter's. No one would shut Paul up as a vagabond. In some ways, therefore, Stirner's Union of Egoists would function more like the present capitalistic system" than like any socialist organization. It would simply be *laissez-faire* carried to its logical conclusion.

Adam Smith and his followers felt that industry would best be carried on without any governmental interference. They would, to be sure, call-in the police to break up a strike. The strike, as they saw it, was an interference with the right of the individual to contract freely for his own service. Stirner, disbanding the police department, would make the individual freer still.

The self is all that would count—in the Union of Egoists. The aggrandizement of the self, by the way, is what causes many persons far apart philosophically from Stirner to believe in the immortality of the soul.

I am that I am, the name of God, is also the name that men give themselves. The world exists only in my consciousness. The world can not suddenly be plunged into oblivion. Therefore my consciousness runs on and on forever. Such is the route by which men arrive at the doctrine of immortality. Every man is his own sun, and the planets revolve about him.

Even the martyrs are egoists, for they derive pleasure from the pains with which they are tortured. When Stirner tears from us our joyful sufferings, our pleasant ideals, our glorious lifelines, what have we left to live for? He deprives us of the most characteristic, the most cherished elements of our egoism. In spite of his ranting against communism, he leaves us poor naked beggars at last. Without wheels in the head, where is your manhood. Nay, where is your egoism?

Nietzsche's proposal to have a slave and a master class is in some ways more attractive than Stirner's Utopia. It is more feasible, at any rate. However, this is not the place to argue the relative merits of democracy and aristocracy. Stirner says he believes in neither, but in effect his philosophy is pretty much democratic. The egoistic suns necessarily balance, and the equilibrium of gravities keeps any ego from wandering off on a brilliant but erratic career.

The egoism of Nietzsche aims at what Stirner would have called a religious goal, to-wit, the perfection of the race. I do not know of any philosopher who has advised individuals to trample over others merely for their own selfish growth. Even Macchiavelli thought that the unscrupulous tyranny of princes would work out for the ultimate good of their subjects.

Plenty of human beings do seek their own advantage without love of other people or consideration for them. Yet, though a philosopher saw this clearly and felt this to be a profitable course, he would not proclaim it openly. To do so would be to injure his own strength, to show his opponents his own ace of trumps.

The careless reader of "The Unique One and His Property" gets the impression that Stirner advocates absolute freedom in the expansion of the ego. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The benevolence or natural good will which Stirner assumes in his egoists is fully as effective as many codes of good will which Stirner assumes in his ego criminal laws. That is, of course, providing that egoists are really as benevolent as he assumes them to be.

Stirner announces himself a hater of man the species, of Man the ideal abstraction, but by no means of men as individuals. In this he is at one with the great satirist Dean Swift, in accord also with the humorist and thinker we call Mark Twain. After all, it is a mere piece of vanity that makes us honor our neighbor merely because he shares with us the state of being a man.

When I, a man, feel myself noble, it is no piece of modesty to proclaim the nobility of mankind. Direct praise of self is no more presumptuous, no less modest in such a case, than indirect.

There was once a vagabond who found in an abandoned newspaper the statement that the United States was the richest country in the world at once his chest began to expand, and his heart to grow proud—almost as proud as though he personally were the possessor of ten cents. Yet he remained a vagabond still.

Man is a rational animal, but poor Joe around the corner was born an idiot. What good to him is the "All men are rational" of the traditional syllogism?

The midnight oil-burning students and the dance-hungry social leaders of our American colleges, though themselves flabby of muscle, enjoy a vicarious delight in the victory of "their" football teams. In other words, it makes all Harvard men feel athletic when eleven Harvard men have proved themselves strong. It makes all New York feel agile, swift and accurate of eye and sinew when the Giants or the Yankees win a game.

Because certain inventors and scientists live in our own time, we feel ourselves very superior to the people who lived in the "Dark Ages." This even if we are ourselves in the dark about the mysteries of science and invention.

Inversely, because we admire ourselves, who are human, we admire others for their possessing the same humanity. It is easy enough to persuade a group of native-born white Protestants that all colored people, all Catholics, all Jews, all foreigners belong on a lower level. In this way they exalt themselves.

Stirner, seeing all this, declares that true understanding and sympathy can only arise when men look out directly and exclusively for themselves. Bound by no creeds, held by no conscience and by no moral system laboriously injected in childhood, Stirner's self-possessed and

self-possessing man would yet feel a love for those about him who deserve to be loved. As dreams go, perhaps this is not a bad one. It will come to pass, no doubt, on the very day when the lamb and the lion walk out together in perfect good-fellowship.

“If Jews and Christians could be completely egoists, they would exclude each other entirely and so hold together much more firmly.” That is, they would cast out their humanity and with it their other and individual allegiances. It is as though the lamb and the lion, deciding to be animals no longer, found nothing more to quarrel about, no more reasons why one should eat the other and the other should seek to avoid being eaten. That would leave them pure spirits, and Stirner himself has nothing good to say for disembodied souls.

This last argument of mine but carps at Stirner’s logic. Logic plays an important part in formal philosophy, but little or none in the informal philosophy out of which the formal arises. Therefore I should probably consider Stirner’s ratiocinations reasonably straightforward if my temperament were sufficiently like his. An anarchist is not such because he is attracted by the rationality, the logical need, of anarchism. Men are not attracted to Catholicism by some learned archbishop’s exposition of theology. They are attracted by the beauty of the church and its ceremonies, or their hearts yearning for the consolation of the faith.

It is the heart that sways men, not the head. The heart has “its reasons,” and presently the head finds them to be good ones. Men go out to war and kill because it is in their instincts to do so. Presently scholars appear, who justify the killing with biological and sociological and psychological jargon. “Whatever is, is right,” as Pope learned from Bolingbroke.

Observe how Stirner would commend the words, but derive from them a different meaning than Pope did. Right, says Stirner, comes only from might. Whatever exists, exists because of the power that has made it what it is. Suppose, though, that a spirit of rebellion exists. That too is right, Stirner would say.

Stirner never dreams of making men into angels. Yet, looking within himself, and finding himself inclined to be conscientious and benevolent, he felt that all men have naturally good impulses. This thought is the backbone of his philosophy.

Consider Stirner’s benevolence in the light of his creed: “My strength—is my property. My strength gives me property. My strength am I myself, and through it I am my property.”

But what did Herr Schmidt’s personal strength amount to? If it had been great, he would have made some property his own, instead of merely talking about it.

A man does good, according to the custom of the Society of Egoists, because it gives him pleasure and not because he wishes to make a display of his charity or because he is trying to qualify for admission into the Kingdom of Heaven. He does good always, but never because it is good. He is, in Nietzsche’s phrase, beyond good and evil.

“Everything holy is a bond, or fetter,” says Stirner. He points out that men are continually tearing off their old fetters, only to replace them with new ones. If they could only leave the fetters permanently aside—oh, the seducing sound of those “if’s”!

The free and unique individual pays no respect, renders no homage, to a group. When “the people” dies, then “Up with me!” Given the alternative of serving his family group or serving himself, he leaves his father and his mother and his sisters and brothers and cleaves unto—his own ego.

Stirner says, “The weak, as we have long known, are the unselfish. For these weak members the family cares, because they belong to the family instead of belonging to themselves and caring

for themselves. This weakness Hegel praises when he wishes to have match-making left to the choice, of the parents.”

Supposing the individual breaks the family ties, Stirner continues, he is still under the control of the state. The state is not something created by the individual. It operates for its own sake, not for that of any individual or for that of all individuals. Thus, the public school inculcates patriotism. It brings up the pupils to be “useful members of society.”

The tolerant state does not appear to Stirner the state of free individuals. Its toleration is only an “elevation above pettiness, only a worthier, greater, prouder tyranny.”

The free activity of individuals is always dangerous to any state, no matter how organized, Stirner tells us. This is true of the republic as well as of the absolute monarchy. “The voice of the people is the voice of God,” Stirner concedes, “but is not the voice of the prince also the voice of God?” Which is to say, God is incorporated in an image. No matter which, so long as it be not mine. But if God be I, why not call him The Unique One, or Ego, or I, and have done?

Therefore “the individual is the only one, not the member of any party. He unites freely and separates freely again.” It is no praise of a strong man—I am presenting Stirner’s view—to say that he remains loyal to his state, that he sticks fast to his party.

“Do the Egoists constitute a party?” Stirner asks, and answers himself thus: “How could they be possessors if they belonged to a party?” To belong is to be a slave. However, individuals may band together temporarily for their mutual advantage. A self-owner may enter into a circle and remain there just as long as it pleases him to stay. The party may belong to an individual, but when he becomes subservient to the party, he gives up his ownership.

Similarly, when he respects the property rights of others, he is letting himself be conquered by the abstraction Man. On the formal side Stirner’s whole philosophy may be summarized thus:

“Property is what is mine!”

To declare that “property belongs to all” is to set up ownership in a ghost, he says. The individual, without any consideration for social rights, must be the owner. “To what property am I entitled? To every property which I—gain by my own power.”

Love and altruism must be cast aside. “Egoism simply decides that what I desire to have I must have and will obtain.” When there is no longer any respect for property in the abstract, then everyone will have property in the concrete. “Free unions will then, in this manner also, multiply the power of the individual and make secure his endangered property.”

Competition would be swept aside, as a mere worship of equality (the equality of opportunity). Besides, says Stirner, competition stifles the artistic power of the individual. The artist’s work is essentially unique and independent. In the matter of work not essentially artistic, and of such a nature that it can best be done by groups working together, there would be some sort of agreement among the Egoists. “So far,” Stirner is willing to concede, “communism will bear its fruits.”

What he objects to is the undue emphasis laid by communists upon the communal nature of the labor, and upon the efficiency of that labor. “For whom is time to be gained?” he asks. “For what does man require more time than is necessary to replenish his wearied powers of labor? Here communism is silent.”

However, Stirner supplies an answer. “For what? To take comfort in himself as the unique one, after he has done his part as man.”

Here, then, Stirner makes the uniqueness in a man secondary to his cooperative labor. He is not an absolute egoist, as we can readily see. When he comes to discuss the old, the sick and the crippled, it is again apparent that he is no apostle of selfishness:

“We may actually go so far as to pay the crippled and the sick and the old an appropriate price for not parting from us because of hunger and want; for, if we want them to live, it becomes entirely proper that we should buy the fulfillment of our desire.”

He goes on to explain that he means more than a charitable dole. In his ideal society, there would be no free gifts. Our pleasure in another man’s life would extend to more than his mere existence. We should want, says Stirner, the helpless people whom we care for to live in comfort. Therefore we should buy the pleasure of seeing them comfortable.

All things will be worth their price, and the rich will be worth no more than the poor. Labor, according to Stirner’s metaphor, is the father of Money. By money lie designates all forms of capital.

The Owners’ Club would permit no competition in the production of necessary commodities, and yet would not throw the control of these things into a guild. Bread, says Stirner, concerns not only the bakers, but also the people who eat it. They are to control baking, and not to leave the quality and quantity of the loaf to the chances of competition.

There are many wastes incidental to free competition, to be sure, but probably the waste would be greater in Stirner’s New Jerusalem. Note, too, that Stirner is giving up a portion of the baker’s power of self-expression. He must bake what the majority—or at the very least, a strong minority—of the people want. He must not twist rolls into crescents, the shape which satisfies his artistic soul, but into the round shape required by the consumers. The hated majority rules, and Stirner’s critic is almost inclined to call him a socialist.

The conflict between his ideal state and his best possible society is easily to be seen. He would like to live under a system of no compulsion; but when he puts down a few details why, we have the bread-eaters telling the bread-makers what to do.

The bakers would work together according to the specifications of the consumers. How would there ever be an improvement in baking methods? Assuming that some one would invent a new process, he would then have to make speeches urging all that eat bread to insist upon the bakers’ using the new method,

The believer in progress must also, as it seems to me, believe in competition. Whether Stirner cares anything about progress is not made clear. His ego is probably not concerned with the ego of two centuries hence. Let the unborn find their own way into the world, is the motto of the egoist.

Not ideal love, but selfish love, is what Stirner praises. Men do not love their grandchildren as yet unconceived. And still—Stirner reveals a great fund of generosity, a great deal of benevolence. Perhaps he could even love unborn generations.

A schoolmaster—a rather unusual sort of schoolmaster, to be sure—intoxicated with a few grains of logic. Such is the author of “The Unique One and His Property.” Whether we like his dream or not, we may safely enroll him among the great dreamers of the world.

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