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# The Theory of the Individual: Stirner's Savage Thought

Alfredo M. Bonanno  
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Personal communication with the translator

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a supersession that sums up the old strengths in itself, destroying them in the synthesis that produces precisely the new. But considering it well, can we become new? Is the egoist a new human being? According to Stirner's own analysis, she is not, she cannot be so. But if he cannot be so, if he can only be what she is, and only on the condition of not making aims outside himself sacred, then he cannot ever become "new". But the Hegelian *Aufhebung* actually produced a new thing, made the old disappear. The egoist destroys the old human being, destroys every residue of past truth; she alone is truth. But if this destruction is carried to its ultimate conclusion, it even destroys itself, needing its own foundation to be real. This is supplied by individualism that very quickly finds quiet, one way or another, in the society of egoists or in the singular ferocity of the solitary.

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to set up house in the sphere of his image, sadly reflected in the deforming mirror of daily life, even though safeguarded by thousands of mechanisms that are completely other than individualist.

What “supersession” are we talking about? Interesting question. Unfortunately, I think Stirner’s supersession, aimed at constructing the egoist, is destined to fall into the trap of the foundation. The egoist is either constructed as such and once the result is obtained is enclosed in its egoism; or one moves toward egoism, thus one rebels and gains, one appropriates, uses and all the rest, but not just in order to form one’s egoism, but to make something of this egoism as such, i.e., to enjoy oneself, to really live one’s life.

Stirner posed this problem and resolved it by affirming that the aim must remain within the egoist I. Thus, if the individualist is to avoid becoming the cause of other, ie, not her own, she must himself be his own aim. In other words, she must simply live the best that she can. But this is not a radical resolution, insofar as the supersession to the definite individualist phase, in a clear way, doesn’t take into consideration that one can only enjoy something that one knows, and one can only possess something that one knows. Stirner himself affirms that involuntary possession, like involuntary enjoyment, are only lesser moments of life. But it is easily understood that knowing, the indispensable antechamber of all enjoyment and all living, cannot be locked into a definitive foundation, but must be continually put into play. There is no moment in which knowledge can be considered closed. Therefore there is no moment in which one can be called individualistically complete.

**Another way to consider “supersession”.** The philosophy of the twentieth century responded to the Nietzschean heritage and proposed a concept of supersession that was different from the Hegelian one that presupposes the dialectical mechanism, the *Aufhebung*, which one inevitably finds again even in the formation of the egoist as Stirner proposes it.

This new concept consists in not leaving anything behind, in exceeding starting from one’s own condition of need. Otherwise supersession would be deprived of meaning. This *Überwindung*, revived by Heidegger in some passages of his work, certainly leads back to Nietzsche. If the egoist is the new human being, he needs

## Introduction

My reading of Stirner as philosopher of the *Unique* and the direct itinerary of reconstructing a “theory of the individual”, in a manner that varies through the other writings of mine presented here, at least seems to me to demonstrate a coherence of purpose that legitimates giving them a new life together here.

In the current frozen panorama of anarchist readings, turning to the sources of *The Ego and Its Own* is always a radical shock. If nothing else, this explains the persistent fortune of a strange book that would not have obliged itself to relieve any worries in the watchful forecasts of power or taken any interest, or at least very little, in the few readers it was likely to have. No prediction was ever less attentive.

Often it occurs to me to read a few pages of *The Ego and Its Own*, even when I am intent on thoroughly going to the depths of topics of another sort. And it is always a short path over unknown territory.

Stirner is a sharpened blade that penetrates in depth, that allows no respite, that doesn't stop halfway, but gets to the bottom, suddenly. And he does it only with thought. If events are there at times, they are there in order to avert the attention, bring the feet back down to the ground and thus perhaps provoke a smile of satisfaction. Not thought. It moves in a linear fashion, cuts away the bridges with reality and with the respectability of intellectual appearances that yield to events before having their say about them, washed out and weak, that then make all the obeisances of apology if, by chance, they happen to strike a nerve. The raw and naked thought of Stirner is a barbaric act of rare ferocity, excessive, the classical elephant that with its pachydermic mass makes space for itself in the philosophical china shop.

A tutor exists, and this is obvious, but he is a strange tutor, that Hegel who sharpened blades himself, to then stop halfway, carefully blunting the most dangerous part and, in fact, building the new pillars of power on that point. Stirner goes beyond this point (Marx instead took a further step backward in relation to his tutor — this is

one finds in his basic works all the elements that incubate, often quite thoughtlessly, in models that project in advance instincts of revolt, desires to conquer the world, spurs to pleasure, use of the other, ownership of the means with which the world is overburdened, and so on, in a colorful montage, agreeable to aggressive spirits. After all, life is not rationed. It is always better to rip it out in large chunks and enjoy it even at the cost of getting one's hands dirty.

**The need for a foundation.** Behind all Stirner's work, and not just the fundamental book, there stand the need for a foundation, a basis from which to start. The enumeration of all the “false” foundations, such as “God”, “man”, “freedom”, “truth”, etc., corresponds to another list of “true” foundations, i.e., the “nothing”, the “I”, “self-liberation”, “property”. Of course, these two lists, which correspond exactly, could be lengthened considerably, and in the triadic scheme of the Hegelian dialectic, they can find their “supersession” in the third phase, that of synthesis, in which the “egoist”, the “individualist”, emerges and consolidates itself.

All of Stirner's labor is directed toward building this foundation and enlarging it, passing from the egoist to the society of egoists, developing analyses of great interest that have formed and in the future will again form the eternal fortune of this philosopher.

I want to say one thing here, which I will develop from this point. Like every foundation, the egoist also succumbs to Stirner's critical considerations. If the possibility is not admitted that once this foundation is formed, once the path of revolt against every earthly and divine institution is undertaken, once the individualist is found in his most intimate and vital aspect, one could not head toward a further critical vision, proceeding beyond, toward other perspectives, always more distant and risky, precisely because they lack any foundation, if this is not admitted, the egoist will herself be a “possessed” person, yet another “spook”. Stirner is the one who supplies us with the means for reaching this conclusion. But he carefully avoids proposing it since this would have broken the sealing mechanism of the triadic dialectic.

This is why the strong man, the courageous victor of a thousand battles, even with himself, the prophet of prospects for liberation, often ends his life in the misery of a fictitious rebellion, destined

what the matter of the head and the feet of the dialectic consists of), a going beyond that the reader almost doesn't notice. After Stirner there is no other possible use of thought than that which is on this side of the barbaric rarefaction of civilization and its conditions of compromise that he traces, in a diligent manner, almost without making us aware of it.

The next step can only be action, the reign of chatter has become unspeakable.

"I only want to be I. I despise nature, people and their laws, human society and its love, and sever every general relationship with it, even that of language. To all the claims of your duty, to all the designations of your categorical justice, I oppose the imperturbability of my I. And already I make a concession, if I make use of language. I am 'unspeakable', 'I manifest only myself'"

The thought that puts an end to the chattering is passed off as something primitive, not sufficiently cultured, something that does not know courtesy and manners. This is why it is considered barbarous, why it is limited at times, in terms of the linguistic orthodoxy of the academy, to stammering in the impossibility of continuing to talk about the great emotional pressure that remains behind, inside, unable to come out. But why should it come out in a further distinction of the Hegelian mechanism of thought, this too, the final element of common understanding, which ends up being thrown overboard? Even neo-Kantians try to ask, who was he, and what did he want from their coordinated chatter, considering that, after all, he paid little attention to their method.

I'm not trying to say that anarchists, on their side, have all taken into account what it means to read Stirner. Sometimes, for reasons not so different from those of the academy, they read with the same desire for the comforting funeral dirge that gives cadence to the previous moments at rest. And why should these readings proceed differently? Perhaps because anarchists have a hidden philosopher's stone, some secret that throws light into the territory of theory? I don't think so, at least not if this means a kind of privilege produced by the simple fact that one considers oneself an anarchist as

## Contribution to a Critical Reading of Stirner

One could easily write a small treatise on the history of anarchist individualism using only quotes taken from *The Ego and Its Own*. It would certainly be empty work, but in a few instances, this is all that some students of Stirner have done. A questionable affair for people called to deeply examine themes and problems, but also a sad affair when superficial and enthusiastic revolutionaries do substantially the same thing, because it has negative practical consequences.

Stirner's entire work lends itself to distortions of this type, and thus can be used to satisfy easy palates and minds in need of tutelage. Now, this shouldn't seem strange, since these readers and the image of themselves that they love to project, seem distant from the human prototype in need. The Stirnerian individualist loves to cry to the four winds about placing his right to life and joy in himself and in his strength. He is satisfied affirming that every "cause" outside of his "I" is extraneous to her and therefore she denies it, identifying his cause only in what is his, i.e., it is a unique cause, as his "I" is unique.

The appeal to revolt has fascinated many anarchists, and couldn't be otherwise. It fascinated this writer and continues to fascinate him, as an anarchist and as a man who has dedicated his life to revolution, but fascination with something does not have to dull the critical capacity. Otherwise, every declaration of principle falls under the razor that Stirner himself prepared along with other philosophers. It's a razor sharper than any other. All sanctification is a phantom that leads me far from myself, and thus, definitively becomes something contrary to myself. And what if this were the sanctification of one's "I" itself? What if it were the sanctification of nothing?

Here I would like to propose a critique of this basic thesis contained in *The Ego and Its Own*, but I mainly want to confront the problem of revolt as an end in itself. This misunderstanding becomes more serious, to the extent to which its possible unmasking becomes more difficult. Stirner provides a very important occasion. In fact

a category of existence, which consolidates in the deep and uncontaminated purity of the refusal of power, and says so. Stirner would have sneered at this as well.

Perfectly fulfilling anarchist principles.

*Catania, August 20, 1998,  
Alfredo M. Bonanno*

He says that history can only appear as a series of contingent events only from the point of view of the individual, the finite intellect, which measures history by the standards of its personal, even if respectable, ideals. History is rational: a divine will rules powerfully in the world.

The aim of world history is that the spirit achieves the knowledge of what it truly is. This spirit is the world spirit that is embodied in the spirits of peoples that follow one another as the vanguard of history.

The means of world history are individuals with their passions. Hegel does not condemn the passions without which nothing great has been accomplished in the world. But the world spirit is always the spirit of a specific people: the action of the individual will be much more effective the more thoroughly it conforms to the spirit of the people to which the individual belongs.

Hegel recognizes in tradition all the necessitating force of an absolute reality. But tradition is not just conservation; it is also progress. As tradition finds its tools in conservative individuals, so progress finds its tools in heroes or world-historical individuals. Apparently the latter do nothing but follow their passions and ambitions, but it is an artifice of reason that makes use of them to realize its ends.

The providential design of history is revealed in the victory that the people that have conceived the highest concept of the spirit win from time to time.

Now since the ultimate aim of world history is the realization of the freedom of the spirit, and since this freedom is realized in the state, the state is the supreme goal. The history of the world is thus the succession of state forms that constitute moments of an absolute becoming. Its three moments: the oriental world, the Greco-Roman world, the Germanic world, are three moments of the realization of the freedom of the spirit in the world.



## Max Stirner, Philosopher of the *Unique One*

A discussion about Stirner, a philosopher of few words who poses a decidedly unspeakable concept at the center of his thought, a concept that fights against being expounded: the concept of the Unique one.

In fact, this philosopher has been used in all kinds of ways, has been cooked in so many styles. He is used by the academy, but also on the streets; he is used by professional philosophers, but also by revolutionaries. In a lecture of about an hour, it is difficult to give an idea of the complexity of Stirner's thought. I will attempt to create a meeting of the minds with you: a mutual effort at approaching a fascinating problem.

As I said, Stirner can be understood in many ways. *The Ego and Its Own* can be read as a romance; it can be read, with good reason, as a book that technically has aspects of philosophical analysis.

My endeavor today is somewhere in the middle. I will try to give account of the roots on which and from which *The Ego and Its Own* originates, and I will try to show the possible uses to be found in reading this book.

Stirner fits into the region of Hegelian philosophy. Today, distant in time, beyond what is told in books on the history of philosophy, it is difficult to develop an idea of what the frightful mechanism of Hegelian thought might mean, what that mechanism succeeded in solidifying in German culture at that time, and the extent to which it would later manage to carve into the history of philosophical thought considered in the totality of its development. One man (Hegel) capable of bringing a flux of intuitions that flowed through the entire history of human thought, or rather the entire history of western philosophical thought, like a subterranean river into the light.

Let's take a small step backwards together. As you know, Kant is considered to be a crossroads. He summarizes the conditions of previous philosophical thought, but is limited to pointing out the things

But the culminating moment of subjective spirituality is when this spirit becomes free. It becomes so through practical activity. This is how the human spirit becomes the will to freedom.

**The objective spirit.** The will to freedom is realized here in historical institutions. This self-realization occurs in three moments: a) In the right<sup>2</sup>, the objective spirit is a person, formed through the possession of property; b) In morality, it is the subject provided with a specific will that must still become the will for universal good; c) In the ethical, where this conflict is overcome, the obligation to be and being coincide.

The ethical essence is realized: a) in the family, which involves a natural moment, because it is based on the difference of the sexes; b) in society, which involves specific interests; c) in the state, unity of the family and civil society.

**Absolute spirit.** This is the final realization of the spirit. This is the sphere in which it is realized as the ethical, i.e., as the spirit of a people. In absolute spirit, the spirit of a people is manifested as itself and understood in the forms of art, religion and philosophy. a) Art: the first category of the absolute spirit. b) Religion: the second category. c) Philosophy: the third category. The rational becoming of reality culminates and is concluded in it. It is the unity of art and religion. In philosophy, the Idea thinks itself as Idea and achieves absolute self-consciousness. In this way, the idea is the object not only of philosophy, but also of the history of philosophy, which is the philosophy of philosophy.

**The philosophy of history.** The principle of the identity of the rational and the real leads Hegel to identify the chronological development of reality in every field with the becoming absolute of the Idea. In the stages through which art, religion and philosophy have passed, Hegel recognized the immutable categories of absolute spirit.

<sup>2</sup> Or law, the Italian word "diritto" can mean either "right" as in legal or civil rights or "law", though the term "legge" is more often used for "law". This makes the connection between rights and law, and thus the state which makes and enforces laws much clearer. — translator

that are the constituent conditions of all possible future metaphysics, of every possible development of philosophical thought. After Kant and his reductive intentions, the great German philosophical idealism is born (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel).

The problem that Kant leaves is that of understanding what is behind the phenomenon, what the human being might be able to comprehend beyond the phenomenological appearance of reality. In fact, still today in every day life, we see the consequences and reach of this question that seems in appearance to be a technical intricacy. If we consider reality, as we know it, we have a creation of our own. There is no object, there is no event, that was not invented, we could say, created by man. Nature itself is a human production, in so far as it is a cataloguing, an archiving carried out through the cognitive processes of the human being. What is there behind this cognitive apparatus, what is this thing that stands behind, what is the noumenon that stands behind the phenomenon, what is the so-called thing in itself?

These are the questions that the heirs of Kant pose themselves. And the answers, concisely (apart from a transition period: Maimon, Beck, etc.), are as follows: first, the response of Fichte, the capacity of the I to construct and encompass, to take, in reality; second, that of Schelling (the early Schelling, the period in which Schelling was, in a certain sense, Hegel's tutor), the capacity of nature and art to explain reality (and thence the second moment, the I-nature); third, that of Hegel, the capacity to sum reality up in a new synthesis.

Why am I speaking of these matters that in a way show signs of textbook scholasticism? Because ultimately Stirner is not comprehensible if one does not place him in the philosophical climate of his time, a climate marked by the Hegelian theoretical dimension.

Therefore, it is necessary to forcefully delve deeply into the structure of Hegelian thought, very complex thought that I will try to summarize in a few words. First of all, there is a great voyage of consciousness, which is described in *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*. The sensible certainty of the I is presented as the only possible tool for knowing reality. It is a poor tool insofar as it only renders the existence of a generic I capable of desiring. But the perception of reality, as the capacity to define the object of knowledge in the sphere

**The concept.** Essence as reality in action becomes concept. Not the concept in contrast to reality, the purely intellectual concept, but the concept of reason, i.e., the living spirit of reality. First, this concept is subjective or purely formal, then it is objective, manifested in the basic aspects of nature, and then it is Idea, the unity of objective and subjective, self-conscious reason. The idea is the ultimate category of logic, the totality of reality in all the richness of its determinations.

**The philosophy of nature.** Therefore, Hegel drives what is finite, accidental, contingent, linked to time and space, as well as individuality itself insofar as it is irreducible to reason, out from reality and into appearance. But all this must find a place, a justification since it is real, at least in appearance. It thus finds a place in nature.

Nature is the idea in the form of being other, and so, as such, is essentially exteriority, the decline of the idea from itself.

Therefore, it is absurd to try to know god from the works of nature; the lowest manifestations of spirit serve this aim better.

**The philosophy of the spirit.** Spirit is the idea that, after becoming estranges from itself, returns to itself. The prerequisite of spirit is thus nature, which reveals its final goal in spirit and vanishes into spirit as exteriority in order to become subjectivity and freedom.

The development of spirit is realized through three moments that don't remain as specific realities, but are encompassed again in the highest moment.

**The subjective spirit.** This is the cognitive spirit.<sup>1</sup> It is the object of anthropology and remains attached to the individuality and natural (geographical, physical, etc.) conditions. It is consciousness and forms the object of the phenomenology of the spirit, insofar as it reflects on itself and poses itself as self-consciousness. In this way, it passes from the consciousness of its singularity to universal self-consciousness, which is reason.

So subjective spirit is also spirit in the narrow sense and forms the object of psychology.

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<sup>1</sup> In Italian, as in many other languages, the word "spirito" can be used to refer to mind as well as spirit, though there are other words for mind (as well as spirit) in Italian. This aspect of Hegelian thought connects the two concepts. — translator

**Logic.** If the *Phenomenology* is a novel, the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* is a history. Here the categories are developed, the instances necessary for the realization of infinite consciousness.

Hegel refers to infinite reason with the name of Idea and characterizes History, or the becoming of the Idea, in three moments: a) Logic or the science of the idea in itself and for itself; b) Philosophy of nature or the science of the idea in its being other; c) Philosophy of the spirit as the science of the idea that returns from its alienation to itself, i.e., to its complete self-consciousness. This three-level partition is drawn from ancient neo-platonism, especially from Proclo.

Hegel says that logic is the science of the idea in itself and for itself. Its content is thus immanent to it. It is absolute truth, god itself. Thus, the thoughts of logic are not subjective thoughts, to which reality remains extraneous and contrasting, but objective thoughts that express reality itself in its necessary essence. But reason in this sense is not finite intellect.

Here Hegel distinguishes three moments of reason: a) Intellectual, thought is stopped in rigid determinations; b) Dialectical, it clarifies how these determinations are unilateral and should be related to the opposite or negative determinations (the propulsive moment); c) Speculative, it shows the unity of the determinations in their opposition.

Let's look at how logic develops:

**The concept of being.** Deprived of content, it is absolutely undetermined, like nothing. The concept of the identity of being and nothing is becoming. Here is the first triad: being, nothing, becoming. This is how Hegel solves the problem of beginning. When the determined being comes out from the absolutely indeterminate being by becoming and so discovers itself, it has reached the passage to essence.

**The concept of essence.** When essence recognizes itself as identical to itself, i.e., when it discovers itself, it has essence as the reason for existence. In this way, through essence it becomes existence, and phenomenon is born. From the dialectical union of reason and existence, one gets reality in action.

of its specificity is based on an ability to furnish this multiple totality with a unity, a process the intellect looks after. Thus, the intellect is what establishes a difference, in perception, between the object and the process of its recognition, the supercession of every specification in the perceptive unity. This completely resolves/dissolves perception in consciousness, that thus becomes self-consciousness.

Self-consciousness has a history of its own, inasmuch as it is broken into a series of forms and phases that develop progressively. Keep in mind that we will find these phases, which may be clear from some standpoints and not from others, in Stirner's thought with the same schematization developed in Hegel's thought (ancient, medieval and modern world). In the ancient world, the antithesis between the slave and the master, the conflict, the life and death struggle from which servile consciousness emerges the winner. In the middle ages, this consciousness, servile and victorious, is unsure of itself, and so unfortunately unhappy; it seeks a greater synthesis and finds it in asceticism., in religion. Finally, the modern era, in which self-consciousness finds itself in the dimension of reason, in other words, in other words, that dimension which is realized as such in the institutions of reality: the family, society, the state.

Parallel to this development, which we find in *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, one of Hegel's most inspiring books, another development of Hegel's thought takes place, that contained in *Logic*. Let's keep in mind that Hegel's book of logic is different from any other book of logic. It has nothing to do with Aristotle's *Organon*, for example. Hegel states that logic is the ideal, the vicissitudes of logic are the vicissitudes of the ideal, and thus the vicissitudes of the ideal are the vicissitudes of God, because logic is God. *Logic* assumes that any movement is distributed in three phases, reflecting in this the preceding tripartition. We have looked at the preceding phases (ancient world, medieval world, modern world), and now we see them reflected in the phases of logic: as the first phase, the ideal in and for itself, i.e., a prisoner within its own enclosure; then, the escape, firstly in the phase of nature, the ideal alienated in outward appearance; and then in the philosophy of the spirit, the ideal, that having returned to itself, supercedes the phases of philosophical enclosure and objective alienation. Hegel often recalls the experience of the

time when he first saw the extremely beautiful sight of the Alps and felt no emotion at all: For him that spectacle did not exist, it meant nothing to him, it was the estrangement of the I.

The philosophy of the spirit: the science of the ideal that returns to itself, beyond alienation. In the first phase, there is the ideal in itself and for itself. Existence appears to a certain extent, indefinable, inasmuch as it is not distinguishable from nothingness, is not separable from nothingness, appears as the confusion of being and nothingness. It is from the mixture of these two movements that becoming comes out. From becoming springs the essence of existence, the phenomenon, that which is visible, the perceivable dimension; and from this contrast that is superceded, the concept comes out, reality as essence for itself, the ideal.

The second phase of the *Logic*, as we know, is nature, the third is spirit. The subjective spirit, the tiniest spirit, the most reduced spirit, anthropology, the science of objective conditions, of daily life, day after day; but this objective spirit is posed as self-consciousness, as we have seen, in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, the voyage begins, it becomes self-consciousness for itself and finally becomes free. And in what does the subjective spirit become free? Do you recall the sign at the entrance of Nazi concentration camps? It becomes free in work, it becomes free through work, it becomes free in practical realizations; it becomes free in the state.

Here the foundation of all future reaction, of all future conservation of thought, of the methods and institutions of the great Germany that was being born from the small extremely militarized Prussia, is truly built. It is through this little provincial professor, who held his classes in the Prussian dialect, that the central seed of what would be the reactionary thought of the future developed. This is why even today both sides, progressives and reactionaries, discuss this question: the vicissitudes of the subjective spirit; in what way the subject is able to liberate itself exclusively through the acceptance of the institutions; in what way it becomes free in practical activity, in what way it becomes free and so acquires the desire to free itself, the desire for freedom. And in what way the desire for freedom becomes objective spirit, no longer subjective objective spirit that travels through history; that is realized in the concrete and spatial

implies a life-or-death risk not for the self-consciousnesses, but for their freedom. It terminates with the subordination of one to the other, in the slave-master relationship. When the slave achieves consciousness of her dignity and independence, then the lord falls and responsibility for history is left in the hands of slave consciousness.

**Stoicism and skepticism. Further movements of liberation of self-consciousness.** In stoicism, self-consciousness wants to free itself from the bonds of nature, and so despises it. But it only achieves and abstract freedom in this way, since the reality of nature is not negated, but merely despised. In skepticism, this reality is negated, and thus all reality is placed in the consciousness itself. But this consciousness is still the individual consciousness, in conflict with other consciousnesses. This leads to unhappy consciousness.

**Unhappy consciousness.** He sees the presence of two consciousnesses in this contrast: divine consciousness and human consciousness. This is the situation of medieval religious consciousness. The reunification of these two consciousnesses is carried out through devotion and asceticism, consciousness recognizes being itself in the other as well, and thus closes a cycle.

**The absolute subject.** The cycle of self-consciousness made into reason opens. It knows that external reality is itself, but still hasn't justified this knowledge. This leads to a restless searching through the relative phases of naturalism, the renaissance and empiricism. The wanderings end when self-consciousness achieves the phase of the ethical.

For Hegel, the ethical is consciousness that recognizes itself as reason that has become aware of itself, because it has been realized in the historical-political institutions of a people, and above all in the state. But before the ethical, self-consciousness, disappointed by science, seeks life and pleasure. It thus seeks to base itself on the laws of the heart, but then it realizes that this is not felt by all and so it seeks virtue. This leads to a contrast that makes it understand that there is nothing left for it to do but to free itself from individuality. This takes place when it places itself within the state, where every internal split disappears and where peace and security are achieved for themselves.

are not opposed to reality and are thus incapable of accommodating the richness of its particulars, but are reality itself, which doesn't exclude contradictions, but rather mediates them in order to recognize itself, in the end, as faithful only to itself. Thus, reality, reason's synonym, shows itself to be dialectical.

The phenomenology of the spirit is the fictionalized history of the consciousness comes out of its individuality through wandering, conflict and splits, and therefore unhappiness and sorrow, and achieves universality and recognizes itself as reason that exists actively in the determinations of the real.

Since there is no other way for philosophy to elevate itself as science except the demonstration of its becoming, phenomenology prepares for philosophy.

**Sensible certainty.** This is the point of departure of phenomenology. It is the poorest certainty, since it only renders *this* thing certain, insofar as it is present to us now. Therefore this certainty does not depend upon the thing, but on the I that considers it. Sensible certainty is thus a certainty only for the universal I.

**Perception.** The same goes for the return to the universal I. In fact, an object cannot be perceived as unique, in the multiplicity of its qualities (white, cubical, savory) if the I doesn't take the affirmed unity onto itself, i.e., if this I doesn't recognize that he established the unity of the object.

**Intellect.** It recognizes in the object only a phenomenon to which the essence of the object, which is beyond the sensible, is contrasted. Now since the phenomenon is only in the consciousness, and what is beyond phenomenon is either nothing or it is something for the consciousness, this has completely resolved the object in itself and it has become the consciousness of itself, self-consciousness. The degrees of consciousness — sensible certainty, perception and intellect — are dissolved in self-consciousness. But this self-consciousness is also considered as other than itself, as object. For this reason, it is separated into various, independent self-consciousnesses. This is where the self-consciousness of the human world originates.

**The history of self-consciousness. Lordship and slavery. First pattern, typical of the ancient world.** The two self-consciousnesses must struggle to achieve the full awareness of their being. Struggle

institutions of history; that is realized in the legal right where the subject becomes a person, holder of rights, holder of rights, with the mark of property; that is realized as proprietary subject; that is realized in morality, as through the moral conception it acquires freedom in the will or the will in freedom, and from the synthesis of these two elements, in ethics, in the objective dimension in which ethics is realized: the family, society, the state. [. . .] The state is the ethical essence of reality. The ethical state of the fascists originates here in this Hegelian analysis.

From the union and supercession of the subjective spirit and the objective spirit, the absolute spirit emerges. This final concretization of the spirit is realized in its three moments: in art, in religion and through the union of art and religion in philosophy. The conclusion of Hegelian thought is self-consciousness, absolute spirit, philosophy. Philosophy realized. This is why Hegel, without any shadow of self-exaltation, could say in complete sincerity: "I do not teach a philosophy; I am philosophy." He thought that with him the process of the development of philosophy came to an end.

This discourse at least allows us to understand one thing. There is a great moment in Hegelian thought. It is this: bringing back into the official institutions that which had until that time (or at least until Fichte if not Schelling) had been the heritage of an underground thought that many people who were not accepted at the official level had developed during the course of the previous two thousand years. There is no doubt that Hegel is connected with German mysticism (for example through Franz von Baader), with the mystics who had gone into the light of the sun (like Hamann, Kant's black beast, in the restricted sphere of small ascetic and mystical cliques, the currents of the dissident sects of Protestantism, like the Pietists); instances of purity of thought and mainly a kind of importation of the dimensions of the infinite into the finite.

But what was there in these men of faith that made them face persecution, if not a deep desire for freedom? (Consider, for example, the massacres for which Luther himself was responsible, with which peasant revolts were repressed). These people brought to light the desire for communism. Certainly in a limited and circumscribed way, since these were not people who read much or visited universities,

but they certainly felt the desire for communism, for life in common, for free life, the desire to negate exploitation, the obligation of work, poverty, suffering and pain. Hegel had the capacity to bring all this into institutionalized thought, to blend it with traditional philosophy and make it become the possible terrain for future development, because upon it he subsequently built the definitive state of tomorrow, the all-inclusive state, the state capable of engulfing, justifying and thus nullifying subversive moments. This concept, this process, this philosophical product, is due to Hegel.

Hegel died in 1831 and left a heritage that was not well-understood from the start, but that fed a debate for at least 20 years (with poor understandings and many approximations, also due to the drafts of his works), debates that are reflected in the condition of the development of Germany, but also in those of Europe in general.

Within what is described as the “Hegelian debate”, the most interesting positions for us are those of the so-called “Hegelian left”. Extremely broad discussions: the “old” and “young” Hegelians the right, the left, the center, positions that were patterned after the divisions of the French parliament. This problem interests us here only as a passage to bring us to Stirner who, from the philosophical point of view, is located within the Hegelian left. It is of interest to take a look at the critiques the left brings to the central philosophical concept of Hegel which is summarized in the idea that the absolute spirit is realized in history in its principle expression, i.e., in the state.

The first of these critiques, and certainly the most important, is that of Feuerbach. First, we should point out that all the exponents of the Hegelian left had little success within the institutions. Some for one reason (persecution by the police), some for another (persecution by the academic structures), they had no luck. Their perspectives themselves prevented any outlet in the university structure of the time. Feuerbach had this fate as well. He starts with a bit of access to an academic career, because he is a student of Hegel, because he did his thesis with him, because he is Hegelian at least in his earliest periods. From the moment that he arises to firmly establish his distance from Hegel, his career is over. A few students — maybe two or three — call him to give a series of lessons. Attendance is meager, and it all ends there.

## Reference to Hegel

**Infinite-finite. Fichte-Schelling. Process to the infinite. Bad infinite. Basic theme: the infinite in its unity with the finite.**

In the juvenile writings this unity is celebrated in religion. In those that follow, it is recognized in philosophy. The unity in question is not recognized “beyond” the finite, but in the sense that it surpasses and abolishes the finite in itself.

This is not like Schelling and Fichte who say that the I supposes the finite as such, causing it to remain and justifying it. But this way, the finite, in order to adapt itself to the infinite that supposes it, is launched into a process toward the infinite that abolishes it. Hegel calls this infinite the “bad infinite” or negative infinite.

**Rational = real. Reality = reason. Negation of Fichte’s unique principle. Negation of the indifferent absolute. The negation of being and having to be according to Kant.**

In Hegel, the finite is abolished. Reality cannot be penetrated by reason, but is reason. What is rational is real, and what is real is rational. Reason is the self-conscious infinite principle. The absolute identity of reality and reason expresses the absorption of the finite into the infinite.

Hegel does not intend to deduce all reality from a single principle, as Fichte had done, because in this way reality would not be identical to its single principle. Nor does he intend to cancel the determinations of reality in an indifferent Absolute, as Schelling desired, but wanted to preserve all the richness of reality.

With the dissolution of the finite in the infinite, the distinction between being and having to be vanish, they coincide, in total opposition to Kant.

**Negation of faith (Jacobi). Philosophy as science and system. Categories and concepts are not opposed to reality, but mediate it. Like reason (reality), they have a dialectic form.**

If reason is reality, it is absolute necessity. The philosophy that studies it is therefore science and system, and not faith as Jacobi would have liked. This science renders the contents of reality mediating categories and concepts universal. These categories and concepts

them or because someone destroys them, they mean something else to me: they cause me sorrow, they cause me suffering.

Thus the difference between possession and property, as it has been developed at length in juridical and sociological thought is absolutely eliminated in Stirner. For him, property has no meaning if it has alienation, merchandise, exchange value as its purpose. It has meaning only in use value. The use of property. This is why he says that property and possession are the same thing. In this way, property and possession end up becoming the same thing.

Property gives me might and might allows me to maintain my property. Only in this way do I come out of the herd and become something different from what I was. The difference wasn't in me before. It grew in me through rebellion, through acquisition, through force.

Consent, Stirner continues, "is not given to me by a force outside of me, but solely by my own might; if I lose it, the thing I possessed will escape [ . . . ] Only might decides about property, and, since the state (no matter whether it is the state of well-to-do citizens, ragamuffins or simply of human beings) is the only mighty one, it alone is proprietor as well. I, the Unique one, possess nothing and am only endowed with a possession; I am a vassal and, as such, a servant. Under the dominion of the state no property of *mine* exists." In the Stirnerian sense, of course, since, as we know, the state guarantees the existence of property. The extreme radical difference that exists between the state concept of property and Stirner's concept of property is understood. Any attempt (and there are still those who continue to attempt this . . . ) to bring Stirner into a reactionary philosophical dimension is undeserved.

What is Feuerbach's position? He criticizes the conception of the divine, but doesn't go so far as to negate the divine. Though it is one of the components of his thought, he considers true and proper negation to be of secondary importance. Thus, the essence of Feuerbach's thought is not atheism, but the identification of divine attributes, the removal of these attributes from the divine and their transference (as attributes) to the human. Everything (Feuerbach said) that according to theological analysis belonged to the divine dimension up to now, essentially forms the totality of the qualifications of man, and it is necessary to return them to man. Obviously, this implies a series of modifications, a whole series of interesting discussions, which we will see but as they are taken into consideration by Stirner.

Clearly, Feuerbach is not the only one who opposed Hegel; there were other thinkers as well. I would like to say a few words here about another figure, Bauer, who is also an outcast from a German academic career. He stands halfway between Feuerbach and what will be, as we will see, Stirner's theses. He says: yes, it is right to transfer the weapons and baggage of divinity to man, but in effect this transference is dangerous because it could constitute a new point of reference for creating another form of deification in the very form of a new construction of "Humanity". Thus he anticipates the much more pointed and radical critique of Stirner himself. (on this point, there is a technical debate: who first defined this critique of Feuerbach, Bauer or Stirner).

The other interesting position is that of Marx, and it is very well-known, so I won't talk at length about it. As you know, Marx expresses himself in detail on this topic in the book that was written and then abandoned (as Engels said) to the gnawing criticisms of rats: *The German Ideology*. In this text, where for the first time, Marx and Engels clarify the foundations of their historical materialism, and that was published several decades after their deaths, their critique of Stirner is developed, supporting the important concept that the true foundation of the Hegelian essence is production relationships, i.e., economic, social relationships, concrete society.

Now let's get to the heart of Stirner's thought. I think it's useful to briefly quote from *The Ego and Its Own*. This is indispensable if we want to develop a discussion that is the least bit deep about Stirner's

thinking. There is a question of shading that could be summarized in a brief concept: Stirner is against all sanctity, against all ideologizing. But, in itself this says little.

For example, let's look at the critique of Feuerbach. The critique of Feuerbach is important for Stirner and so he wrote: "How natural is the supposition that *man* and *ego* ['I'] mean the same. And yet one sees, as in Feuerbach, that the expression 'man' is to designate the absolute ego, the *species*, not the transitory individual ego. Egoism and humanity (humaneness) ought to mean the same, but according to Feuerbach the individual 'can only lift himself above the limits of his individuality, but not above the laws, the positive ordinance of his species.' But the species is nothing, and, if the individual lifts himself above the limits of his individuality, this is rather his very self as an individual; he exists only in raising himself, he exists only in not remaining what he is; otherwise, he would be done, dead. Man with a capital M is only an ideal, the species is only something thought of. To be a man is not to realize the ideal of *man*, but to present *oneself*, the individual. It is not how I realize the *generally human* that needs to be my task, but how I satisfy myself. I am my species, am without norm, without law, without model, and the like. It is possible that I can make little out of myself; but this little is everything, and is better than what I allow to be made of me by the might of others, by the training of custom, religion, the laws, the state." From the point of view of the critique of religion, it doesn't matter whether we transfer all divine attributes, part and parcel, to man and say that this man is the sole perfectible being. When we consider this man as a species, as a sanctification of man. The only man I know, says Stirner, is I myself. And the only man that interests me and in whose name I am disposed do anything is I myself. Feuerbach seeks to defend himself from this critique, but it is clearly a radical critique, and he ends up not realizing that there is no way out from this critical opposition of Stirner.

What critique did Stirner develop in the face of Marx's position? This critique is not only directed at the materialist concept of Marx, which had affirmed, as we have seen, that the essence of existence is constituted by the totality of social and economic existence. It also, and principally, deals with the consequent development of this

has loving intentions with regards to me, but rather those of hatred, my pleasure becomes something else. It becomes something else because I feel pleasure not only in defending myself from the other's intentions, but also in attacking. It is not at all the case that I find pleasure only in pacifism, in tolerance, in not attacking the other. In fact, quite the opposite. Conflict pleases me, struggle pleases me, because struggle is part of life. Now, if Stirner, and not just him, but also other anarchists, were to limit themselves only to saying: the sole solution is force, let's go, let's attack, let's destroy, etc., his discussion would have been partial. However, Stirner says in a passage we have read today: I love people, I love all people, and this is really the basis of my might, because I want to take possession of the other through the realization that I want to love it, because this remains good to me, it puts me in a position of enjoyment. Thus, this also forms a limit to the use of my force, because if I were to use my force beyond this limit, I would cause the other suffering and this suffering of his would be my suffering and so my enjoyment would disappear. This is the true obstacle to the use of my force. Force cannot be developed infinitely, one cannot enter cheerfully into the territory of the gratuitous gesture, represented by Gide.

The problem of property is extremely important. There has always been a lively debate on this point. In the book *Community and Society* by F. Tönnies, there is an important distinction made between possession and property. But Stirner said that there is no distinction. The distinction is clear for Tönnies: possession is the defining quality of something we have from which we might separate ourselves only through sacrifice, that we might get rid of, but only with pain, with suffering. Property, on the other hand, is that which we have in order to get rid of it, because we receive enjoyment, a positive compensation by getting rid of it. Let's suggest: I am a bookseller and sell books, the books I possess mean nothing to me. The mean something when I separate from them, because in exchange I receive a payment in cash with which I can do other things that concern me. If, on the other hand, I consider the books of my personal library, I would not want to get rid of them, because they mean something to me only when they are not alienated from me. Because in the moment in which they are separated from me, let's say because I sell



dimension of the Unique one were the sanctification of the other within you.

Now I don't have the exact quote available, but in relation to the overcoming of moral limits, Stirner uses a fantastic phrase and says: to stretch out the hand. If we stretch out our hand in order to gain possession of something, that gesture places outside the law. Because according to the law, we can only make that which the law grants us our own, not that which we autonomously decide to make our own. And yet, in order to take possession of what we want, we must do nothing other than to stretch out the hand to take it. But to reach the point of doing so we must overcome an obstacle. Only that which we take possession of is our property, not that which is granted. That which is granted to us is the mark of our slavery, of our acceptance of the compensation. We have done something and are given a wage in compensation, a payment. "But property," says Stirner, "is conditioned by might. What I have in my power [and only this], that is my own. So long as I assert myself as holder [as long as I am capable of sustaining my possession of the thing with force], I am the proprietor of the thing; if it gets away from me again, no matter by what power, as through my recognition of a title of others to the thing — then [my] property is extinct. Thus, property and possession coincide."

But there is another discourse. Stirner speaks with clarity. Stretching out the hand, i.e., the exercise of force, finds an obstacle, a limit, in the force of others, this is the Stirnerian principle as well as that of anarchism.

Even Bakunin, in the writings of the period of the Franco-German war of 1870, says: why should we fear civil war? Civil war rouses the instincts too, but sooner or later it reaches an end and people come to an agreement among themselves. Clearly behind the chaos, behind the war, behind the human vileness, there is the possibility of building a different society, a different future. Thus, there is no need to fear very many things.

For example, there is no need to fear force. We have been educated in a sanctification of tolerance, a sanctification of respect for others, etc. I respect the other because it gives me pleasure to do so insofar as I love the other. But from the moment that the other no longer

critique, that is to say the foundation of a free society, of the ideal and of communist organization. At this point I think that a small quote is most illuminating, something relating to Stirner's critique of communism: "But the social reformers preach to us a '*law of society*'. There the individual becomes society's slave, and is in the right only when society *makes him out* in the right, when he lives according to society's *statutes* and so is — *loyal*. [Only then are these rights conceded to him]. Whether I am loyal under a despotism or in a 'society' [communist, we suppose] *à la* Weitling, it is the absence of right insofar as in both cases I have not *my* right, but *foreign* right. In consideration of right, the question is always asked: 'What or who gives me the right to it?' [The] Answer [is always this]: "God, love, reason, nature, humanity, etc. No, only *your might, your power* gives you the right." And further on: "All attempts to enact rational laws about property have put out from the bay of *Love* [with a capital L] into a desolate sea of regulations. Even socialism and communism cannot be excepted from this. Everyone is to be provided with adequate means, for which it is little to the point whether one socialistically finds them in personal property, or communistically draws them from the community of goods. The individual's mind in this remains the same; it remains the mind of dependence. The distributing *board of equity* let's me have only what the sense of equity, its *loving* care for all, prescribes. For me, the individual, there lies no less of a check in *collective wealth* than in that of *individual others*; neither that is mine nor this [neither communist property or capitalist property]."

This passage is important. Many times Stirner has been wrongly considered a supporter of individual property, playing on a misunderstanding of what his concept of property was, that as we shall see was quite different. And, therefore, in him the refusal of communist property is very clear, but so is the refusal of capitalist property. "Whether the property belongs to the collectivity," Stirner continues, "which confers part of it on me, or to individual possessors, is for me the same constraint, as I cannot decide about either of the two. On the contrary, communism, by the abolition of personal property, only presses me back still more into dependence on another, on the generality or collectivity; and as loudly as it always attacks the

“state”, what it intends is itself again a state [what it wants to realize has always been a state], a *status*, a condition hindering my free movement, [therefore] a sovereign power over me. Communism rightly revolts against the pressure that I experience from individual proprietors; but still more horrible is the might that it puts in the hands of the collectivity.”

So Stirner’s critical analysis takes shape as a radical critique of ideology, of any ideology. From what dimension does the sacred, which is the fertile terrain of all ideologies, emerge? There are various interpretations about the origins of the sacred: fear, the noumenous, etc., but in Stirner this entire set of problems is seen through the Hegelian filter. Let’s not forget that Stirner is a Hegelian. The history of the development of thought, and therefore of human consciousness, is the Hegelian one. History in its three phases: the ancient world, the childhood of man; the medieval world, the passage and the philosophical break of Proclo; the modern world, as the modern world develops itself, the function of empiricism and so on. Now, within this movement, Stirner produces a history of the origins of the sacred. That his concept is then transferred to men, and here, in concrete terms (without disturbing Destut DeTracy, but speaking in Feuerbachian terms) becomes ideology, that is to say abstract construction (metaphysical and political) of the sacred. This occurs in the same manner, because man still has need of giving a transcendent justification to their actions, a projectuality, he needs to give himself justifications. This takes place both in the individual dimension of immediate awareness and in the dimension of collective projectuality.

In my opinion, this is a major problem, inside of which lies the rejection of the hypothesis of a chosen physical place for the elaboration of ideology. Ideology is not invented as a fantasy. And on this point, Schelling was illuminating, because in the return to teaching after the death of Hegel, that is when the poor man finally was able to open his mouth (since Hegel did not permit anyone to speak during the course of his philosophical dictatorship), Schelling makes us understand how myth is born. Myth is not born because some theoretician develops an analysis. Rather it is born from the suffering

But no one grants me my property. If anyone grants me my property, if anyone grants me my freedom, this freedom makes me an emancipated slave, a liberated slave, i.e., a slave who continues to be a slave under changed conditions of the management of my slavery. So freedom is conquered, property is conquered. In order to conquer it, might<sup>3</sup> is necessary. The force of the will is needed, the force of decision is needed, the might that can smash the moral obstacles, the spooks, the sanctifications, the sacredness that keep us bound.

It is necessary to understand that Stirner’s philosophy is not a philosophy of dialogue. Stirner is not Martin Buber [. . .] with all respect for Buber, who has given me a great deal of pleasure. Stirner is a considerable thinker. The Unique one is not the I of dialogue. It doesn’t open itself to the other in order to dialogue, but in order to take possession of it. To take possession even of oneself? I don’t know. I don’t know if it is legitimate to even think of taking possession of oneself as other. I don’t know if the other is an integral part of oneself, because this would annul all the reasoning in the triad. Above all, in the Unique one there is, from the start, a radicalization, a taking to extremes, of the triad, which would remain ineffective, and would substantially represent the limits of the discussion of the absolute spirit, if there were not all the aspects of opening to the usability of others: property, the union of egoists. Now these aspects have a meaning because the Unique one moves; if it were to keep still, they would have no meaning.

Therefore the Unique one is a movement, and moves toward a thing different from itself. From what I have been able to understand of Stirner, a centrality of the Unique one is not acceptable. Otherwise, this would have within itself the dimension of sacredness. Since what do you have in yourself that is not something that must be conquered? Inside of you there is nothing, what a tragedy if the

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout the texts that make up this pamphlet, I will vary the way I translate the Italian word “forza” in order to create a text that reads well. However, I will use “might” wherever this reads well, because in the English translation of Stirner, this is the word used most commonly for this concept.

and realizes History; it is the proletariat. This is the historical task of this class that, negating the conflict with the bourgeoisie, realizes the free communist society.

After the lessons of the past few years, that we alone have seen, having had the fortune of being able to live them, nobody would now light-heartedly adhere to an analysis like this. Stirner did not have the experience of these times, and so could only use tools of thought with certain considerable limitations that often led to unjust condemnations such as “petty bourgeois Stirner”, Stirner as philosopher of a bourgeoisie that wanted to rebuild the colonialist and imperialist capacities of a disunited Germany, that wanted to protect the interests of the “German Customs Union”, and so on. However, Stirner manages to prevent the Unique from falling into the equivocation of a hypothetical conclusive moment of the triadic development of history, the Unique one in bad company with proletariat and absolute spirit.

The Unique one is not in this company, but has a particular characteristic of its own: the Unique one is not, by itself, self-sufficient. After having constructed the thesis of the uniqueness (singularity) of the Unique one for almost 250 pages of his book (written in a brilliant style, in the journalistic German of the time), Stirner tells us that the Unique one is not self-sufficient. It needs something; it needs its property. Without its property, the Unique one is nothing, it is an abstraction. But what is the property of the Unique one: a house? A genuine possession? A purchase agreement? Or rather what are these things? Sanctifications of reality, concessions.

I cannot see a distinction, a truly clear separation, between the Unique one and its property, a point when the latter becomes precisely the property of the former. Otherwise, the Unique one is fixed as absolute spirit, it becomes a sacred thing. In other words, if the existence of the Unique one by itself and, separately, that of its property or rebellion or the union of egoists as things alien to it, were possible, it would be like announcing the separate existence of the Unique one and then of its property. It does not seem to me that one can make this distinction. Perhaps I read Stirner badly. In any case, for me, there is a group of elements that form the Unique one, a totality in movement.

of people, from the need people have of giving themselves a justification for why pain exists, why death exists, why suffering exists. This model of the development of myth is visible and is the initial element of the argument that Hegel makes and that he takes from the vast reservoir of Schelling’s writings, not from the second period, that he couldn’t have read, but from the period of the philosophical journal they published together. From Schelling’s first writings, the concepts of pain and death are put forward as irrational elements capable of overturning the organization of reason within history. It is from this that myth originates and not from the elaboration of some philosophy. Therefore, even now, we can affirm that ideology is not built in a workshop.

Today [1994], we are facing the birth of a new ideology, an anti-communist ideology, a free market ideology, and all that this requires. But this ideology is not found in books. You think, neoliberalism. But there is no economic theory more discredited than neo-liberalism. You think rightly that today it may still be supported by some well-paid economists, doubtlessly, English, American and Japanese, still supporting *laissez faire, laissez passer*. But are we joking? Yet the fear of communism creates an illusion in people that this free market dimension might actually solve the problems, the problems of those who suffer, of backwards countries, might resolve all these problems. Thus, ideology is born; thus, sanctification is produced. Now, it is logical from time to time that we should make a specific analysis of each individual element in the construction of the current morality, study its origins, the historical moments that have crystallized the taboo on which one is not to touch another’s woman or the taboo against incest or the taboo about respecting one’s father. These are all things that can be historically distinguished, but we cannot, from this, understand how they originate.

The new ideology that is being born before our eyes, and absolutely obsolete, contradictory, insignificant ideology, functions perfectly. Therefore, the ideologue, or the intellectual by trade or state-subsidized to do this job, and thus, first of all, professional philosophers, are as they say so many examples of the marionette in the hands of history of which Hegel speaks. These people, often without wanting to or only wanting to in the slightest degree (because

these scum work with an utterly ridiculous projectuality), contribute to building that ideology. The destructive task alone is up to us, seeking to unravel it, to eliminate negative results. Stirner does this work from a philosophical point of view, and thus opens the way for us, supplies us with a radical direction. Stirner's readers have often tried to continue his thought from a practical point of view. And, in my opinion, the practical reading of Stirner is still all to be done.

Now let's go to the true heart of Stirner's discourse. At the start, Stirner poses the problem of the basis, i.e., of the reason of reality. It is a technical problem that pertains to Hegelian philosophy, but also to the earlier philosophies. All systematic philosophers have posed the problem of the concreteness from which to start, the *Grund* [ground] on which to base their reasoning. Stirner also does this in a way that is justifiable, or at least explicable within the Hegelian philosophical method and its subsequent developments, but this basis is something disturbing, something downright savage: "I have set my affair on nothing".<sup>1</sup> Let's keep in mind that there has been much debate about this "nothing". "Nothing" is not "the nothing" [nothingness?]. . . The original text says "on nothing". "Nothing" means the exclusive and absolute elimination of any over-determination of the I, what Stirner describes as "sanctity", i.e., as the concept of security. God, authority, state, family, ideal, sacrifice, world, morality, ethics, all the elements that form the estrangement of the I, its negation, its alienation. For Stirner, starting from nothing is the only possible basis for the Unique one.

"The divine is God's concern," he wrote, "the human, 'man's'. My concern is neither the divine nor the human, not the true, good, just, free, etc., but solely what is *mine*, and it is not the general one, but is *unique*, as I am Unique. Nothing is more to me than myself!" But the Unique one, as seen up to this moment in its develop through the things that I have spoken about more or less clearly, could be thought of as the extreme, rarefied end of Hegelianism, as the absolute spirit

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<sup>1</sup> The English translation of this phrase in current editions of *The Ego and Its Own* is "All things are nothing to me". This is not at all a literal translation, and loses a great deal of significance as compared to the much more literal translation above. — translator

with every other attribute removed, as the end of History. What is it that effectively removes the Unique one from this sorry end, what is it that really brings it out from the territory of the development of Hegelian thought?

Let's not forget that there was something that pulsed in a vital way in the Hegelian philosophical system. It was its historicity, the concept of history as progress, as development, that Hegel, of course, takes from the French materialist philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, from Voltaire to Holbach.

There is some importance, in my opinion, in opening a little parenthesis on this point. One does not find the idea of progress throughout the history of humanity. It is a modern idea that the ancients did not have. For them, the concept of history had a circular course. For example, Paul Orano, St. Augustine's disciple, while writing his thoughts immediately after the occupation of Augustine's city by the Vandals, did not have the idea of the death of History, because for him History could not die, since, being cyclic, it would have to start again.<sup>2</sup> Yes, the Vandals had destroyed the civilization that had seen the work of the great philosophical and religious figure, Augustine, but they could not destroy the circle, they could not depart from the circular form of History. This concept is shattered by the radical critique of the Enlightenment philosophers. A concept of progress, a mechanism that develops and that History acquires by growing and directing itself toward an improvement, is thus furnished to humanity. Hegel makes this concept his own, but he makes it his own within that triadic system that saw the triumph of philosophy as the absolute spirit and as the synthesis of art and religion. Between parentheses, let's recognize that even in that so much praised turning upside down of the dialectic that walked on its head and now walks on its feet (according to Marx's affirmation), this triadic movement is not damaged. It is no longer the absolute philosophy, it is no longer Hegelian philosophy, it is no longer the absolute spirit that resolves

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<sup>2</sup> And yet, Christians did have a conception of the end of History — of the Apocalypse, and this conception seems to very much parallel Hegelian and Marxist conceptions of progress with their dependence on a process of conflict as the motive force of History that leads to an ultimate conflict that brings about the end of History. — translator