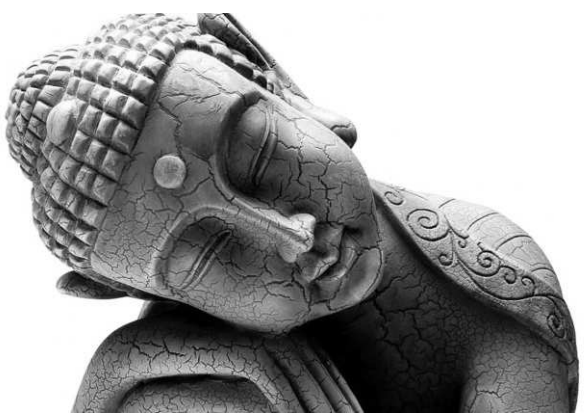
The Ego
&
His Own

"A Masterpiece on Western Philosophy"

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His Own

"A Masterpiece on Western Philosophy"



By

MAX STIRNER

Translator:

Steven T. Byington

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ABOUT AUTHOR:



Max Stirner, pseudonym of **Johann Kaspar Schmidt**, (1806, Bayreuth, Bavaria [Germany]—died 1856, Berlin, Prussia), German antistatist philosopher in whose writings many anarchists of the late 19th and the 20th centuries found ideological inspiration. His thought is sometimes regarded as a source of 20th-century existentialism.

After teaching in a girls' preparatory school in Berlin, Stirner made a scanty living as a translator, preparing what became a standard German version of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations.* He contributed articles to the liberal periodical *Rheinische Zeitung,* which was in part edited by Karl Marx. Later Marx tried to refute Stirner's ideas, ironically calling him "Sankt Max" ("Saint Max"). His most influential work is *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (1845; *The Ego and His Own*).

Stirner believed that there was no objective social reality independent of the individual; social classes, the state, the masses, and humanity are abstractions and therefore need not be

considered seriously. He wrote of a finite, empirical ego, which he saw as the motive force of every human action. Writing chiefly for working-class readers, he taught that all persons are capable of the self-awareness that would make them "egoists," or true individuals.

Max Stirner in his book The Ego and His Own (1845) recommended, instead of social reform, a ruthless individualism that should seek satisfaction by any means and at whatever risk. A small group of other individualists.

THE EGO AND HIS OWN

BY

MAX STIRNER

Translated from the German by
STEVEN T. BYINGTON

With an Introduction by

J. L. WALKER

New York

1907

TO MY SWEETHEART

MARIE DÄHNHARDT

PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

For more than twenty years I have entertained the design of publishing an English translation of "*Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*." When I formed this design, the number of English-speaking persons who had ever heard of the book was very limited. The memory of Max Stirner had been virtually extinct for an entire generation. But in the last two decades there has been a remarkable revival of interest both in the book and in its author. It began in this country with a discussion in the pages of the Anarchist periodical, "Liberty," in which Stirner's thought was clearly expounded and vigorously championed by Dr. James L. Walker, who adopted for this discussion the pseudonym "Tak Kak." At that time Dr. Walker was the chief editorial writer for the Galveston "News." Some years later he became a practising physician in Mexico, where he died in 1904. A series of essays which he began in an Anarchist periodical, "Egoism," and which he lived to complete, was published after his death in a small volume, "The Philosophy of Egoism." It is a very able and convincing exposition of Stirner's teachings, and almost the only one that exists in the English language. But the chief instrument in the revival of Stirnerism was and is the German poet, John Henry Mackay. Very early in his career he met Stirner's name in Lange's "History of Materialism," and was moved thereby to read his book. The work made such an impression on him that he resolved to devote a portion of his life to the rediscovery and rehabilitation of the lost and forgotten genius. Through years of toil and correspondence and travel, and triumphing over tremendous obstacles, he carried his task to completion, and his biography of Stirner appeared in Berlin in 1898. It is a tribute to the thoroughness of Mackay's work that since its publication not one important fact about Stirner has been discovered by anybody. During his years of investigation Mackay's advertising for information had created a new interest in Stirner, which was enhanced by the sudden fame of the writings of

Friedrich Nietzsche, an author whose intellectual kinship with Stirner has been a subject of much controversy. "*Der Einzige*," previously obtainable only in an expensive form, was included in Philipp Reclam's Universal-Bibliothek, and this cheap edition has enjoyed a wide and ever-increasing circulation. During the last dozen years the book has been translated twice into French, once into Italian, once into Russian, and possibly into other languages. The Scandinavian critic, Brandes, has written on Stirner. A large and appreciative volume, entitled "*L'Individualisme Anarchiste: Max Stirner*," from the pen of Prof. Victor Basch, of the University of Rennes, has appeared in Paris. Another large and sympathetic volume, "Max Stirner," written by Dr. Anselm Ruest, has been published very recently in Berlin. Dr. Paul Eltzbacher, in his work, "*Der Anarchismus*," gives a chapter to Stirner, making him one of the seven typical Anarchists, beginning with William Godwin and ending with Tolstoi, of whom his book treats. There is hardly a notable magazine or a review on the Continent that has not given at least one leading article to the subject of Stirner. Upon the initiative of Mackay and with the aid of other admirers a suitable stone has been placed above the philosopher's previously-neglected grave, and a memorial tablet upon the house in Berlin where he died in 1856; and this spring another is to be placed upon the house in Bayreuth where he was born in 1806. As a result of these various efforts, and though but little has been written about Stirner in the English language, his name is now known at least to thousands in America and England where formerly it was known only to hundreds. Therefore conditions are now more favorable for the reception of this volume than they were when I formed the design of publishing it, more than twenty years ago.

The problem of securing a reasonably good translation (for in the case of a work presenting difficulties so enormous it was idle to hope for an adequate translation) was finally solved by entrusting the task to Steven T. Byington, a scholar of remarkable attainments, whose specialty is philology, and who is also one of the ablest workers in the propaganda of Anarchism. But, for further security from error, it was agreed with Mr. Byington that his translation should have the benefit of revision by Dr. Walker,

the most thorough American student of Stirner, and by Emma Heller Schumm and George Schumm, who are not only sympathetic with Stirner, but familiar with the history of his time, and who enjoy a knowledge of English and German that makes it difficult to decide which is their native tongue. It was also agreed that, upon any point of difference between the translator and his revisers which consultation might fail to solve, the publisher should decide. This method has been followed, and in a considerable number of instances it has fallen to me to make a decision. It is only fair to say, therefore, that the responsibility for special errors and imperfections properly rests on my shoulders, whereas, on the other hand, the credit for whatever general excellence the translation may possess belongs with the same propriety to Mr. Byington and his coadjutors. One thing is certain: its defects are due to no lack of loving care and pains. And I think I may add with confidence, while realizing fully how far short of perfection it necessarily falls, that it may safely challenge comparison with the translations that have been made into other languages.

In particular, I am responsible for the admittedly erroneous rendering of the title. "The Ego and His Own" is not an exact English equivalent of "*Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*." But then, there is no exact English equivalent. Perhaps the nearest is "The Unique One and His Property." But the unique one is not strictly the *Einzige*, for uniqueness connotes not only singleness but an admirable singleness, while Stirner's *Einzigkeit* is admirable in his eyes only as such, it being no part of the purpose of his book to distinguish a particular *Einzigkeit* as more excellent than another. Moreover, "The Unique One and His Property" has no graces to compel our forgiveness of its slight inaccuracy. It is clumsy and unattractive. And the same objections may be urged with still greater force against all the other renderings that have been suggested,—"The Single One and His Property," "The Only One and His Property," "The Lone One and His Property," "The Unit and His Property," and, last and least and worst, "The Individual and His Prerogative." "The Ego and His Own," on the other hand, if not a precise rendering, is at least an excellent title in itself; excellent

by its euphony, its monosyllabic incisiveness, and its telling—*Einzigkeit*. Another strong argument in its favor is the emphatic correspondence of the phrase "his own" with Mr. Byington's renderings of the kindred words, *Eigenheit* and *Eigner*. Moreover, no reader will be led astray who bears in mind Stirner's distinction: "I am not an ego along with other egos, but the sole ego; I am unique." And, to help the reader to bear this in mind, the various renderings of the word *Einzige* that occur through the volume are often accompanied by foot-notes showing that, in the German, one and the same word does duty for all.

If the reader finds the first quarter of this book somewhat forbidding and obscure, he is advised nevertheless not to falter. Close attention will master almost every difficulty, and, if he will but give it, he will find abundant reward in what follows. For his guidance I may specify one defect in the author's style. When controverting a view opposite to his own, he seldom distinguishes with sufficient clearness his statement of his own view from his re-statement of the antagonistic view. As a result, the reader is plunged into deeper and deeper mystification, until something suddenly reveals the cause of his misunderstanding, after which he must go back and read again. I therefore put him on his guard. The other difficulties lie, as a rule, in the structure of the work. As to these I can hardly do better than translate the following passage from Prof. Basch's book, alluded to above: "There is nothing more disconcerting than the first approach to this strange work. Stirner does not condescend to inform us as to the architecture of his edifice, or furnish us the slightest guiding thread. The apparent divisions of the book are few and misleading. From the first page to the last a *unique* thought circulates, but it divides itself among an infinity of vessels and arteries in each of which runs a blood so rich in ferments that one is tempted to describe them all. There is no progress in the development, and the repetitions are innumerable.... The reader who is not deterred by this oddity, or rather absence, of composition gives proof of genuine intellectual courage. At first one seems to be confronted with a collection of essays strung together, with a throng of aphorisms.... But, if you read this book several times; if, after having penetrated the

intimacy of each of its parts, you then traverse it as a whole,—gradually the fragments weld themselves together, and Stirner's thought is revealed in all its unity, in all its force, and in all its depth."

A word about the dedication. Mackay's investigations have brought to light that Marie Daehnhardt had nothing whatever in common with Stirner, and so was unworthy of the honor conferred upon her. She was no *Eigene*. I therefore reproduce the dedication merely in the interest of historical accuracy.

Happy as I am in the appearance of this book, my joy is not unmixed with sorrow. The cherished project was as dear to the heart of Dr. Walker as to mine, and I deeply grieve that he is no longer with us to share our delight in the fruition. Nothing, however, can rob us of the masterly introduction that he wrote for this volume (in 1903, or perhaps earlier), from which I will not longer keep the reader. This introduction, no more than the book itself, shall that *Einzige*, Death, make his *Eigentum*.

February, 1907.

B. R. T.

INTRODUCTION

Fifty years sooner or later can make little difference in the case of a book so revolutionary as this.

It saw the light when a so-called revolutionary movement was preparing in men's minds, which agitation was, however, only a disturbance due to desires to participate in government, and to govern and to be governed, in a manner different to that which prevails. The "revolutionists" of 1848 were bewitched with an idea. They were not at all the masters of ideas. Most of those who since that time have prided themselves upon being revolutionists have been and are likewise but the bondmen of an idea,—that of the different lodgment of authority.

The temptation is, of course, present to attempt an explanation of the central thought of this work; but such an effort appears to be unnecessary to one who has the volume in his hand. The author's care in illustrating his meaning shows that he realized how prone the possessed man is to misunderstand whatever is not moulded according to the fashions in thinking. The author's learning was considerable, his command of words and ideas may never be excelled by another, and he judged it needful to develop his argument in manifold ways. So those who enter into the spirit of it will scarcely hope to impress others with the same conclusion in a more summary manner. Or, if one might deem that possible after reading Stirner, still one cannot think that it could be done so surely. The author has made certain work of it, even though he has to wait for his public; but still, the reception of the book by its critics amply proves the truth of the saying that one can give another arguments, but not understanding. The system-makers and system-believers thus far cannot get it out of their heads that any discourse about the nature of an ego must turn upon the common characteristics of egos, to make a systematic scheme of what they share as a generality. The critics inquire what kind of

man the author is talking about. They repeat the question: What does he believe in? They fail to grasp the purport of the recorded answer: "I believe in myself"; which is attributed to a common soldier long before the time of Stirner. They ask, What is the principle of the self-conscious egoist,—the *Einzige*? To this perplexity Stirner says: Change the question; put "who?" instead of "what?" and an answer can then be given by naming him!

This, of course, is too simple for persons governed by ideas, and for persons in quest of new governing ideas. They wish to classify the man. Now, that in me which you can classify is not my distinguishing self. "Man" is the horizon or zero of my existence as an individual. Over that I rise as I can. At least I am something more than "man in general." Pre-existing worship of ideals and disrespect for self had made of the ego at the very most a Somebody, oftener an empty vessel to be filled with the grace or the leavings of a tyrannous doctrine; thus a Nobody. Stirner dispels the morbid subjection, and recognizes each one who knows and feels himself as his own property to be neither humble Nobody nor befogged Somebody, but henceforth flat-footed and level-headed Mr. Thisbody, who has a character and good pleasure of his own, just as he has a name of his own.

The critics who attacked this work and were answered in the author's minor writings, rescued from oblivion by John Henry Mackay, nearly all display the most astonishing triviality and impotent malice.

We owe to Dr. Eduard von Hartmann the unquestionable service which he rendered by directing attention to this book in his "*Philosophie des Unbewussten*," the first edition of which was published in 1869, and in other writings. I do not begrudge Dr. von Hartmann the liberty of criticism which he used; and I think the admirers of Stirner's teaching must quite appreciate one thing which Von Hartmann did at a much later date. In "*Der Eigene*" of August 10, 1896, there appeared a letter written by him and giving, among other things, certain data from which to judge that, when Friedrich Nietzsche wrote his later essays, Nietzsche was not ignorant of Stirner's book.

Von Hartmann wishes that Stirner had gone on and developed his principle. Von Hartmann suggests that you and I are really the same spirit, looking out through two pairs of eyes. Then, one may reply, I need not concern myself about you, for in myself I have—us; and at that rate Von Hartmann is merely accusing himself of inconsistency: for, when Stirner wrote this book, Von Hartmann's spirit was writing it; and it is just the pity that Von Hartmann in his present form does not indorse what he said in the form of Stirner,—that Stirner was different from any other man; that his ego was not Fichte's transcendental generality, but "this transitory ego of flesh and blood." It is not as a generality that you and I differ, but as a couple of facts which are not to be reasoned into one. "I" is somewise Hartmann, and thus Hartmann is "I"; but I am not Hartmann, and Hartmann is not—I. Neither am I the "I" of Stirner; only Stirner himself was Stirner's "I." Note how comparatively indifferent a matter it is with Stirner that one is an ego, but how all-important it is that one be a self-conscious ego,—a self-conscious, self-willed person.

Those not self-conscious and self-willed are constantly acting from self-interested motives, but clothing these in various garbs. Watch those people closely in the light of Stirner's teaching, and they seem to be hypocrites, they have so many good moral and religious plans of which self-interest is at the end and bottom; but they, we may believe, do not know that this is more than a coincidence.

In Stirner we have the philosophical foundation for political liberty. His interest in the practical development of egoism to the dissolution of the State and the union of free men is clear and pronounced, and harmonizes perfectly with the economic philosophy of Josiah Warren. Allowing for difference of temperament and language, there is a substantial agreement between Stirner and Proudhon. Each would be free, and sees in every increase of the number of free people and their intelligence an auxiliary force against the oppressor. But, on the other hand, will any one for a moment seriously contend that Nietzsche and Proudhon march together in general aim and tendency,—that they

have anything in common except the daring to profane the shrine and sepulchre of superstition?

Nietzsche has been much spoken of as a disciple of Stirner, and, owing to favorable cullings from Nietzsche's writings, it has occurred that one of his books has been supposed to contain more sense than it really does—so long as one had read only the extracts.

Nietzsche cites scores or hundreds of authors. Had he read everything, and not read Stirner?

But Nietzsche is as unlike Stirner as a tight-rope performance is unlike an algebraic equation.

Stirner loved liberty for himself, and loved to see any and all men and women taking liberty, and he had no lust of power. Democracy to him was sham liberty, egoism the genuine liberty.

Nietzsche, on the contrary, pours out his contempt upon democracy because it is not aristocratic. He is predatory to the point of demanding that those who must succumb to feline rapacity shall be taught to submit with resignation. When he speaks of "Anarchistic dogs" scouring the streets of great civilized cities, it is true, the context shows that he means the Communists; but his worship of Napoleon, his bathos of anxiety for the rise of an aristocracy that shall rule Europe for thousands of years, his idea of treating women in the oriental fashion, show that Nietzsche has struck out in a very old path—doing the apotheosis of tyranny. We individual egoistic Anarchists, however, may say to the Nietzsche school, so as not to be misunderstood: We do not ask of the Napoleons to have pity, nor of the predatory barons to do justice. They will find it convenient for their own welfare to make terms with men who have learned of Stirner what a man can be who worships nothing, bears allegiance to nothing. To Nietzsche's rhodomontade of eagles in baronial form, born to prey on industrial lambs, we rather tauntingly oppose the ironical question: Where are your claws? What if the "eagles" are found to be plain barnyard fowls on which more silly fowls have fastened steel spurs to hack the victims, who, however, have the power to disarm the sham "eagles" between two suns?

Stirner shows that men make their tyrants as they make their gods, and his purpose is to unmake tyrants.

Nietzsche dearly loves a tyrant.

In style Stirner's work offers the greatest possible contrast to the puerile, padded phraseology of Nietzsche's "*Zarathustra*" and its false imagery. Who ever imagined such an unnatural conjuncture as an eagle "toting" a serpent in friendship? which performance is told of in bare words, but nothing comes of it. In Stirner we are treated to an enlivening and earnest discussion addressed to serious minds, and every reader feels that the word is to him, for his instruction and benefit, so far as he has mental independence and courage to take it and use it. The startling intrepidity of this book is infused with a whole-hearted love for all mankind, as evidenced by the fact that the author shows not one iota of prejudice or any idea of division of men into ranks. He would lay aside government, but would establish any regulation deemed convenient, and for this only *our* convenience is consulted. Thus there will be general liberty only when the disposition toward tyranny is met by intelligent opposition that will no longer submit to such a rule. Beyond this the manly sympathy and philosophical bent of Stirner are such that rulership appears by contrast a vanity, an infatuation of perverted pride. We know not whether we more admire our author or more love him.

Stirner's attitude toward woman is not special. She is an individual if she can be, not handicapped by anything he says, feels, thinks, or plans. This was more fully exemplified in his life than even in this book; but there is not a line in the book to put or keep woman in an inferior position to man, neither is there anything of caste or aristocracy in the book.

Likewise there is nothing of obscurantism or affected mysticism about it. Everything in it is made as plain as the author could make it. He who does not so is not Stirner's disciple nor successor nor co-worker.

Some one may ask: How does plumb-line Anarchism train with the unbridled egoism proclaimed by Stirner? The plumb-line is not a fetish, but an intellectual conviction, and egoism is a universal

fact of animal life. Nothing could seem clearer to my mind than that the reality of egoism must first come into the consciousness of men, before we can have the unbiased Einzige in place of the prejudiced biped who lends himself to the support of tyrannies a million times stronger over me than the natural self-interest of any individual. When plumb-line doctrine is misconceived as duty between unequal-minded men,—as a religion of humanity,—it is indeed the confusion of trying to read without knowing the alphabet and of putting philanthropy in place of contract. But, if the plumb-line be scientific, it is or can be my possession, my property, and I choose it for its use—when circumstances admit of its use. I do not feel bound to use it because it is scientific, in building my house; but, as my will, to be intelligent, is not to be merely wilful, the adoption of the plumb-line follows the discarding of incantations. There is no plumb-line without the unvarying lead at the end of the line; not a fluttering bird or a clawing cat.

On the practical side of the question of egoism *versus* self-surrender and for a trial of egoism in politics, this may be said: the belief that men not moved by a sense of duty will be unkind or unjust to others is but an indirect confession that those who hold that belief are greatly interested in having others live for them rather than for themselves. But I do not ask or expect so much. I am content if others individually live for themselves, and thus cease in so many ways to act in opposition to my living for myself,—to our living for ourselves.

If Christianity has failed to turn the world from evil, it is not to be dreamed that rationalism of a pious moral stamp will succeed in the same task. Christianity, or all philanthropic love, is tested in non-resistance. It is a dream that example will change the hearts of rulers, tyrants, mobs. If the extremest self-surrender fails, how can a mixture of Christian love and worldly caution succeed? This at least must be given up. The policy of Christ and Tolstoi can soon be tested, but Tolstoi's belief is not satisfied with a present test and failure. He has the infatuation of one who persists because this *ought* to be. The egoist who thinks "I should like this to be" still has the sense to perceive that it is not accomplished by the fact of some

believing and submitting, inasmuch as others are alert to prey upon the unresisting. The Pharaohs we have ever with us.

Several passages in this most remarkable book show the author as a man full of sympathy. When we reflect upon his deliberately expressed opinions and sentiments,—his spurning of the sense of moral obligation as the last form of superstition,—may we not be warranted in thinking that the total disappearance of the sentimental supposition of duty liberates a quantity of nervous energy for the purest generosity and clarifies the intellect for the more discriminating choice of objects of merit?

J. L. Walker.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

If the style of this book is found unattractive, it will show that I have done my work ill and not represented the author truly; but, if it is found odd, I beg that I may not bear all the blame. I have simply tried to reproduce the author's own mixture of colloquialisms and technicalities, and his preference for the precise expression of his thought rather than the word conventionally expected.

One especial feature of the style, however, gives the reason why this preface should exist. It is characteristic of Stirner's writing that the thread of thought is carried on largely by the repetition of the same word in a modified form or sense. That connection of ideas which has guided popular instinct in the formation of words is made to suggest the line of thought which the writer wishes to follow. If this echoing of words is missed, the bearing of the statements on each other is in a measure lost; and, where the ideas are very new, one cannot afford to throw away any help in following their connection. Therefore, where a useful echo (and there are few useless ones in the book) could not be reproduced in English, I have generally called attention to it in a note. My notes are distinguished from the author's by being enclosed in brackets.

One or two of such coincidences of language, occurring in words which are prominent throughout the book, should be borne constantly in mind as a sort of *Keri perpetuum*: for instance, the identity in the original of the words "spirit" and "mind," and of the phrases "supreme being" and "highest essence." In such cases I have repeated the note where it seemed that such repetition might be absolutely necessary, but have trusted the reader to carry it in his head where a failure of his memory would not be ruinous or likely.

For the same reason,—that is, in order not to miss any indication of the drift of the thought,—I have followed the original

in the very liberal use of italics, and in the occasional eccentric use of a punctuation mark, as I might not have done in translating a work of a different nature.

I have set my face as a flint against the temptation to add notes that were not part of the translation. There is no telling how much I might have enlarged the book if I had put a note at every sentence which deserved to have its truth brought out by fuller elucidation,—or even at every one which I thought needed correction. It might have been within my province, if I had been able, to explain all the allusions to contemporary events, but I doubt whether any one could do that properly without having access to the files of three or four well-chosen German newspapers of Stirner's time. The allusions are clear enough, without names and dates, to give a vivid picture of certain aspects of German life then. The tone of some of them is explained by the fact that the book was published under censorship.

I have usually preferred, for the sake of the connection, to translate Biblical quotations somewhat as they stand in the German, rather than conform them altogether to the English Bible. I am sometimes quite as near the original Greek as if I had followed the current translation.

Where German books are referred to, the pages cited are those of the German editions even when (usually because of some allusions in the text) the titles of the books are translated.

Steven T. Byington.

THE EGO AND HIS OWN

All Things are Nothing to Me[1]

What is not supposed, to be my concern[2]! First and foremost, the Good Cause,[3] then God's cause, the cause of mankind, of truth, of freedom, of humanity, of justice; further, the cause of my people, my prince, my fatherland; finally, even the cause of Mind, and a thousand other causes. Only *my* cause is never to be my concern. "Shame on the egoist who thinks only of himself!"

Let us look and see, then, how they manage *their* concerns—they for whose cause we are to labor, devote ourselves, and grow enthusiastic.

You have much profound information to give about God, and have for thousands of years "searched the depths of the Godhead," and looked into its heart, so that you can doubtless tell us how God himself attends to "God's cause," which we are called to serve. And you do not conceal the Lord's doings, either. Now, what is his cause? Has he, as is demanded of us, made an alien cause, the cause of truth or love, his own? You are shocked by this misunderstanding, and you instruct us that God's cause is indeed the cause of truth and love, but that this cause cannot be called alien to him, because God is himself truth and love; you are shocked by the assumption that God could be like us poor worms in furthering an alien cause as his own. "Should God take up the cause of truth if he were not himself truth?" He cares only for *his* cause, but, because he is all in all, therefore all is *his* cause! But we, we are not all in all, and our cause is altogether little and

contemptible; therefore we must "serve a higher cause."—Now it is clear, God cares only for what is his, busies himself only with himself, thinks only of himself, and has only himself before his eyes; woe to all that is not well-pleasing to him! He serves no higher person, and satisfies only himself. His cause is—a purely egoistic cause.

How is it with mankind, whose cause we are to make our own? Is its cause that of another, and does mankind serve a higher cause? No, mankind looks only at itself, mankind will promote the interests of mankind only, mankind is its own cause. That it may develop, it causes nations and individuals to wear themselves out in its service, and, when they have accomplished what mankind needs, it throws them on the dung-heap of history in gratitude. Is not mankind's cause—a purely egoistic cause?

I have no need to take up each thing that wants to throw its cause on us and show that it is occupied only with itself, not with us, only with its good, not with ours. Look at the rest for yourselves. Do truth, freedom, humanity, justice, desire anything else than that you grow enthusiastic and serve them?

They all have an admirable time of it when they receive zealous homage. Just observe the nation that is defended by devoted patriots. The patriots fall in bloody battle or in the fight with hunger and want; what does the nation care for that? Joy the manure of their corpses the nation comes to "its bloom!" The individuals have died "for the great cause of the nation," and the nation sends some words of thanks after them and—has the profit of it. I call that a paying kind of egoism.

But only look at that Sultan who cares so lovingly for his people. Is he not pure unselfishness itself, and does he not hourly sacrifice himself for his people? Oh, yes, for "his people." Just try it; show yourself not as his, but as your own; for breaking away from his egoism you will take a trip to jail. The Sultan has set his cause on nothing but himself; he is to himself all in all, he is to himself the only one, and tolerates nobody who would dare not to be one of "his people."

And will you not learn by these brilliant examples that the egoist gets on best? I for my part take a lesson from them, and propose, instead of further unselfishly serving those great egoists, rather to be the egoist myself.

God and mankind have concerned themselves for nothing, for nothing but themselves. Let me then likewise concern myself for *myself*, who am equally with God the nothing of all others, who am my all, who am the only one.[4]

If God, if mankind, as you affirm, have substance enough in themselves to be all in all to themselves, then I feel that *I* shall still less lack that, and that I shall have no complaint to make of my "emptiness." I am nothing in the sense of emptiness, but I am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything.

Away, then, with every concern that is not altogether my concern! You think at least the "good cause" must be my concern? What's good, what's bad? Why, I myself am my concern, and I am neither good nor bad. Neither has meaning for me.

The divine is God's concern; 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 a general one, but is—*unique*,[5] as I am unique.

Nothing is more to me than myself!

Part First: Man

Man is to man the supreme being, says Feuerbach.

Man has just been discovered, says Burno Bauer.

Then let us take a more careful look at this supreme being and this new discovery.

I: A HUMAN LIFE

From the moment when he catches sight of the light of the world a man seeks to find out *himself* and get hold of *himself* out of its confusion, in which he, with everything else, is tossed about in motley mixture.

But everything that comes in contact with the child defends itself in turn against his attacks, and asserts its own persistence.

Accordingly, because each thing *cares for itself* and at the same time comes into constant collision with other things, the *combat* of self-assertion is unavoidable.

Victory or *defeat*—between the two alternatives the fate of the combat wavers. The victor becomes the lord, the vanquished one the *subject*: the former exercises *supremacy* and "rights of supremacy," the latter fulfils in awe and deference the "duties of a subject."

But both remain *enemies*, and always lie in wait: they watch for each other's *weaknesses*—children for those of their parents and parents for those of their children (*e. g*. their fear); either the stick conquers the man, or the man conquers the stick.

In childhood liberation takes the direction of trying to get to the bottom of things, to get at what is "back of" things; therefore we spy out the weak points of everybody, for which, it is well known, children have a sure instinct; therefore we like to smash things, like to rummage through hidden corners, pry after what is covered up or out of the way, and try what we can do with everything. When we once get at what is back of the things, we know we are safe; when, *e. g*., we have got at the fact that the rod is too weak against our obduracy, then we no longer fear it, "have outgrown it."

Back of the rod, mightier than it, stands our—obduracy, our obdurate courage. By degrees we get at what is back of everything that was mysterious and uncanny to us, the mysteriously-dreaded

might of the rod, the father's stern look, etc., and back of all we find our—ataraxy, *i. e.* imperturbability, intrepidity, our counter force, our odds of strength, our invincibility. Before that which formerly inspired in us fear and deference we no longer retreat shyly, but take *courage*. Back of everything we find our *courage*, our superiority; back of the sharp command of parents and authorities stands, after all, our courageous choice or our outwitting shrewdness. And the more we feel ourselves, the smaller appears that which before seemed invincible. And what is our trickery, shrewdness, courage, obduracy? What else but—*mind!*[6]

Through a considerable time we are spared a fight that is so exhausting later—the fight against *reason*. The fairest part of childhood passes without the necessity of coming to blows with reason. We care nothing at all about it, do not meddle with it, admit no reason. We are not to be persuaded to anything by *conviction*, and are deaf to good arguments, principles, etc.; on the other hand, coaxing, punishment, and the like are hard for us to resist.

This stern life-and-death combat with *reason* enter later, and begins a new phase; in childhood we scamper about without racking our brains much.

Mind is the name of the *first* self-discovery, the first undeification of the divine, *i. e.* of the uncanny, the spooks, the "powers above." Our fresh feeling of youth, this feeling of self, now defers to nothing; the world is discredited, for we are above it, we are *mind*.

Now for the first time we see that hitherto we have not looked at the world *intelligently* at all, but only stared at it.

We exercise the beginnings of our strength on *natural powers*. We defer to parents as a natural power; later we say: Father and mother are to be forsaken, all natural power to be counted as riven. They are vanquished. For the rational, *i. e.* "intellectual" man there is no family as a natural power; a renunciation of parents, brothers, etc., makes its appearance. If these are "born again" as *intellectual, rational powers*, they are no longer at all what they were before.

And not only parents, but *men in general*, are conquered by the young man; they are no hindrance to him, and are no longer regarded; for now he says: One must obey God rather than men.

From this high standpoint everything "*earthly*" recedes into contemptible remoteness; for the standby point is—the *heavenly*.

The attitude is now altogether reversed; the youth takes up an *intellectual* position, while the boy, who did not yet feel himself as mind, grew up in mindless learning. The former does not try to get hold of *things* (*e. g.* to get into his head the *data* of history), but of the *thoughts* that lie hidden in things, and so, *e. g.*, of the *spirit* of history. On the other hand, the boy understands *connections* no doubt, but not ideas, the spirit; therefore he strings together whatever can be learned, without proceeding *a priori* and theoretically, *i. e.* without looking for ideas.

As in childhood one had to overcome the resistance of the *laws of the world*, so now in everything that he proposes he is met by an objection of the mind, of reason, of his *own conscience*. "That is unreasonable, unchristian, unpatriotic," and the like, cries conscience to us, and—frightens us away from it. Not the might of the avenging Eumenides, not Poseidon's wrath, not God, far as he sees the hidden, not the father's rod of punishment, do we fear, but—*conscience*.

We "run after our thoughts" now, and follow their commands just as before we followed parental, human ones. Our course of action is determined by our thoughts (ideas, conceptions, *faith*) as it is in childhood by the commands of our parents.

For all that, we were already thinking when we were children, only our thoughts were not fleshless, abstract, *absolute, i. e.* NOTHING BUT THOUGHTS, a heaven in themselves, a pure world of thought, *logical* thoughts.

On the contrary, they had been only thoughts that we had about a *thing*; we thought of the thing so or so. Thus we may have thought "God made the world that we see there," but we did not think of ("search") the "depths of the Godhead itself"; we may have thought "that is the truth about the matter," but we did not think of

Truth itself, nor unite into one sentence "God is truth." The "depths of the Godhead, who is truth," we did not touch. Over such purely logical, *i. e.* theological questions, "What is truth?" Pilate does not stop, though he does not therefore hesitate to ascertain in an individual case "what truth there is in the thing," *i. e.* whether the *thing* is true.

Any thought bound to a *thing* is not yet *nothing but a thought*, absolute thought.

To bring to light *the pure thought*, or to be of its party, is the delight of youth; and all the shapes of light in the world of thought, like truth, freedom, humanity, Man, etc., illumine and inspire the youthful soul.

But, when the spirit is recognized as the essential thing, it still makes a difference whether the spirit is poor or rich, and therefore one seeks to become rich in spirit; the spirit wants to spread out so as to found its empire—an empire that is not of this world, the world just conquered. Thus, then, it longs to become all in all to itself; *i. e.*, although I am spirit, I am not yet *perfected* spirit, and must first seek the complete spirit.

But with that I, who had just now found myself as spirit, lose myself again at once, bowing before the complete spirit as one not my own but *supernal*, and feeling my emptiness.

Spirit is the essential point for everything, to be sure; but then is every spirit the "right" spirit? The right and true spirit is the ideal of spirit, the "Holy Spirit." It is not my or your spirit, but just—an ideal, supernal one, it is "God." "God is spirit." And this supernal "Father in heaven gives it to those that pray to him."[7]

The man is distinguished from the youth by the fact that he takes the world as it is, instead of everywhere fancying it amiss and wanting to improve it, *i. e.* model it after his ideal; in him the view that one must deal with the world according to his *interest*, not according to his *ideals*, becomes confirmed.

So long as one knows himself only as *spirit*, and feels that all the value of his existence consists in being spirit (it becomes easy for the youth to give his life, the "bodily life," for a nothing, for the

silliest point of honor), so long it is only *thoughts* that one has, ideas that he hopes to be able to realize some day when he has found a sphere of action; thus one has meanwhile only *ideals*, unexecuted ideas or thoughts.

Not till one has fallen in love with his *corporeal* self, and takes a pleasure in himself as a living flesh-and-blood person,—but it is in mature years, in the man, that we find it so,—not till then has one a personal or *egoistic* interest, *i. e.* an interest not only of our spirit, for instance, but of total satisfaction, satisfaction of the whole chap, a *selfish* interest. Just compare a man with a youth, and see if he will not appear to you harder, less magnanimous, more selfish. Is he therefore worse? No, you say; he has only become more definite, or, as you also call it, more "practical." But the main point is this, that he makes *himself* more the centre than does the youth, who is infatuated about other things, *e. g.* God, fatherland, and so on.

Therefore the man shows a *second* self-discovery. The youth found himself as *spirit* and lost himself again in the *general* spirit, the complete, holy spirit, Man, mankind,—in short, all ideals; the man finds himself as *embodied* spirit.

Boys had only *unintellectual* interests (*i. e.* interests devoid of thoughts and ideas), youths only *intellectual* ones; the man has bodily, personal, egoistic interests.

If the child has not an *object* that it can occupy itself with, it feels *ennui*; for it does not yet know how to occupy itself with *itself*. The youth, on the contrary, throws the object aside, because for him *thoughts* arose out of the object; he occupies himself with his *thoughts*, his dreams, occupies himself intellectually, or "his mind is occupied."

The young man includes everything not intellectual under the contemptuous name of "externalities." If he nevertheless sticks to the most trivial externalities (*e. g.* the customs of students' clubs and other formalities), it is because, and when, he discovers *mind* in them, *i. e.* when they are *symbols* to him.

As I find myself back of things, and that as mind, so I must later find *myself* also back of *thoughts*,—to wit, as their creator and

owner. In the time of spirits thoughts grew till they overtopped my head, whose offspring they yet were; they hovered about me and convulsed me like fever-phantasies—an awful power. The thoughts had become *corporeal* on their own account, were ghosts, such as God, Emperor, Pope, Fatherland, etc. If I destroy their corporeity, then I take them back into mine, and say: "I alone am corporeal." And now I take the world as what it is to me, as *mine*, as my property; I refer all to myself.

If as spirit I had thrust away the world in the deepest contempt, so as owner I thrust spirits or ideas away into their "vanity." They have no longer any power over me, as no "earthly might" has power over the spirit.

The child was realistic, taken up with the things of this world, till little by little he succeeded in getting at what was back of these very things; the youth was idealistic, inspired by thoughts, till he worked his way up to where he became the man, the egoistic man, who deals with things and thoughts according to his heart's pleasure, and sets his personal interest above everything. Finally, the old man? When I become one, there will still be time enough to speak of that.

II. MEN OF THE OLD TIME AND THE NEW

How each of us developed himself, what he strove for, attained, or missed, what objects he formerly pursued and what plans and wishes his heart is now set on, what transformations his views have experienced, what perturbations his principles,—in short, how he has to-day become what yesterday or years ago he was not,—this he brings out again from his memory with more or less ease, and he feels with especial vividness what changes have taken place in himself when he has before his eyes the unrolling of another's life.

Let us therefore look into the activities our fore-fathers busied themselves with.

I.—THE ANCIENTS

Custom having once given the name of "the ancients" to our pre-Christian ancestors, we will not throw it up against them that, in comparison with us experienced people, they ought properly to be called children, but will rather continue to honor them as our good old fathers. But how have they come to be antiquated, and who could displace them through his pretended newness?

We know, of course, the revolutionary innovator and disrespectful heir, who even took away the sanctity of the fathers' sabbath to hallow his Sunday, and interrupted the course of time to begin at himself with a new chronology; we know him, and know that it is—the Christian. But does he remain forever young, and is he to-day still the new man, or will he too be superseded, as he has superseded the "ancients"?

The fathers must doubtless have themselves begotten the young one who entombed them. Let us then peep at this act of generation.

"To the ancients the world was a truth," says Feuerbach, but he forgets to make the important addition, "a truth whose untruth they tried to get back of, and at last really did." What is meant by those words of Feuerbach will be easily recognized if they are put alongside the Christian thesis of the "vanity and transitoriness of the world." For, as the Christian can never convince himself of the vanity of the divine word, but believes in its eternal and unshakeable truth, which, the more its depths are searched, must all the more brilliantly come to light and triumph, so the ancients on their side lived in the feeling that the world and mundane relations (*e. g.* the natural ties of blood) were the truth before which their powerless "I" must bow. The very thing on which the ancients set the highest value is spurned by Christians as the valueless, and what they recognized as truth these brand as idle lies; the high significance of the fatherland disappears, and the Christian must regard himself as "a stranger on earth";[8] the sanctity of funeral rites, from which sprang a work of art like the Antigone of Sophocles, is designated as a paltry thing ("Let the dead bury their dead"); the infrangible truth of family ties is represented as an untruth which one cannot promptly enough get clear of;[9] and so in everything.

If we now see that to the two sides opposite things appear as truth, to one the natural, to the other the intellectual, to one earthly things and relations, to the other heavenly (the heavenly fatherland, "Jerusalem that is above," etc.), it still remains to be considered how the new time and that undeniable reversal could come out of antiquity. But the ancients themselves worked toward making their truth a lie.

Let us plunge at once into the midst of the most brilliant years of the ancients, into the Periclean century. Then the Sophistic culture was spreading, and Greece made a pastime of what had hitherto been to her a monstrously serious matter.

The fathers had been enslaved by the undisturbed power of existing things too long for the posterity not to have to learn by bitter experience to *feel themselves*. Therefore the Sophists, with courageous sauciness, pronounce the reassuring words, "Don't be

bluffed!" and diffuse the rationalistic doctrine, "Use your understanding, your wit, your mind, against everything; it is by having a good and well-drilled understanding that one gets through the world best, provides for himself the best lot, the pleasantest *life*." Thus they recognize in *mind* man's true weapon against the world. This is why they lay such stress on dialectic skill, command of language, the art of disputation, etc. They announce that mind is to be used against everything; but they are still far removed from the holiness of the Spirit, for to them it is a *means*, a weapon, as trickery and defiance serve children for the same purpose; their mind is the unbribable *understanding*.

To-day we should call that a one-sided culture of the understanding, and add the warning, "Cultivate not only your understanding, but also, and especially, your heart." Socrates did the same. For, if the heart did not become free from its natural impulses, but remained filled with the most fortuitous contents and, as an uncriticised *avidity*, altogether in the power of things, *i. e.* nothing but a vessel of the most various *appetites*,—then it was unavoidable that the free understanding must serve the "bad heart" and was ready to justify everything that the wicked heart desired.

Therefore Socrates says that it is not enough for one to use his understanding in all things, but it is a question of what *cause* one exerts it for. We should now say, one must serve the "good cause." But serving the good cause is—being moral. Hence Socrates is the founder of ethics.

Certainly the principle of the Sophistic doctrine must lead to the possibility that the blindest and most dependent slave of his desires might yet be an excellent sophist, and, with keen understanding, trim and expound everything in favor of his coarse heart. What could there be for which a "good reason" might not be found, or which might not be defended through thick and thin?

Therefore Socrates says: "You must be 'pure-hearted' if your shrewdness is to be valued." At this point begins the second period of Greek liberation of the mind, the period of *purity of heart*. For the first was brought to a close by the Sophists in their proclaiming the omnipotence of the understanding. But the heart remained

worldly-minded, remained a servant of the world, always affected by worldly wishes. This coarse heart was to be cultivated from now on—the era of *culture of the heart*. But how is the heart to be cultivated? What the understanding, this one side of the mind, has reached,—to wit, the capability of playing freely with and over every concern,—awaits the heart also; everything *worldly* must come to grief before it, so that at last family, commonwealth, fatherland, and the like, are given up for the sake of the heart, *i. e.* of *blessedness*, the heart's blessedness.

Daily experience confirms the truth that the understanding may have renounced a thing many years before the heart has ceased to beat for it. So the Sophistic understanding too had so far become master over the dominant, ancient powers that they now needed only to be driven out of the heart, in which they dwelt unmolested, to have at last no part at all left in man.

This war is opened by Socrates, and not till the dying day of the old world does it end in peace.

The examination of the heart takes its start with Socrates, and all the contents of the heart are sifted. In their last and extremest struggles the ancients threw all contents out of the heart and let it no longer beat for anything; this was the deed of the Skeptics. The same purgation of the heart was now achieved in the Skeptical age, as the understanding had succeeded in establishing in the Sophistic age.

The Sophistic culture has brought it to pass that one's understanding no longer *stands still* before anything, and the Skeptical, that his heart is no longer *moved* by anything.

So long as man is entangled in the movements of the world and embarrassed by relations to the world,—and he is so till the end of antiquity, because his heart still has to struggle for independence from the worldly,—so long he is not yet spirit; for spirit is without body, and has no relations to the world and corporality; for it the world does not exist, nor natural bonds, but only the spiritual, and spiritual bonds. Therefore man must first become so completely unconcerned and reckless, so altogether without relations, as the Skeptical culture presents him,—so altogether indifferent to the

world that even its falling in ruins would not move him,—before he could feel himself as worldless, *i. e.* as spirit. And this is the result of the gigantic work of the ancients: that man knows himself as a being without relations and without a world, as *spirit*.

Only now, after all worldly care has left him, is he all in all to himself, is he only for himself, i. e. he is spirit for the spirit, or, in plainer language, he cares only for the spiritual.

In the Christian wisdom of serpents and innocence of doves the two sides—understanding and heart—of the ancient liberation of mind are so completed that they appear young and new again, and neither the one nor the other lets itself be bluffed any longer by the worldly and natural.

Thus the ancients mounted to *spirit*, and strove to become *spiritual*. But a man who wishes to be active as spirit is drawn to quite other tasks than he was able to set himself formerly: to tasks which really give something to do to the spirit and not to mere sense or acuteness,[10] which exerts itself only to become master of *things*. The spirit busies itself solely about the spiritual, and seeks out the "traces of mind" in everything; to the *believing* spirit "everything comes from God," and interests him only to the extent that it reveals this origin; to the *philosophic* spirit everything appears with the stamp of reason, and interests him only so far as he is able to discover in it reason, *i. e.* spiritual content.

Not the spirit, then, which has to do with absolutely nothing unspiritual, with no *thing*, but only with the essence which exists behind and above things, with *thoughts*,—not that did the ancients exert, for they did not yet have it; no, they had only reached the point of struggling and longing for it, and therefore sharpened it against their too-powerful foe, the world of sense (but what would not have been sensuous for them, since Jehovah or the gods of the heathen were yet far removed from the conception "God is *spirit*," since the "heavenly fatherland" had not yet stepped into the place of the sensuous, etc?)—they sharpened against the world of sense their *sense*, their acuteness. To this day the Jews, those precocious children of antiquity, have got no farther; and with all the subtlety and strength of their prudence and understanding, which easily

becomes master of things and forces them to obey it, they cannot discover *spirit*, which *takes no account whatever of things*.

The Christian has spiritual interests, because he allows himself to be a *spiritual* man; the Jew does not even understand these interests in their purity, because he does not allow himself to assign *no value* to things. He does not arrive at pure *spirituality*, a spirituality such as is religiously expressed, *e. g.*, in the *faith*, of Christians, which alone (*i. e.* without works) justifies. Their *unspirituality* sets Jews forever apart from Christians; for the spiritual man is incomprehensible to the unspiritual, as the unspiritual is contemptible to the spiritual. But the Jews have only "the spirit of this world."

The ancient acuteness and profundity lies as far from the spirit and the spirituality of the Christian world as earth from heaven.

He who feels himself as free spirit is not oppressed and made anxious by the things of this world, because he does not care for them; if one is still to feel their burden, he must be narrow enough to attach *weight* to them,—as is evidently the case, for instance, when one is still concerned for his "dear life." He to whom everything centres in knowing and conducting himself as a free spirit gives little heed to how scantily he is supplied meanwhile, and does not reflect at all on how he must make his arrangements to have a thoroughly free or enjoyable *life*. He is not disturbed by the inconveniences of the life that depends on things, because he lives only spiritually and on spiritual food, while aside from this he only gulps things down like a beast, hardly knowing it, and dies bodily, to be sure, when his fodder gives out, but knows himself immortal as spirit, and closes his eyes with an adoration or a thought. His life is occupation with the spiritual, is—*thinking*; the rest does not bother him; let him busy himself with the spiritual in any way that he can and chooses,—in devotion, in contemplation, or in philosophic cognition,—his doing is always thinking; and therefore Descartes, to whom this had at last become quite clear, could lay down the proposition: "I think, that is—I am." This means, my thinking is my being or my life; only when I live spiritually do I live; only as spirit am I really, or—I am spirit