

Max Stirner

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Contents

I	3
II	5
III	7

I

In 1888, John Henry Mackay, the Scottish-German poet, while at the British Museum reading Lange's History of Materialism, encountered the name of Max Stirner and a brief criticism of his forgotten book, *Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum* (The Only One and His Property; in French translated *L'Unique et sa Propriété*, and in the First English translation more aptly and euphoniously entitled *The Ego and His Own*). His curiosity excited, Mackay, who is an anarchist, procured after some difficulty a copy of the work, and so greatly was he stirred that for ten years he gave himself up to the study of Stirner and his teachings, and after incredible painstaking published in 1898 the story of his life. (*Max Stirner: Sein Leben und sein Werk*: John Henry Mackay.) To Mackay's labors we owe all we know of a man who was as absolutely swallowed up by the years as if he had never existed. But some advanced spirits had read Stirner's book, the most revolutionary ever written, and had felt its influence. Let us name two: Henrik Ibsen and Friedrich Nietzsche. Though the name of Stirner is not quoted by Nietzsche, he nevertheless recommended Stirner to a favorite pupil of his, Professor Baumgartner at Basel University. This was in 1874.

One hot August afternoon in the year 1896 at Bayreuth, I was standing in the Marktplatz when a member of the Wagner Theatre pointed out to me a house opposite, at the corner of the Maximilianstrasse, and said: "Do you see that house with the double gables? A man was born there whose name will be green when Jean Paul and Richard Wagner are forgotten." It was too large a draft upon my credulity, so I asked the name. "Max Stirner," he replied. "The crazy Hegelian," I retorted. "You have read him, then?" "No; but you haven't read Nordau." It was true. All fire and flame at that time for Nietzsche, I did not realize that the poet and rhapsodist had forerunners. My friend sniffed at Nietzsche's name; Nietzsche for him was an aristocrat, not an Individualist — in reality, a lyric expounder of Bismarck's gospel of blood and iron. Wagner's adversary would, with Renan, place mankind under the yoke of a more exacting tyranny than Socialism, the tyranny of Culture, of the Superman. Ibsen, who had studied both Kierkegaard and Stirner — witness *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* — Ibsen was much nearer to the champion of Ego than Nietzsche. Yet it is the dithyrambic author of *Zarathustra* who is responsible, with Mackay, for the recrudescence of Stirner's teachings.

Nietzsche is the poet of the doctrine, Stirner its prophet, or, if you will, its philosopher. Later I secured the book, which had been reprinted in the cheap edition of Reclam (1882). It seemed colorless, or rather gray, set against the glory and gorgeous rhetoric of Nietzsche. I could not see then what I saw a decade later — that Nietzsche had used Stirner as a springboard, as a point of departure, and that the Individual had vastly different meanings to those diverse temperaments. But Stirner displayed the courage of an explorer in search of the north pole of the Ego.

The man whose theories would make a *tabula rasa* of civilization, was born at Bayreuth, October 25, 1806, and died at Berlin June 25, 1856. His right name was Johann Caspar Schmidt, Max Stirner being a nickname bestowed upon him by his lively comrades in Berlin because of his very high and massive forehead. His father was a maker of wind instruments, who died six months after his son's birth. His mother remarried, and his stepfather proved a kind protector. Nothing of external importance occurred in the life of Max Stirner that might place him apart from his fellow-students. He was very industrious over his books at Bayreuth, and when he became a student at the Berlin University he attended the lectures regularly, preparing himself for a teacher's profession. He mastered the classics, modern philosophy, and modern languages. But he did not win a doctor's degree; just before examinations his mother became ill with a mental malady (a

fact his critics have noted) and the son dutifully gave up everything so as to be near her. After her death he married a girl who died within a short time. Later, in 1843, his second wife was Marie Dähnhardt, a very “advanced” young woman, who came from Schwerin to Berlin to lead a “free” life. She met Stirner in the Hoppel circle, at a Weinstube in the Friedrichstrasse, where radical young thinkers gathered: Bruno Bauer, Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Moses Hess, Jordan, Julius Faucher, and other stormy insurgents. She had, it is said, about 10,000 thalers. She was married with the ring wrenched from a witness’s purse — her bridegroom had forgotten to provide one. He was not a practical man; if he had been he would hardly have written *The Ego and His Own*.

It was finished between the years 1843 and 1845; the latter date it was published. It created a stir, though the censor did not seriously interfere with it; its attacks on the prevailing government were veiled. In Germany rebellion on the psychic plane expresses itself in metaphysics; in Poland and Russia music is the safer medium. Feuerbach, Hess, and Szeliga answered Stirner’s terrible arraignment of society, but men’s thoughts were interested elsewhere, and with the revolt of 1848 Stirner was quite effaced. He had taught for five years in a fashionable school for young ladies; he had written for several periodicals, and translated extracts from the works of Say and Adam Smith.

After the book appeared, relations with his wife became uneasy. Late in 1846 or early in 1847 she left him and went to London, where she supported herself by writing; later she inherited a small sum from a sister, visited Australia, married a laborer there, and became a washerwoman. In 1897 Mackay wrote to her in London, asking her for some facts in the life of her husband. She replied tartly that she was not willing to revive her past; that her husband had been too much of an egotist to keep friends, and was “very sly.” This was all he could extort from the woman, who evidently had never understood her husband and execrated his memory, probably because her little fortune was swallowed up by their mutual improvidence. Another appeal only elicited the answer that “Mary Smith is preparing for death” — she had become a Roman Catholic. It is the irony of things in general that his book is dedicated to “My Sweetheart, Marie Dähnhardt.”

Stirner, after being deserted, led a precarious existence. The old jolly crowd at Hoppel’s seldom saw him. He was in prison twice for debt — free Prussia — and often lacked bread. He, the exponent of Egoism, of philosophic anarchy, starved because of his pride. He was in all matters save his theories a moderate man, eating and drinking temperately, living frugally. Unassuming in manners, he could hold his own in debate — and Hoppel’s appears to have been a rude debating society — yet one who avoided life rather than mastered it. He was of medium height, ruddy, and his eyes deep blue. His hands were white, slender, “aristocratic,” writes Mackay. Certainly not the figure of a stalwart shatterer of conventions, not the ideal iconoclast; above all, without a touch of the melodrama of communistic anarchy, with its black flags, its propaganda by force, its idolatry of assassinations, bomb-throwing, killing of fat, harmless policemen, and its sentimental gabble about Fraternity. Stirner hated the word Equality; he knew it was a lie, knew that all men are born unequal, as no two grains of sand on earth ever are or ever will be alike. He was a solitary. And thus he died at the age of fifty. A few of his former companions heard of his neglected condition and buried him. Nearly a half century later Mackay, with the co-operation of Hans von Bülow, affixed a commemorative tablet on the house where he last lived, Phillipstrasse 19, Berlin, and alone Mackay placed a slab to mark his grave in the Sophienkirchhof.

It is to the poet of the *Letzte Erkenntniss*, with its stirring line, “Doch bin ich mein,” that I owe the above scanty details of the most thorough-going Nihilist who ever penned his disbelief in religion, humanity, society, the family. He rejects them all. We have no genuine portrait of this

insurrectionist — he preferred personal insurrection to general revolution; the latter, he asserted, brought in its train either Socialism or a tyrant — except a sketch hastily made by Friedrich Engels, the revolutionist, for Mackay. It is not reassuring. Stirner looks like an old-fashioned German and timid pedagogue, high coat-collar, spectacles, clean-shaven face, and all. This valient enemy of the State, of Socialism, was, perhaps, only brave on paper. But his icy, relentless, epigrammatic style is in the end more gripping than the spectacular, volcanic, whirling utterances of Nietzsche. Nietzsche lives in an ivory tower and is an aristocrat. Into Stirner's land all are welcome. That is, if men have the will to rebel, and if they despise the sentimentality of mob rule. The Ego and His Own is the most drastic criticism of Socialism thus far presented.

II

For those who love to think of the visible universe as a cosy corner of God's footstool, there is something bleak and terrifying in the isolated position of man since science has postulated him as an infinitesimal bubble on an unimportant planet. The soul shrinks as our conception of outer space widens. Thomas Hardy describes the sensation as "ghastly." There is said to be no purpose, no design, in all the gleaming phantasmagoria revealed by the astronomer's glass; while on our globe we are a brother to lizards, bacteria furnish our motor force, and our brain is but a subtly fashioned mirror, composed of neuron filaments, a sort of "dark room" in which is somehow pictured the life without. Well, we admit, for the sake of the argument, that we banish God from the firmament, substituting a superior mechanism; we admit our descent from stardust and apes, we know that we have no free will, because man, like the unicellular organisms, "gives to every stimulus without an inevitable response." That, of course, settles all moral obligations. But we had hoped, we of the old sentimental brigade, that all things being thus adjusted we could live with our fellow man in (comparative) peace, cheating him only in a legitimate business way, and loving our neighbor better than ourselves (in public). Ibsen had jostled our self-satisfaction sadly, but some obliging critic had discovered his formula — a pessimistic decadent — and with bare verbal bones we worried the old white-haired mastiff of Norway. Only a decadent! It is an easy word to speak and it means nothing. With Nietzsche the case was simpler. We couldn't read him because he was a madman; but he at least was an aristocrat who held the *bourgeois* in contempt, and he also held a brief for culture. Ah! when we are young we are altruists; as Thackeray says, "Youths go to balls; men go to dinners."

But alone comes this dreadful Stirner, who cries out: Hypocrites all of you. You are not altruists, but selfish persons, who, self-illuded, believe yourselves to be disinterested. Be Egoists. Confess the truth in the secrecy of your mean, little souls. We are all Egotists. Be Egoists. There is no truth but my truth. No world but my world. I am I. And then Stirner waves away God, State, society, the family, morals, mankind, leaving only the "hateful" Ego. The cosmos is frosty and inhuman, and old Mother Earth no longer offers us her bosom as a reclining-place. Stirner has so decreed it. We are suspended between heaven and earth, like Mahomet's coffin, hermetically sealed in Self. Instead of "smiting the chord of self," we must reorchestrate the chord that it may give out richer music. (Perhaps the Higher Egoism which often leads to low selfishness.)

Nevertheless, there is an honesty in the words of Max Stirner. We are weary of the crying in the market-place, "Lo! Christ is risen," only to find an old nostrum tricked out in socialistic phrases; and fine phrases make fine feathers for these gentlemen who offer the millennium in one hand

and perfect peace in the other. Stirner is the frankest thinker of his century. He does not soften his propositions, harsh ones for most of us, with promises, but pursues his thought with ferocious logic to its covert. There is no such hybrid with him as Christian Socialism, no dodging issues. He is a Teutonic Childe Roland who to the dark tower comes, but instead of blowing his horn — as Nietzsche did — he blows up the tower itself. Such an iconoclast has never before put pen to paper. He is so sincere in his scorn of all we hold dear that he is refreshing. Nietzsche's flashing epigrammatic blade often snaps after it is fleshed; the grim, cruel Stirner, after he makes a jab at his opponent, twists the steel in the wound. Having no mercy for himself, he has no mercy for others. He is never a hypocrite. He erects no altars to known or unknown gods. Humanity, he says, has become the Moloch to-day to which everything is sacrificed. Humanity — that is, the State, perhaps, even the socialistic state (the most terrible yoke of all for the individual soul). This assumed love of humanity, this sacrifice of our own personality, are the blights of modern life. The Ego has too long been suppressed by ideas, sacred ideas of religion, state, family, law, morals. The conceptual question "What is Man?" must be changed to "Who is Man?" I am the owner of my might, and I am so when I know myself as *unique*.

Stirner is not a communist — so long confounded with anarchists — he does not believe in force. That element came into the world with the advent of Bakounine and Russian nihilism. Stirner would replace society by groups; property would be held, money would be a circulating medium; the present compulsory system would be voluntary instead of involuntary. Unlike his great contemporary, Joseph Proudhon, Stirner is not a constructive philosopher. Indeed, he is no philosopher. A moralist (or immoralist), and *Ethiker*, his book is a defense of Egoism, of the submerged rights of the Ego, and in this piping times of peace and fraternal humbug, when every nation, every man, embraces his neighbor preparatory to disembowelling him in commerce or war, Max Stirner's words are like a trumpet-blast. And many Jericho-built walls go down before these ringing tones. His doctrine is the Fourth Dimension of ethics. That his book will be more dangerous than a million bombs, if misapprehended, is no reason why it should not be read. Its author can no more be held responsible for its misreading than the orthodox faiths for their backsliders. Nietzsche has been woefully misunderstood; Nietzsche, the despiser of mob rule, has been acclaimed a very Attila — instead of which he is a culture-philosopher, one who insists that reform must be first spiritual. Individualism for him means only an end to culture. Stirner is not a metaphysician; he is too much realist. He is really a topsy-turvy Hegelian, a political pyrrhonist. His Ego is his Categorical Imperative. And if the Individual loses his value, what is his *raison d'être* for existence? What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his own Ego? Make your value felt, cries Stirner. The minority may occasionally err, but the majority is always in the wrong. Egoism must not be misinterpreted as petty selfishness or as an excuse to do wrong. Life will be ennobled and sweeter if we respect ourselves. "There is no sinner and no sinful egoism... Do not call men sinful; and *they are not*." Freedom is no a goal. "Free — from what? Oh! what is there that cannot be shaken off? The yoke of serfdom, of sovereignty, of aristocracy and princes, the dominion of the desires and passions; yes, even the dominion of one's own will, of self-will, for the completest self-denial is nothing but freedom — freedom, to wit, from self-determination, from one's own self." This has an ascetic tang, and indicates that to compass our complete Ego the road traveled will be as thorny as any saint's of old. Where does Woman come into this scheme? There is no Woman, only a human Ego. Humanity is a convenient fiction to harry the individualist. So, society, family are the clamps that compress the soul of woman. If woman is to be free she must first be an individual, an Ego. In America, to talk of female suffrage is to propound the

paradox of the masters attacking their slaves; yet female suffrage might prove a good thing — it might demonstrate the *reductio ad absurdum* of the administration of the present ballot system.

Our wail over our neighbor's soul is simply the wail of a busybody. Mind your own business! is the pregnant device of the new Egoism. Puritanism is not morality, but a psychic disorder.

Stirner, in his way, teaches that the Kingdom of God is within you. That man will ever be sufficiently perfected to become his own master is a dreamer's dream. Yet let us dream it. At least by that road we make for righteousness. But let us drop all cant about brotherly love and self-sacrifice. Let us love ourselves (respect our Ego), that we may learn to respect our brother; self-sacrifice means doing something that we believe to be good for our souls, there *egotism* — the higher *egotism*, withal *egotism*. As for going to the people — the Russian phrase — let the people forget themselves as a collective body, tribe, or group, and each man and woman develop his or her Ego. In Russia "going to the people" may have been sincere — in America it is a trick to catch, not souls, but votes.

"The time is not far distant when it will be impossible for any proud, free, independent spirit to call himself a socialist, since he would be classed with those wretched toadies and worshippers of success who even now lie on their knees before every workingman and lick his hands simply because he is a workingman."

John Henry Mackay spoke these words in a book of his. Did not Campanella, in an unforgettable sonnet, sing, "The people is a beast of muddy brain that knows not its own strength... With its own hands it ties and gags itself"?

III

The Ego and His Own is divided into two parts: first, The Man; second, I. Its motto should be, "I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones." But Walt Whitman's pronouncement had not been made, and Stirner was forced to fall back on Goethe — Goethe, the grand Immoralist of his epoch, wise and wicked Goethe, from whom flows all that is modern. "I base my all on Naught" ("Ich Vanitas! Vanitum Vanitas!) is Stirner's key-note to his Egoistic symphony. The hateful I, as Pascal called it, caused Zola, a solid egotist himself, to assert that the English were the most egotistic of races because their I in their tongue was but a single letter, while the French employed two, and not capitalized unless beginning a sentence. Stirner must have admired the English, as his I was the sole counter in his philosophy. His Ego and not the family is the unit of the social life. In antique times, when men were really the young, not the ancient, it was a world of reality. Men enjoyed the material. With Christianity came the rule of the spirit; ideas were become sacred, with the concepts of God, Goodness, Sin, Salvation. After Rousseau and the French Revolution humanity was enthroned, and the State became our oppressor. Our first enemies are our parents, our educators. It follows, then, that the only criterion of life is my Ego. Without my Ego I could not apprehend existence. Altruism is a pretty disguise for egotism. No one is or can be disinterested. He gives up one thing for another because the other seems better, nobler to him. Egotism! The ascetic renounces the pleasures of life because in his eyes renunciation is nobler than enjoyment. Egotism again! "You are to benefit yourself, and you are not to seek your benefit," cries Stirner. Explain the paradox! The one sure thing of life is the Ego. Therefore, "I am not you, but I'll use you if you are agreeable to me." Not to God, not to man, must be given the glory. "I'll keep the glory myself." What is Humanity but an abstraction? I am

Humanity. Therefore the State is a monster that devours its children. It must not dictate to me. "The State and I are enemies." The State is a spook. A spook, too, is freedom. What is freedom? Who is free? The world belongs to all, but *all* are *I*. I alone am individual proprietor.

Property is conditioned by might. What I have is mine. "Whoever knows how to take, to defend, the thing, to him belongs property." Stirner would have held that property was not only nine but ten points of the law. This is Pragmatism with a vengeance. He repudiates all laws; repudiates competition, for persons are not the subject of competition, but "things" are; therefore if you are without "things" how can you compete? Persons are free, not "things." The world, therefore, is not "free." Socialism is but a further screwing up of the State machine to limit the individual. Socialism is a new god, a new abstraction to tyrannize over the Ego. And remember that Stirner is not speaking of the metaphysical Ego of Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, but of your I, my I, the political, the social I, the economic I of every man and woman. Stirner spun no metaphysical cobwebs. He reared no lofty cloud palaces. He did not bring from Asia its pessimism, as did Schopenhauer; nor deny reality, as did Berkeley. He was a foe to general ideas. He was an implacable realist. Yet while he denies the existence of an Absolute, of a Deity, State, Categorical Imperative, he nevertheless had not shaken himself free from Hegelianism (he is Extreme Left as a Hegelian), for he erected his I as an Absolute, though only dealing with it in its relations to society. Everything is relative. So we shall see presently that with Stirner, too, his I is not so independent as he imagines.

He says "crimes spring from fixed ideas." The Church, State, the Family, Morals, are fixed ideas. "Atheists are pious people." They reject one fiction only to cling to many old ones. Liberty for the people is not my liberty. Socrates was a fool in that he conceded to the Athenians the right to condemn him. Proudhon said (rather, Brisson before him), "Property is theft." Theft from whom? From society? But society is not the sole proprietor. Pauperism is the valuelessness of Me. The State and Pauperism are the same. Communism, Socialism abolish private property and push us back into Collectivism. The individualism is enslaved by the machinery of the State or by socialism. Your Ego is not free if you allow your vices or virtues to enslave it. The intellect has too long ruled, says Stirner; it is the will (not Schopenhauer's Will to Live, or Nietzsche's Will to Power, but the sum of our activity expressed by an act of volition; old-fashioned will, in a word) to exercise itself to the utmost. Nothing compulsory, all voluntary. Do what you will. *Fay ce que voudras*, as Rabelais has it in his Abbey of Thélème. Not "Know thyself," but get the value out of yourself. Make your value felt. The poor are to blame for the rich. Our art to-day is the only art possible, and therefore real at the time. We are at every moment all we can be. There is no such thing as sin. It is an invention to keep imprisoned the will of our Ego. And as mankind is forced to believe theoretically in the evil of sin, yet commit it in its daily life, hypocrisy and crime are engendered. If the concept of sin had never been used as a club over the weak-minded, there would be no sinners — *i.e.*, wicked people. the individual is himself the world's history. The world is my picture. There is no other Ego but mine. Louis XIV said, "*L'Etat, c'est moi*"; I say, "*L'Univers, c'est moi*." John Stuart Mill wrote in his famous essay on liberty that "Society has now got the better of the individual."

Rousseau is to blame for the "Social Contract" and the "Equality" nonsense that has poisoned more than one nation's political ideas. The minority is always in the right, declared Ibsen, as opposed to Comte's "Submission is the base of perfection." "Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it" (Bernard Shaw). "Nature does not seem to have made man for independence" (Vauvenargues). "What can give a man liberty? Will, his own will, and it gives power, which is better than liberty" (Turgenev). To have the will to be responsible for one's self, advises

Nietzsche. "I am what I am" (Brand). "To thyself be sufficient" (Peer Gynt). Both men failed, for their freedom kills. To thine own self be true. God is within you. Best of all is Lord Acton's dictum that "Liberty is not a means to a higher political end. It is of itself the highest political end." To will is to have to will (Ibsen). My truth is the truth (Stirner). Mortal has made the immortal, says the Rig Veda. Nothing is greater than I (Bhagavat Gita). I am that I am (the Avesta, also Exodus). Taine wrote, "Nature is in reality a tapestry of which we see the reverse side. This is why we try to turn it." Hierarchy, oligarchy, both forms submerge the Ego. J.S. Mill demanded: "How can great minds be produced in a country where the test of a great mind is agreeing in the opinion of small minds?" Bakounine in his fragmentary essay on God and the State feared the domination of science quite as much as an autocracy. "Politics is the madness of the many for the gain of the few," Pope asserted. Read Spinoza, *The Citizen and the State* (Tractatus Theologico-Politicus). Or Oscar Wilde's epigram: "Charity creates a multitude of sins." "I am not poor enough to give alms," says Nietzsche. But Max Beerbohm has wittily said — and his words contain as much wisdom as wit — that "If he would have his ideas realized, the Socialist must first kill the Snob."

Science tells us that our *I* is really a *We*; a colony of cells, an orchestra of inherited instincts. We have not even free will, or at least only in a limited sense. We are an instrument played upon by our heredity and our environment. The cell, then, is the unit, not the Ego. Very well, Stirner would exclaim (if he had lived after Darwin and 1859), the cell is my cell, not yours! Away with other cells! But such an autonomous gospel is surely a phantasm. Stirner saw a ghost. He, too, in his proud Individualism was an aristocrat. No man may separate himself from the tradition of his race unless to incur the penalty of a sterile isolation. The solitary is the abnormal man. Man is gregarious. Man is a political animal. Even Stirner recognizes that man is not man without society.

In practice he would not have agreed with Havelock Ellis that "all the art of living lies in the fine mingling of letting go and holding on." Stirner, sentimental, henpecked, myopic Berlin professor, was too actively engaged in wholesale criticism — that is, destruction of society, with all its props and standards, its hidden selfishness and heartlessness — to bother with theories of reconstruction. His disciples have remedied the omission. In the United States, for example, Benjamin R. Tucker, a follower of Josiah Warren, teaches a practical and philosophical form of Individualism. He is an Anarch who believes in passive resistance. Stirner speaks, though vaguely, of a Union of Egoists, a Verein, where all would rule all, where man, through self-mastery would be his own master. ("In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes.") Indeed, his notions as to Property and Money — "it will always be money" — sound suspiciously like those of our "captains of industry." Might conquers Right. He has brought to bear the most blazing light-rays upon the shifts and evasions of those who decry Egoism, who are what he calls "involuntary," not voluntary egotists. Their motives are shown to the bone. Your Sir Willoughby Patternes are not real Egoists, but only half-hearted selfish weaklings. The true egotist is the altruist, says Stirner; yet Leibnitz was right; so was Dr. Pangloss. This is the best of possible worlds. Any other is not conceivable for man, who is at the top of his zoological series. (Though Quinton has made the statement that birds followed the mammal.) We are all "spectres of the dust," and to live on an overcrowded planet we must follow the advice of the Boyg: "Go roundabout!" Compromise is the only sane attitude. The world is not, will never be, to the strong of arm or spirit, as Nietzsche believes. The race is to the mediocre. The survival of the fittest means survival of the weakest. Society shields and upholds the feeble. Mediocrity rules, let Carlyle or Nietzsche thunder to the contrary. It was the perception of these facts that drove

Stirner to formulate his theories in *The Ego and His Own*. He was poor, a failure, and despised by his wife. He lived under a dull brutal régime. The Individual was naught, the State all. His book was his great revenge. It was the efflorescence of his Ego. It was his romance, his dream of an ideal world, his Platonic republic. Philosophy is more a matter of man's temperament than some suppose. And philosophers often live by opposites. Schopenhauer preached asceticism, but hardly led an ascetic life; Nietzsche's injunctions to become Immoralists and Supermen were but the buttressing up of a will diseased, by the needs of a man who suffered his life long from morbid sensibility. James Walker's suggestion that "We will not allow the world to wait for the Superman. We are the Supermen," is a convincing criticism of Nietzscheism. I am Unique. Never again will this aggregation of atoms stand on earth. Therefore I must be free. I will myself free. (It is only spiritual liberty that counts.) But my I must not be of the kind described by the madhouse doctor in Peer Gynt: "Each one shuts himself up in the barrel of self. In the self-fermentation he dives to the bottom; with the self-bung he seals it hermetically." The increased self-responsibility of life in an Egoist Union would prevent the world from ever entering into such ideal anarchy (an-arch, *i.e.*, without government). There is too much of renunciation in the absolute freedom of the will — that is its final, if paradoxical implication — for mankind. Our Utopias are secretly based on Chance. Deny Chance in our existence and life would be without salt. Man is not a perfectible animal; not on this side of eternity. He fears the new and therefore clings to his old beliefs. To each his own chimera. He has not grown mentally or physically since the Sumerians — or a million years before the Sumerians. The squirrel in the revolving cage thinks it is progressing; Man is in a revolving cage. He goes round but he does not progress. Man is not a logical animal. He is governed by his emotions, his affective life. He lives by his illusions. His brains are an accident, possibly from overnutrition as De Gourmont has declared. To fancy him capable of existing in a community where all will be self-governed is a poet's vision. That way the millennium lies, or the High Noon of Nietzsche. And would the world be happier if it ever did attain this condition?

The English translation of *The Ego and His Own*, by Steven T. Byington, is admirable; it is that of a philologist and a versatile scholar. Stirner's form is open to criticism. It is vermicular. His thought is sometimes confused; he sees so many sides of his theme, embroiders it with so many variations, that he repeats himself. He has neither the crystalline brilliance nor the poetic glamour of Nietzsche. But he left behind him a veritable breviary of destruction, a striking and dangerous book. It is dangerous in every sense of the word — to socialism, to politicians, to hypocrisy. It asserts the dignity of the Individual, not his debasement.

"Is it not the chief disgrace in the world not to be a unit; to be reckoned one character; not to yield that peculiar fruit which each man was created to bear, but to be reckoned in the gross, in the hundred of thousands, of the party, of the section to which we belong, and our opinion predicted geographically as the North or the South?"

Herbert Spencer did not write these words, nor Max Stirner. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote them.

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James G. Huneker
Max Stirner

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From *The Memory Hole*: The following is from a collection of essays by the brilliant essayist, James G. Huneker, who garnered the admiration and respect of the highly critical curmudgeon, H.L. Mencken. Besides being an excellent example of Huneker's flowing literary criticism, it is an fine introduction to Max Stirner and includes a handy summary of John Henry Mackay's biography of Stirner.

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