My thought's on n'ought!

My thoughts 'n' oughts are nothing fixed
Hooray!
for Joy's the world that's downed unmixed
this way!
and all who'd be good mates of mine
to clink 'n' drink just suit me fine
for lees of life and wine!

I'd trained my trade on gold 'n' gain
Hooray!
but so I sold my joy for pain;
I say,
the coins were rolling here and there,
but every time I chased a where
the here was over there.

To women then I gave my heart
O belles!
but how those damsels made me smart
o hells!
The false were true to others, true,
but true ones bored me through and through;
the best … were not for woo.

Next, I thought I ought to roam
Hooray!
but then I lost my ways of home,
that way,
and nothing seemed to suit me quite,
the board was bad, the bed a fright,
and no one got me right.

I tuned my dream to name and fame
Excel!
but better men put me to shame
O hell!
or when I gave some good I had
they made me out to be a cad;
my good was worse than bad.

I sought the right in battle might
Hooray!
and often was our might so right
(hooray!)
the enemy's land was ours to run;
but still the score was won to none,
and a leg became undone.

So now I call my calling nought
So what!
The world's all mine that comes unsought
that's what!
Now that it's song and sup all day,
come clink 'n' drink me all the way
these lees to the last hooray!

Translated by Wm. Flygare from the German original, «Vanitas!».

J.W. von Goethe (1749-1832)

non serviam

self-ownership & self-enjoyment ***19/20***

Svein Olav Nyberg

• Max Stirner – The Great Philosopher Of Egoism

• The Union of Egoists – A Reply To Sid

J.W. von Goethe

• Vanitas! Vanitatum Vanitas
Translated by Wm. Flygare

–Did you ever contribute anything to the happiness of Mankind?
–Yes, I myself have been happy!

—John Henry Mackay

Stirner himself wasted the whole fortune of his soon-thereafter ex wife on unsuccessful investments.

Before he died in 1856, Stirner completed the first German translation of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and also translated some books by a French popularizer of Smith, Jean-Baptiste Say. In the early 1850s, Stirner could also be found in the salon of Baroness von der Goltz where he still argued radical and shocking ideas.

On June 25, 1856 Stirner died of an infection after having been stung by an insect. With him dies a unique world.

Postscript On Feminism

Stirner's attack on «the essence of Man» can be neatly applied in a critique of gender roles as postulated by «feminists» and patriarchalists alike. Both sides maintain normative views of what a woman «is». We are, for instance, told that women can not be muscular. When a woman is strong, the patriarchs label her «unfeminine» and even «unwomanly». All this while a simple medical inspection would reveal her to be a woman. A similarly ugly example from the eighties is when Margaret Thatcher was prime minister. The feminists yelled that she was not one of them, the «women»: She was «a man».[7] Following the pattern of Stirner's critique of «Man«, we find that gender essentialism and pre-assigned gender roles are simply self-contradictory: It is not the deviant woman who ceases to be a woman when she does not fit the essence and role of «woman»; it is the essences and roles of «woman» that cease to be true.

Feminism is perhaps of particular interest because of Dora Marsden (1882–1960), a prominent individualist and feminist in Great Britain at the turn of the century. Her rhetoric and ideas bear a strong resemblance to Stirner, and she explicitly confirmed this link. If you are interested in gaining better knowledge of this remarkable woman, I recommend having a look at this web page:

http://pierce.ee.washington.edu/~davisd/egoist/marsden/

But be warned: Compared to Marsden and her rhetoric, today's feminists will look like boring bureaucrats! ♦

Translated from Norwegian by Hans Trygve Jensen with assistance from Deborah Byfield and the author himself.

[7] Likewise, it may be noted that the competing egoist, Rand, has said that women cannot become presidents. At the moment, it is a bit unclear to me if this is yet another example of normative essentialism in her philosophy.

After Stirner

The Scottish-German poet John-Henry Mackay has the credit for most of what is known about Stirner today. Mackay used several years and a huge amount of his fortune to track down information about Stirner and what he wrote. He was himself an individualist anarchist, and interpreted Stirner to be so, as well. I doubt this is true of Stirner, but this is for another discussion. Stirner did in any case inspire anarchists, particularly individualist anarchists, like Mackay.

Stirner got his second season of fame at the turn of the century. Georg Brandes had discovered and promoted Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche's fans were looking for a «precursor» to Nietzsche, and found this in Stirner. Brandes therefore had a market when he published and wrote a preface to the Danish edition of *Der Einzige* in 1902. There also seems reason to assume that Norway's grand author and Georg Brandes' correspondent, Henrik Ibsen, was influenced by Stirner. But Stirner's connections to art will be the topic of a later issue.

Stirner's reputation as an individualíst anarchist was strengthened when Benjamin Tucker, the leading American libertarian at the beginning of this century, considered it to be his greatest achievement when he published the first English edition of *Der Einzige* in 1907.

In later years, Stirner has for the most part been seen as an anarchist political philosopher. According to the critic Herbert Read, however, people like Erich Fromm, Carl Jung, Martin Buber, Max Ernst and several 20th-century existentialists are indebted to Stirner – a diversity I am confident would have pleased Stirner.

Historical Conclusion

After *Der Einzige* was published things did not happen quite the way Max Stirner had envisioned. The work had a heavy, immediate effect, but in the wake of political unrest and a revolution in 1848, the attention paid him and his contemporary Young Hegelians was lost. Most of the young Hegelians, including Stirner, experienced hardship both financially and otherwise in this time.

non serviam 19/20

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Editor's Word

In this millennium double issue of *Non Serviam*, we have the pleasure of presenting Wm. Flygare's English translation of Goethe's poem «Vanitas!». As readers are probably well aware of, it was the opening lines from «Vanitas!» that inspired and even named Stirner's preface to *The Ego and Its Own*. I think you will recognize the sentiment and the inspiration when you read the poem.

The two other features are by yours truly. The first is a reply to Sid Parker concerning the understanding of the term «union» as it is used by Stirner. The second is an introductory talk I held about Stirner for the local libertarian club Fridemokratene here in Oslo, and later also for a group of «the other egoists» – the Randians.

Much Stirnerite activity is happening on the Internet these days: Linus Walleij has made the Swedish translation of *The Ego and Its Own* available at http://www.nonserviam.com/stirner/svensk/

I would also like to direct your attention to a mailing list called Egoism. The predominant species of animal on that list seems to be a Stirner-type egoist. This list also hosts to a few animals of another kind, most of them passing by and leaving in a huff. These are the moralists. In the world at large, they are in an overwhelming majority. So they will usually arrive at the list with the mindset of a majoritarian: They take their majoritarian presumptions for granted. A particular presumption that seems to be very common is that moral language formulas have a meaning outside of their use within the language games themselves. This presumption is soon challenged, in particular by the resident Stirnerite veteran Dan Davis. If you want to enjoy the sight, join the list by sending an email to listserv@maelstrom.stjohns.edu with «subscribe egoism FirstName LastName» in the body of your message.

—Svein Olav Nyberg
Spring 2000

19/20

The Union Of Egoists

– A Reply To Sid

Svein Olav Nyberg

I will stick to Sid Parker's point numbering from Non Serviam no. 18 in my reply.

1) «Egoism» in Stirner is, as he himself points out, not the same as the bugaboo that is being used to scare old women and little kids. Rather, it is simply your own interests as the unique one you are – what you'd call «interest» when not looking through the tinted spectacles of idealism. Egoism needs thus be no all-or-nothing affair: While you and I may be egoists through and through, the common man may let his personal interest win out to the ideals some 50% of the time, or 30%, or 90%.

«Conscious egoism» can be understood in two ways: First we have the «conscious egoism» of those of us who have read Stirner and who could give lengthy lectures on the topic of prefering own interests to those of ideals. But second, we have it in the form of simply being aware of your own interests – and acting on that awareness, that consciousness. Never would any of us require, I think, that one should also be conscious of the label attached to one's actions – the concept. So conscious egoism we have around us in almost everyone, each and every day: When someone haggles the price for his own good, and when someone eats delicious food for the sake of his own pleasure. That they do not name it is of no importance; likewise, an egoistic action is not negated by that the person afterwards goes off to squander a few hours on an ideal – for instance by following up a steaming sexual Sunday night by going to church later in the day.

2) Concerning the unions of egoists and the State, I think you are right. For though Stirner's philosophy as we find it in writing is recognized by its unique character all the way, he nevertheless changed. In *The False Principle Of Our Education*, Stirner elevates «freedom». Later, in *The Ego*, he has gone away from that concept. In his «Art and Religion», he is very focused on dialectics and contradictions, whereas in his «Replies to Stirner's critics» such Hegelianisms are as well as absent. So when you speak of Henri Arvon's statement that «[Stirner had not] succeeded in freeing himself completely from the climate of social reform that surrounded him [when he wrote The Ego]», it is perhaps not so strange that many have taken the «union of egoists» to be a mere means to a world transformation.

The house where Stirner died.

but rather something that is «granted» by those who otherwise would have put forth a presence in the sphere where you would have liked your freedom. This is echoed in the infamous phrase «You can't have Freedom for free».

An illustrative example of the difference between freedom and ownness can be found in the case of a child being teased at school: If the bullies stop harassing him for a while, the harassment is absent for a while – he is free of it. But this freedom is easily seen to be in the hands of someone else. On the other hand, if he starts learning karate or gets himself some athletic friends, the situation takes on another flavour. He then uses his ownness to fight his harassers. He resists them by his will. In the first scenario: If the bullies decided to start harassing him again, and he appealed to his freedom, this vain appeal would be nothing but a wish, a wish for the bullies' absence. But this wish is not up to himself to fulfill; it is up to the bullies.

This does again hold a certain similarity to Rand: Rand talks about «sanction of the victim»: The bullies' power over you is unlimited unless you fight back and say no.

In the last part of his book, Stirner describes what it means to relate to one another as an individual to an individual, rather than facing each other through the intermediary of an ideal. In particular, he gives a reply to those who object desperately when he tears down their ideals: «But if we do not have the ideals to protects us, we are completely lost! We will have no claim of right to hold up against the evil-doers!» Here Stirner replies that the «rights», just like crosses and garlic, have never been a protection in any case.[6] «What are you standing there for?» he asks, «Do you not have any power of resistance? Don't you, too, have power and abilities?»

Furthermore, Stirner stresses that power and abilities are not reserved for big, brawny men alone. For if I join up with others of similar interests, my power is multiplied manifold. And all changes that have been accomplished throughout history, whether done in the name of an ideal or for some concrete people's sake, have always been accomplished by concrete people; the ideal has not done a darn thing – it has at best been a stowaway or deadhead in the minds of concrete people.

So what I have gained does not become lost when I lose illusions and ideals, not even if the lost ideals are «right» and «freedom». It is rather so that what has been gained has become more solidly founded, because I no longer feel I must bend my head in shame if someone will no longer grant me what I had won: The «freedom» that the bullied school-boy has gained is better founded on his ownness than on pleas for freedom. Also, I may have lost my licence to sell liquor, but that does not mean I will automatically stop selling drinks. I may have been denied imports above certain limits, thus limiting my «freedom» in the classical political sense. But in ownness I – smuggle.

[6] «If someone is stepping on your right,» the prominent Norwegian libertarian Bjørn Borg Kjølseth once asked, «will the right bite his leg in response, or will you have to do it yourself?»

3) On «union», «property» and «one-sidedness»:

A) Consider Tom and Joe: Tom really likes Joe and his company. Joe, however, loathes Tom and his company. Would you then call Tom and Joe «friends»?

B) Consider Jack and Fred: Fred really likes Jack and his company. Likewise, Jack likes Fred and his company. Would you call Jack and Fred «friends»?

C) Consider Ben and Roger: Ben couldn't care less for Roger's company. Likewise, Roger couldn't care less for Ben's company. But still they play together, because their fathers have told them to, and they both do whatever father says. Would you call Ben and Roger friends?

«Friends» is a label attachable to case B only, and I would call that a «union of egoists». This is primarily opposed to the bond, examplified in case C, which is a being-together without or against own will – a «community». This, we seem to agree on.

So the critical case is case A. I know myself from cases in life as a «Joe»: There are people who have persisted in calling me «friend» even after I bang the door in their face. I do not call them «friend». The «Tom» might view me as «property» – i.e. our being-together is a willed relation from his side. I, the «Joe», on the other hand, am no more interested in that potential piece of «property» than I am in collecting rotting twigs in the woods.

My conclusion is that Tom and Joe are not «friends». Whatever the relation between them, it can scarcely be called a «union», as little as a whipper and a whipped are in «union». This does by no means mean that you «should» prefer «union» with another man rather than the relation «property». But it does mean that what can be labelled «property» does not automatically acquire the label «union», even though a «union» may well be labelled «property» too. So this is not a moral question, but a question of how to apply labels. Or rather – how our common favourite philosopher Stirner once applied those labels.

So who is right? Well, neither old Hess, nor old Sid – and not even old me. My position on how to apply the label «union» has changed, if ever so slightly, in part because of this very discussion. ♦

«Different persons growing up in the same language
are like different bushes trimmed and trained to the shape of identical elephants.»
— Willard van Orman Quine, *Word and Object*, §2

Max Stirner – The Great Philosopher Of Egoism

Thank you for your invitation. I have been invited to give a talk on Max Stirner, with subtitle «The Great Philosopher Of Egoism?». A bolder subtitle, «The Great Philosopher Of Individualism?» would perhaps have been even more appropriate. For, although Stirner certainly is a philosopher of egoism, I would say he is also the most consistent philosopher of both egoism and of the larger category of individualism. But the theme of egoism as the ultimate individualism will have to wait until later. In this talk my focus will be on *presenting* Max Stirner's ideas, which may cause great provocation or great – delight.

Svein Olav Nyberg

You are probably familiar with the term «egoism» from Ayn Rand's writings. So you will not come to this meeting completely unprepared. However, the kind of egoism I will present to you today is not the one Rand talked about; it is not quite as domesticated. So at times, these concepts of egoism will not only be different, but they will even be complete opposites. For while Rand talks about the «Nature of Man» («*qua* Man»), about morality, and about the State as the protector of Man's rights, Stirner reveals himself as the anti-moralist. Just like Henrik Ibsen, he treats the State as «the curse of the individuals», and any claims about the «Nature of Man» aside from the purposes of biological classification, are Stirner's favourite targets.

So who is this Max Stirner? And what is his philosophy?

Max Stirner is primarily known as the author of *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum* (*The Ego and His Own*), and it is in this book that he puts forth most of his philosophical views. His philosophy is both an easy and a difficult one to grasp. During his own time and by his opponents, *Der Einzige* was characterized as the first readable book in all the history of German philosophy. Its style is catching and rhetorical, and makes it easy for the reader to become intrigued. At the same time it is a multi-faceted piece of work; both in structure and in content it is packed with implicit and explicit references to both its past and its present: It is a work of many layers, and I doubt that I have managed to get through all of its layers.

Stirner starts his work by quoting Bruno Bauer and Ludwig Feuerbach. «Man is to men the highest creature» says Feuerbach. «Man has just been discovered» says Bruno Bauer. The critique of these two philosophers are at the core of Stirner's work. Through his critique of these two philosophers in particular, Stirner criticizes all kinds of moral philosophy up to his own myself.

Throughout his works Stirner makes a crucial distinction between the ideas and feelings that have been instilled in me and those that arise in me. In his article *Das unwahre Prinzip unserer Erziehung* (The False Principle of Our Education), he attacks the theories that see the great question of teaching as one of how to stuff knowledge into children's heads as effectively as possible. The pedagogues furiously disagree with each other about the means, Stirner observes, but they all agree that the goal is to stuff knowledge into the children's heads. Opposed to this, Stirner suggests that the children could choose their own learning; that their edification is best based on their own – interest. This way knowledge becomes the children's own, and not a heavy burden of imputed facts and theories. An interesting observation in this regard, from brain research 150 years after Stirner, is that the chemistry of learning works best exactly when the learner learns with interest.

Precisely this notion that something is one's own, like learning, is our second, essential concept to better understand Stirner. According to Stirner, everything you get in touch with is your property. Not in a legal sense, but in the sense that what you, as a unique one, get in touch with, you will face on your own terms, and not on terms prescribed by someone else, by an ideal, etc.

This is undeniably an idiosyncratic way of using the word «property», so let me explain: «Property», in a classical sense, is what you control. How you specifically use this control is up to you and your abilities. «Property» as a «right» is something Stirner has just rejected, because the «right» is not something that belongs to the individual; it belongs to «Man».

So in the absense of ruling, normative ideals, «property» means nothing else than whatever you come into contact with. It is «property» when you relate to it by your ownness, and not according to what ideals and authorities have prescribed. And your control of the object depends on your power or - in other words - your abilities.

The second last concept of Stirner's is exactly *Eigenheit* – «ownness». This concept is a description saying that you consider yourself and your evaluations - yours. It is related to the last of Stirner's concepts, *Eigner*, which means «owner».

Stirner contrasts «ownness» to «freedom». «Freedom» in itself, says Stirner, is only an empty and toothless concept. Freedom – the word «freedom» – means, along with the word «free», nothing but «absence of». Light beer is, for instance, free of alcohol. But you do not become a libertarian by drinking it. So when you are looking for «freedom», exactly what do you want freedom from? The word itself does not provide any answer, and you can argue with the «humane liberals» about the right to the word until you are blue in the face.

Or you can simply decide for your own sake what this freedom should contain, and work to liberate yourself, not a crowd of men who do not desire your freedom at all, but instead perhaps desire another kind of freedom contradicting yours.

But Stirner prefers «ownness» to «freedom». Because freedom, which is an absence, is not a result of your own efforts,

This «humane liberalism» is strikingly similar to the society the main character of Ayn Rand's *Anthem* wakes up in. Here Rand and Stirner meet again, in joint critique: Rand does it by means of a novel, and Stirner with a «reductio ad absurdum» argument against this liberation of abstract beings – spirits and spooks!

Feuerbach turned God into Man, says Stirner, while Bauer wanted to turn Man into my concrete I. For remember: In Hegelianism the universal has no existence without its concrete manifestations. As Stirner puts it: «Man is lost without me». And so he turns his back to those who wish to make «Man» the identity of Stirner or any other concrete person.

Stirner's Egoism

Stirner's concept of egoism has so far been presented as something with a negative function – something that can be inserted into a philosophical or political argument to knock the opponent off his perch. But Stirner also gives us egoism as a positive example: Here is what I have done. If you want to and you are able to, the way is open to do likewise.

Unlike Rand's egoism, Stirner's egoism is not prescriptive. He has not chosen the term to be the base of a new -ism. Stirner's philosophy is one of focusing on the concrete individual. The core concept to understand the philosophical world of Stirner beyond his critique is *Der Einzige* – a phrase which means «the unique», «the individual» and «the sole one».

Stirner notes that each individual is unique. Hans Trygve[5] and I are not the same person. We are two concretely different individuals. For sure, we are both human beings, but «human beings» only expresses what we have in common, not anything we must strive to become. That we have something in common does not make what we have in common our essence. «Essence» is a characteristic of concepts, not of individuals; and I can have something in common with a lot of things. That I have something in common with something else, does not make this commonality my essence. For I am no concept. Had I been a concept, could you not also spell me?

This is a simple every-day observation. Yet we have seen that this little stroke fells big philosophical oaks.

As unique, our interests are unique – they express the unique one. It is this unique person's unique interests that Stirner calls egoism. Egoism is the interest you have for your own concerns, as opposed to the concerns of ideals like God, Man and your Country.

Stirner also suggests that if we should happen to identify our concerns with the struggle for an ideal, we would still be doing this on the basis of our self-interest – out of egoism. In other words, he suggests a psychological egoism. This is correct and tautological in the sense that all our interests are basically – unique interests; our own personal interests, as the unique persons we are. Personally, I think the idea of psychological egoism can be a bit messy, since it raises the threshold to separate «unconscious» egoists like Mother Theresa from «conscious» egoists like

[5]The translator of this article.

The house where Stirner was born.

time, and an extension of his critique into our time makes it nicely applicable to more recent philosphers.

You do not need to be familiar with Bauer and Feuerbach to understand Stirner's critique of morality; Stirner himself provides enough insight. It is nevertheless useful to know where Stirner is coming from. So let us do a historical summary:

Max Stirner (1806-56) was born Johann Kaspar Schmidt. «Max Stirner» is a nickname he acquired during his college years because of his high and broad forehead. He later adopted this name and later on used it as his literary pseudonym. He studied philosophy, where he had Hegel as one of his lecturers, and was well on his way to a doctorate in philosophy. Due to circumstances concerning his mother's health, however, this doctorate was never finished. Stirner's intellectual background is his deep knowledge of Hegel's philosophy, the Bible, and of greek Antiquity. So the specific contents of Stirner's critique in *Der Einzige* relates to these elements.

In 1841 Stirner started his association with «Die Freien» («The Free»), a circle of intellectuals who met to drink and debate at Hippel's Weinstube in Berlin. These «Free» were also known as the «Young Hegelians» or the «*Left* Hegelians». Note that the meaning of «left» here is the one used in the French parliament after the 1789 revolution and not the one of current political classification. In this circle of intellectuals, Stirner was known for his few but penetrating arguments, usually confining these arguments only to his neighbour. The general debate he tended to

observe just from a distance with an ironic smile. In 1844 he published his infamous magnum opus; a work which not only gave him instant notoriety, but also crushed the illusions of the Left Hegelians, and for all practical purposes destroyed the movement.

Being a good subversive book, *Der Einzige* was of course confiscated by the government. Stirner and his publisher had, however, planned for this contingency and had already distributed quite a few books before the censorship could get hold of their first copy. After a short while the book was released again, reportedly «too absurd to be dangerous»! «Absurd» was also Karl Marx' reaction. History has it that Engels wrote to Marx[1] upon its publication and talked sympathetically about *Der Einzige*.

[1]Engels wrote in a letter to Marx: «this work is important, far more important than Hess believes. [T]he first point we find true is that, before doing whatever we will on behalf of some idea, we have first to make our cause personal, egoistic [...] Stirner is right to reject the «Man» of Feuerbach [since] Feuerbach's Man is derived from God. [A]mong all of «The Free» Stirner obviously has the most talent, personality, and dynamism».

question is, who is going to win? On one side you have the individual with its the demands of own will and its individual goals. On the other side you have the universal with its implicit demands of equality.

How different, then, will not the two sides define «freedom». The individual wants to break away from those who demand power over it; it finds its freedom when its movements are unhindered. The universal, on the other hand, finds freedom when the universal is unlimited.

As an example, let us look at Norway's liberation from Sweden. Did the individuals in Norway gain more freedom after this event? No, by all means, that would be a misunderstaning. What was liberated was the nation. The nation gained more power. From an individual's point of view, this was a mere change of rulers. After having been ruled by a Swedish king, the Norwegians were now to be ruled by a king devoting his kingship to Norway only.

The same goes for liberation movements all over the world. South Vietnam was liberated from the imperialists, but the South Vietnamese – the individuals – got new and stricter masters. And was not Iran liberated from American imperialism? Yes, indeed, Iran is liberated, while individuals like Salman Rushdie have to fear for their lives.

Stirner's contemporaries, first of all Bruno Bauer, had become experts on how to liberate the universal. And they particularly wanted to free «Man». But as I stated above, they are not talking about concrete individuals, but rather about our «essence». Here the antagonism is even closer to the surface than in the case of the liberation of nations.

Stirner describes three stages in the development of «Man»'s liberation. The first one is from the French revolution of 1789, while the other two are taken from political critics who were Stirner's contemporaries:

1. Man's first liberation takes place during the 1789 revolution. Personal power should be removed – no one should be more than anyone else as a person – all are «citöyen» – state citizens. This is called political liberalism.

But since this liberation is presented as a liberation of Man, and not of any actual and concrete beings with all their personal interests – «egoists» as Stirner calls them – the 1789 revolution lays itself open to criticism that it is not a complete liberation. Distribution of property is controlled by the State, protecting the have's from the have-not's. Property is left to the sphere of egoists, and is not under the control of Man or Mankind.

2. So – if the intention is to liberate Man, you have to remove the power the egoists have gained over property, and make it available for – Mankind. With that we have stepped into Communism or, as it is also called, the social liberalism.

But this is only the beginning of a slippery slope. The humanists, led by Bruno Bauer, finds it abhorrent that even under social liberalism, leisure time is still reserved for private interests – for egoism.

3. So in order to get closer to the complete liberation of Man from the grip of these evil egoists, leisure time must be «human» as well. Everything is to be organized around «Man» – and all one's own and personal interest are to be removed.

I am going to use a philosopher closer to our own time, a more famous one; the competing egoist – Ayn Rand.[2]

To Rand, ethics is founded on one «existential choice»: To live or not to live. And since everything, according to Rand, has an identity, you cannot simply «live»; you have to live as something – «as man» – qua Man.[3] And if you have decided to live «qua Man», then you have chosen a certain ethics.[4]

Stirner's critique applied to Rand would be the example of a man who does not fit her ethics, a man who has chosen otherwise. It would not be hard to find such examples. So what is to be said about this man? Could we say he is not alive – that he is dead? Hardly. And despite objections from Objectivists, most bureaucrats have reasonably long lives. But they do not live according to Rand's ethics. So what else can Rand and Randians say in defense of their ethics than that these people cannot be – men?

So Rand's and Feuerbach's «Man» with a capital M is therefore exposed as something other than the empirical generalization it was claimed to be. «Man» gets exposed as a set of ideals and phantasms that the two authors have desired men should be, which flies in the face of their claims to objectivity. Using the word «Man» to describe their fantasies is exposed as arbitrary - that is, arbitrary for any other purpose than rhetoric.

Myself, I have learned a lot from Stirner's critique of morality as manifested in Feuerbach, and I have yet to find a morality that can not be criticized using Stirner's method. As a general case, Stirner has proven that arguments of the kind «I am a man, therefore I ought to be 'Man' in a normative sense» are nothing but philosophy based on a poor pun! Such bad puns, however, seem to be the order of the day in moral philosophy.

The political Stirner

Earlier on we mentioned that Stirner, like Ibsen, considered the State as «the curse of the individual». To consider the State to be a curse is hardly unique. There is no lack of people cursing the State for «taking away their freedom», «oppressing them as a class», «working against God's will», «destroying the environment», «oppressing one's nation, race, etc.», and not to forget – etc.

They all have this in common: They curse the State in the name of an ideal. Their complaint is that the State prevents the ideal's free unfolding. Stirner and Ibsen, on the other hand, curse the State because it prevents their own free unfolding.

Stirner identifies two opposite directions – the individual and the universal. The Marx' reply has not been preserved, but in his next letter to Marx Engels states that he has changed his mind and that he now finds the book «what you find it to be». These two partners in crime then commenced writing *The German Ideology*, originally a work of 700 pages about their contemporaries. This work is usually published in a version with their embarrassing ad hominem attacks on Max Stirner edited away – a version of a mere 200 pages.

The Left Hegelians

Left Hegelianism was a response to Hegelianism, and particularly a reaction to the Hegelian tendency to support every aspect of the established order. The Left Hegelians were impressed by Hegel's methods, in particular his dialectics.

In dialectics you have a starting-point, and by studying relations at this starting point, you will find dualisms and «one-sidedness» that need to be dissolved through dialectics. The result from the previous exercise in dialectics will then become the starting point for a new dialectical investigation, and so we have a dialectic progression.

So dialectics is specifically related to development – development of concepts through critique; dualisms are found between relational opposites, at times pure «one-sidedness» or «hidden premises» will also be found.

How tempting is it then not – when Hegel himself, the Master of dialectics, almost declares the end of history in the state of Prussia and in Lutheran Christianity – how tempting is it then not to go on and apply dialectics to the end results of Hegel's own investigations? How tempting is it not to «apply Hegel to Hegel», to surface as – the better Hegelian?

This is exactly what the Young Hegelians did. Strauss' Leben Jesu is probably the best marker of the start of this process of re-examining Hegel. In his work Strauss discusses the «Christ» concept: By assumption, «Christ» is Mankind's universal saviour. However: According to Hegel's own methodology, the universal cannot be identified with a single individual. Strauss pursues the matter in true Hegelian style, and ends up with the conclusion that although Jesus probably was a historical person, he could not have been Christ. «Christ as an individual» was merely a mythical expression of Mankind's «real» saviour - Mankind itself.

Naturally, this caused quite a stir among both theologians and philosophers. To Hegel's followers it was certainly no minor matter, and they ended up taking sides. One side, represented by Strauss, thought Hegel was a starting point for further movements of Spirit, and not an end result. Opposing them were the conservatives, in particular Bruno Bauer and Hegel himself. It should, however, be noted that it did not take long before Bauer switched sides and became a leading Left Hegelian.

Strauss' work was the key that unlocked the door, and several works were published, works that presented radical departures from the «results» of conservative Hegelianism. The work of greatest impact was Ludwig Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums* (The Essence Of Christianity), first published in 1841. In

[2]In this context, it is interesting to note that Rand's philosophy keeps being compared to Hegelianism, and that critics like Chris Sciabarra indicate significant similarities between her methods and the methods of the former Feuerbachian – Karl Marx. (Chris Sciabarra: *Ayn Rand, the Russian Radical*)

[3]Peikoff: *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*, p.119-120. This is where Rand makes her error: She does not look for my or any other man's concrete identity. She looks for Man's identity. But since Man is a concept, its identity is its essence. And Man's essence, she says, is Rationality. Erroneously, she then applies this essence to the concrete individuals, as if the concept's essence was the individual's identity. As I mention below, essences belong to cencepts, and I am no concept.

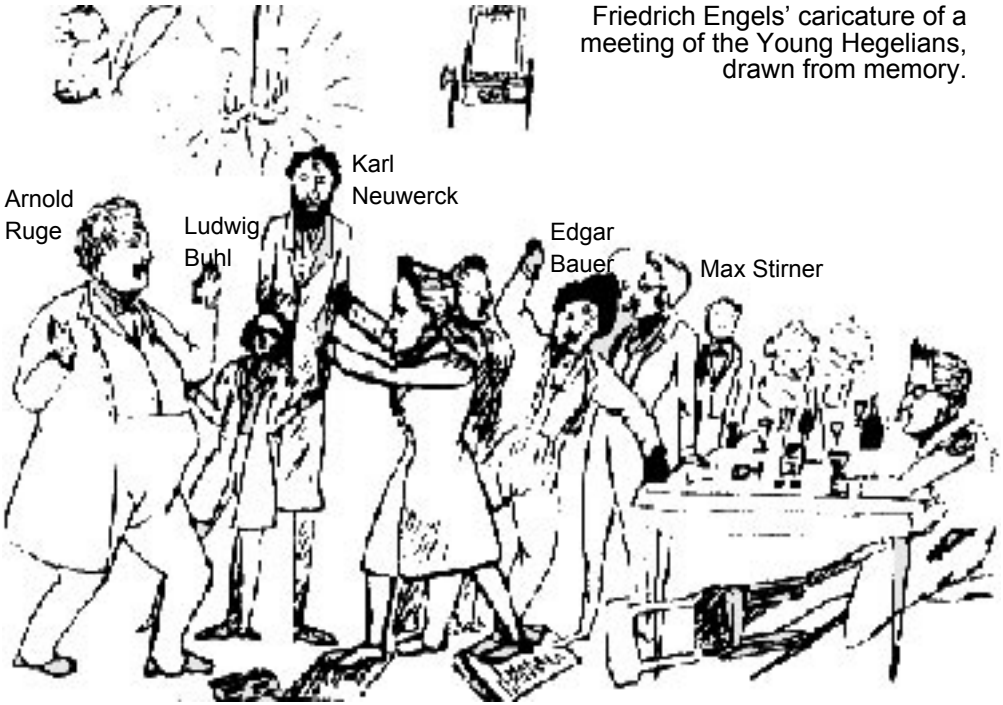
[4]Ibid. p. 257: «If life is the standard, [man] must finance his activities by his own productive efforts.»

this work, Feuerbach develops Strauss' thesis by also denying God – who in Hegelianism is seen as The Universal – incorporation into a single individual.

«How are we said to know God?» Feuerbach asks. His contemporaries, the Hegelian theologians, replied that he is known by his attributes. «God is love», «God is truth», etc. So this God is not known directly, but rather via his attributes. Is it not so, then, asks Feuerbach, that what is worshipped can just as little be God himself? Must not what is worshipped be God's knowable attributes? Would it not then be closer to the truth if we inverted subject and predicate in these statements, so that they now read: «Love is divine», «Truth is divine», etc? And since this is the truth, are not the original statements the real inversion? Feuerbach proceeds by asking from where we know love, truth, etc. Where else, he says, but from ourselves?

Feuerbach concludes by saying that not only is Mankind its own Christ, it is also its own God: «God» is nothing but an alienation of Man's essence, where this essence has been referred to an external object, and thereby considered something other than Man.

With this turn the Young Hegelians have reduced theology to anthropology, and replaced Christianity with Humanism. Man is the measure of all things. Speculations on the nature of God are replaced by speculations on the «essence» of Man.



Friedrich Engels' caricature of a meeting of the Young Hegelians, drawn from memory.

Questions about «God's order» and God's will are replaced by questions about Man's order and will – questions about morality.

So what does being Man mean? Feuerbach, who has just brought God down from Heaven in order to chase him into Humanity, is obligated to search for all of God's attributes in Man – in Man's essence. This way the statements «God is love», «God is truth», etc. turn into «Love is the essence of Man», «Truth is the essence of Man» etc. This is the way it must be if Feuerbach's description of God as nothing but the alienation of Man's essence is to be correct.

But individuals are not always loving, and neither are they always truthful. Which means Feuerbach can not present these statements as empirical generalizations of humans. So Feuerbach's point of view becomes that «love», «truth», and so on are not properties of individuals, but rather the normative essence of all men. «Man», to Feuerbach, is the normative essence of men.

Stirner's Critique Of Left Hegelianism

This is Stirner's starting point, and he could hardly have had a better one; perhaps a Stirner could exist only in an environment like this, where the principles of morality were thus clearly presented.

So what is Stirner's critique?

The first appearance of the concept «egoist» is in his critique - used as a dialectic lever. The egoist is introduced in the preface of *Der Einzige*, for this occasion translated into Norwegian as «Kun for min egen skyld» by myself and Hans Trygve Jensen. In this preface Stirner presents what may be considered an existential choice; deciding whom to serve – God, Mankind, «The Good» – or oneself. Stirner points out that the last choice has always been «shameful»; you are incessantly instructed to serve something «higher», like «God», «Man», etc. But what is «higher»? Stirner shows that such a concept becomes completely circular; God is «higher» by God's measure, «Man» by Man's measure, etc. Therefore, Stirner will choose himself as his own measure. He puts his own will first and declares – the egoist, one single concrete man.

This creature, the egoist, is then sent into the arena of philosophical debate to match strength with the ideals – in particular with «Man», this abstract, normative concept of Feuerbach's.

Stirner's main argument is this: In relation to the egoist – one single, concrete man – Feuerbach's «Man» becomes a contradiction. Feuerbach can not deny that the egoist is a man. But yet, the egoist is no «Man» in the normative sense: For the egoist could not care less about the essence Feuerbach has assigned to him, like «True» and «Loving». So in relation to the normative ideal, the egoist is both man and un-man at the same time – a logical contradiction. Stirner's argument provoked a strong response from Feuerbach's followers, and a restructuring of their ideas. Among these followers was, as mentioned earlier, the young – Karl Marx.

It might be hard to relate to Stirner's critique of Feuerbach without the details you would find in Stirner's presentations of him, or in Feuerbach's own presentations of himself for that matter. So, as an example of how Stirner's argument works,