

The Unique

A Theory of Max Stirner's

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I.

By now, it is needless to say that the basis of modern thought is individualism. And as a testament to this individualism, Nietzsche spread to Japan at the earliest. However when discussing Nietzsche, few have written of his precursor, Max Stirner, whom, according to some scholars, Nietzsche plagiarized.

However, I don't believe that Nietzsche was a plagiarist of Stirner. Nor do I believe that Nietzsche was directly influenced by Stirner's writings. Nietzsche was one who, as he said of himself: "I live in my own house."⁽¹⁾ However, there is no doubt that Stirner's thought had a great deal of *indirect* influence on Nietzsche. In fact, there is more than a slight affinity between both of their writings.

II.

Johann Kaspar Schmidt, who would later take on the pseudonym "Max Stirner," was born on October 25, 1806, in Bayreuth—then a city in Prussia, now a city of Bavaria. His father, a flute maker, died soon after his birth;⁽²⁾ and three years later,⁽³⁾ his mother would remarry, this time to an apothecary named Ballerstedt. Together, they moved to a city in western Prussia named Kulm, and Schmidt went along with them.

Schmidt received his primary schooling in Kulm but returned to Bayreuth at the age of twelve to attend the famous *Gymnasium*⁽⁴⁾ there. He studied there for seven years. Afterward, he would enroll at the University of Berlin, where he studied philology and theology with Böckh, Hegel, Marheineke, Ritter, and Schleiermacher among others. Thereafter, he spent a semester at the University of Erlangen attending lectures by Christian Kapp and Georg Benedikt Wiener. Taking a break from university, he would spend one year traveling throughout Germany, stay one year in Kulm for domestic circumstances, and another in Königsberg. Even though he didn't attend university during this time, he nevertheless did not neglect his philosophical and philological studies.

In October 1833, he returned to Berlin to study under Böckh, Lachmann, and Michelet; and even though he was ill for a time and had to abandon attending lectures, he eventually applied for the *pro facultate docenti*⁽⁵⁾ exam.

Other than this [above] small biography written by him in 1834,⁽⁶⁾ nothing more is known about the early years of Johann Schmidt whom we call Max Stirner.

His subsequent life is likewise just as shrouded in shadow. After finishing university, he taught at a high school in Berlin and at a girl's school, where it seems he did not teach his egoism. During

⁽¹⁾ Full quotation of Nietzsche's original poem on the Title Page of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*:

Ich wohne in meinem eigenen Haus,
Hab Niemandem nie nichts nachgemacht
Und — lachte noch jeden Meister aus,
Der nicht sich selber ausgelacht.
Über meiner Haustür

⁽²⁾ Stirner's father died on April 19th, 1807; six months after Johann Schmidt's birth.

⁽³⁾ To be correct: Two years later; Stirner's mother would remarry on April 13th, 1809.

⁽⁴⁾ The German equivalent to a selective and highly-academic secondary school with an accelerated curriculum.

⁽⁵⁾ *pro facultate docenti*: A certificate attesting to one's teaching ability.

⁽⁶⁾ This autobiography was written as a part of his Latin *curriculum vitae* exam. Accessible here: fr.wikisource.org

this time, he had a wife who left him after about six months,⁽⁷⁾ he met hardship with his mother becoming mentally ill, but he met his second wife⁽⁸⁾ after just about six years [in 1843]. And nearly three years later, this wife would run out on him.

In 1844, Max Stirner authored *The Unique and Its Property*, and published it through Otto Wigand in Leipzig. And although it was the subject of much critical discussion for a time, the book was banned. Due to the ever-approaching uproar of the 1848 revolutions, its reputation disappeared without a moment's notice.

With the publication of his book, the doors to the school where Stirner had been teaching would close. And while, for a short time, he was able to make a living thanks to the kindness of Wigand by doing translation work, his poverty finally got the better of him and he did not know where he could turn. Finally, in 1855, he was placed in debtors' prison.

Thus forgotten by the world, he died on July 25, 1856, without pity from anyone.

III.

First, to fully comprehend Stirner's "unique one," we must go back to Hegel and then to his two or three successors.

In all likelihood, Hegel was a European Restorationist⁽⁹⁾ court scholar. As such, the philosophy that he taught in Berlin was grossly conservative and reactionary, and most of his students embraced authoritarianism. However, his method of philosophy was also extremely revolutionary. And this double-edged sword, the Dialectic, divided the rest of his students into camps over every which authority.

The first movement sought to secularize the foundations of social life away from theology. The origins of religion were examined historically, a philosophical critique of religiosity arose, and attacks on Christian morality appeared. Strauss' *The Life of Jesus*, Bruno Bauer's *Critique of the Gospels*, and Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* were the three major representatives of this defiance of religious authority.

"The Divine Being (the Godhead) is nothing other than a shadow of the attributes of man reflected in the heavens."⁽¹⁰⁾

With this, Feuerbach turned theology into anthropology and the Christian religion into the religion of Humanity—Humanism. However, upon leaving its sheath, the blade of the Dialectic does not stop at religious authority. Here, perhaps, Max Stirner's *The Unique and Its Property* cannot help but emerge.

⁽⁷⁾ This is incorrect. Stirner's first wife, Agnes Clara Kunigunde Burtz, died in childbirth nearly nine months after their marriage in 1838.

⁽⁸⁾ Named Marie Dähnhardt.

⁽⁹⁾ European Restorationism: A term describing, from 1814 to the early 1860s, integral alliances between major European countries beginning from the Congress of Vienna's reactionary effort to restore Europe's Christian and monarchical hegemony to its prior status quo before the French Revolution. It is the first phase of what is known as the Concert of Europe, of which the Revolutions of 1848 would challenge and mark a decline thereof.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Seemingly a paraphrased quotation from Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. Pulling from Marian Evans' 1881 2nd edition English translation, the closest direct quotation I could find is as follows:

The divine being is nothing else than the human being [...] contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being. All the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature.

Stirner went even further and toppled Feuerbach's idol of the Human, and erected "the unique" or "the I." He was, of course, anti-Christian, but, at the same time, he was also anti-moral and anti-social. For him, he rejected any and all authority alien to "the unique."

IV.

The central idea of "the unique" can be, first of all, summarized as follows: There is no such thing as the Human, one does not need to follow anything alien to oneself—neither God nor the Human, and there is no right whatsoever beyond one's personal right.

"Your head is filled with ghosts; you have a crack in your cranium! [...] You have a fixed idea. ...[T]he authority of the people, which one mustn't jostle [...]; the authority of virtue, which one mustn't even lift a single finger against; ...aren't these fixed ideas, which possess and imprison into madhouses you, whom I ought to pity, you arch-fools!?"⁽¹¹⁾

These fixed, ghostly ideas—or, more specifically, what is referred to as society, morality, religion, and so on—are, as Stirner puts it, bloodsucking vampires that feed on the blood of the living. Until one uproots these vampires from their heart, until one refuses to obey them, freedom cannot be gained. And this freedom cannot be realized unless we take ourselves to be the beginning, middle, and end of all things. Thereby, when all existing societal fetters are severed, all that remains is just each individual's 'I'. This is a sense of the unique.

"I am unique. There is nothing alien to me." *Ich hab' mein' Sach' auf Nichts gestellt.*⁽¹²⁾ Moral imperatives are, after all, nothing more than a delusion. Yet, there are those who, like bear trainers, rule, direct, and instruct the people of the world in the name of these delusions, making the innocent, unknowing people dance to the clamoring sounds of pipe and drum.

V.

Stirner's individualism is, indeed, quite extreme, but he does not disapprove of altruistic sentiments; he just refuses to give them any obligatory or coercive status:

"I love human beings. But I love them with the awareness of egoism; I love because it makes me happy, because it pleases me. And as such, I haven't the slightest wish to see them suffer. Since it is easier to win people's hearts with warmth than through cruelty."⁽¹³⁾

⁽¹¹⁾ It should be noted that a translation of Stirner's *The Unique and Its Property* into Japanese wouldn't occur until eight years following this publication, in 1920 with Tsuji Jun's English-to-Japanese translation. This quotation from Ōsugi Sakae is likely a paraphrased translation of his own making, which I have translated therefrom to reflect his own sentiments—as I will do with every quotation from here on. Instead of cramming everything into footnotes, however, there will be an endnote table with each corresponding cross-comparison between English, German, and Japanese translations.

For this paraphrased quotation: See endnote table, row one.

⁽¹²⁾ *Ich hab' mein' Sach' auf Nichts gestellt*: I have based my affair on nothing.

⁽¹³⁾ While the second to last sentence is a paraphrase, the last sentence of this paragraph is seemingly Ōsugi's

“I have fellow-feeling with every feeling being; their torment torments me, their pleasure pleasures me as well: I can swiftly put an end to their misery, but I cannot torture them gradually. This is because I do not wish to lose the tranquility of my own conscience, my own sentiments of perfection. We are not sinful as religion teaches us. We are, all of us, perfect.”⁽¹⁴⁾

“I have no such thing as a “calling” or “mission,” any more than a flower does. For I am nothing but myself. I just only claim the right to live for my sake, to take pleasure in the world, and to live happily.”⁽¹⁵⁾

“Thus, all that I can take and all that I can hold onto is mine, is my property.”⁽¹⁶⁾

“And for that reason, any means are acceptable to me. But whatever right of mine, I create solely and alone through my power.”⁽¹⁷⁾

“If a dog sees a bone in another dog’s possession and silently holds back, it is because the dog feels himself to be too weak. As for the human being, it respects the other person’s right to the bone. This is taken to be humane. And if one acts otherwise, the action is considered to be barbaric or egoistic.”⁽¹⁸⁾

“Why needlessly petition that property is theft; form an association of egoists.”⁽¹⁹⁾

VI.

For forty years, Stirner’s famous book had been buried beneath dust in an obscure corner of a library shelf, unnoticed and forgotten. However, thought moves forward. Eventually, this unknown maverick came to be recognized as one of the most radical thinkers of his time. And still to this day, we can find in such the very words and expressions that people are searching for. Beginning in 1882, a German edition of it was re-released. Soon, French, English, and Italian translations appeared. Translations were made for other European languages, too. And after ten years of hard work, John Henry MacKay wrote *Max Stirner: Sein Leben und sein Werk*⁽²⁰⁾ in 1897 and published *Max Stirner’s Kleinere Schriften*⁽²¹⁾ in 1898, which provided a considerable advantage to new researchers.

addition. For this paraphrased quotation: See endnote table, row two.

⁽¹⁴⁾ The third sentence in this paragraph is, seemingly again, Ōsugi’s addition, stitching the first quotation to the second. However, this third sentence conflicts with Stirner’s distaste of conscience given its often sanctified employment by the idealistic towards the end of self-tyrannizing obedience. For this paraphrased quotation: See endnote table, row three.

⁽¹⁵⁾ While each sentence in this paragraph is a paraphrase, the last two sentences are more of a paraphrase than the first sentence, a direct quotation of which I cannot find. For this paraphrased quotation: See endnote table, row four.

⁽¹⁶⁾ For this paraphrased quotation: See endnote table, row five.

⁽¹⁷⁾ For this paraphrased quotation: See endnote table, row six.

⁽¹⁸⁾ For this paraphrased quotation: See endnote table, row seven.

⁽¹⁹⁾ For this paraphrased quotation: See endnote table, row eight.

⁽²⁰⁾ Translated in 2005 by Hubert Kennedy into *Max Stirner: His Life and Work*.

⁽²¹⁾ “Max Stirner’s Smaller Writings”: Containing essays and reviews by Stirner that have largely been translated into English by disparate translators. As of now, unfortunately no complete English translation of the book yet exists.

I admit that there are quite a few fallacies in this discussion of Stirner. But I will not elaborate upon them here and now. Still, when I look back on the conditions in Germany at the time this book was written, I cannot help but think of the book's tremendous historical and philosophical value.

In all the writings of the Hegelian Left, you will not find a more vehement defiance of the suffocating, coercive rule of the Prussian State before 1848. Nor can one find anything afterward quite as damningly critical of the liberal's cowardice at the time for knowing nothing of gaining rights through power.

The freedom that the liberals of his generation demanded was, to Stirner, nothing more than just alms thrown at beggars. For him, he based his freedom and property solely within his own power in securing them. J. L. Walker, who wrote the Introduction to Byington's English translation of the book, says that Stirner laid the "philosophical foundation for political liberty," but this is a complete misunderstanding of the true spirit of the book. Stirner had nothing but contempt for political liberty. If one first had to beg for it, he was one who insisted on refusing to accept such freedom. So-called liberals, who know nothing about securing what already belongs to them through their own power and walk around begging for their own rights, liberties, and independence, were, indeed, the ones he most heavily damned with his pen.

Individualists, who fear coercion and self-efface themselves, will pity and hate me for this. But in this respect, I think the vigorously individualistic philosophies of Nietzsche and Max Stirner, who preached the religion of power, need to be reiterated again and again in our contemporary Japanese society.

Translator's Endnote Table:

Row #

| | |
|-----|---|
| (1) | Man, your head is haunted; you have bats in your belfry! [...] You have a fixed idea! [T]he majes |
| (2) | I also love human beings, not just a few |
| (3) | I have <i>fellow-feeling</i> with every feeling be |
| (4) | A human b |
| (5) | |
| (6) | What I |
| (7) | A dog sees the bo |
| (8) | |

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