

## MAX STIRNER, THE PREDECESSOR OF NIETZSCHE.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, the author of "Thus Spake Zarathustra" and the inventor of a new ideal called the "overman," is commonly regarded as the most extreme egotist, to whom morality is non-existent and who glories in the coming of the day in which a man of his liking—the overman—would live *au grand jour*. His philosophy is an individualism carried to its utmost extreme, sanctioning egotism, denouncing altruism and establishing the right of the strong to trample the weak under foot. It is little known, however, that he followed another thinker, Johann Caspar Schmidt, whose extreme individualism he adopted. But this forerunner who preached a philosophy of the sovereignty of self and an utter disregard of our neighbors' rights remained unheeded; he lived in obscurity, he died in poverty, and under the pseudonym "Max Stirner" he left behind a book entitled *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*.

The historian Lange briefly mentioned him in his *History of Materialism*, and the novelist John Henry Mackay followed up the reference which led to the discovery of this lonely comet on the philosophical sky.

The strangest thing about this remarkable book consists in the many coincidences with Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy. It is commonly deemed impossible that the famous spokesman of the overman should not have been

thoroughly familiar with this failure in the philosophical book market; but while Stirner was forgotten the same ideas transplanted into the volumes of the author of "Thus Spake Zarathustra" found an echo first in Germany and soon afterwards all over the world.

Stirner's book has been Englished by Stephen T. Byington with an introduction by J. L. Walker at the instigation of Benjamin R. Tucker, the representative of American peaceful anarchism, under the title *The Ego and His Own*. They have been helped by Mr. George Schumm and his wife Mrs. Emma Heller Schumm. These five persons, all interested in this lonely and unique thinker, must have had much trouble in translating the German original and though the final rendering of the title is not inappropriate, the translator and his advisers agree that it falls short of the mark. For the accepted form Mr. B. R. Tucker is responsible, and he admits in the preface that it is not an exact equivalent of the German. *Der Einzige* means "the unique man," a person of a definite individuality, but in the book itself our author modifies and enriches the meaning of the term. The unique man becomes the ego and an owner (*ein Eigener*), a man who is possessed of property, especially of his own being. He is a master of his own and he prides himself on his ownhood, as well as his ownership. As such he is unique, and the very term indicates that the thinker who proposes this view-point is an extreme individualist. In Stirner's opinion Christianity pursued the ideal of liberty, liberty from the world; and in this sense Christians speak of spiritual liberty. To become free from anything that oppresses us we must get rid of it, and so the Christian to rid himself of the world becomes a prey to the idea of a contempt of the world. Stirner declares that the future has a better lot in store for man. Man shall not merely be free, which is a purely negative quality, but he shall be his own master; he shall become an owner

of his own personality and whatever else he may have to control. His end and aim is he himself. There is no moral duty above him. Stirner explains in the very first sentence of his book:

“What is not supposed to be my concern! First and foremost, the good cause, 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!’”

Stirner undertakes to refute this satirical explanation in his book on the unique man and his own, and a French critic according to Paul Lauterbach (p. 5) speaks of his book as *un livre qu’on quitte monarque*, “a book which one lays aside a king.”

Stirner is opposed to all traditional views. He is against church and state. He stands for the self-development of every individual, and insists that the highest duty of every one is to stand up for his ownhood.

J. L. Walker in his Introduction contrasts Stirner with Nietzsche and gives the prize of superiority to the former, declaring him to be a genuine anarchist not less than Josiah Warren, the ideal of the small band of New England anarchists. He says:

“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 sepulcher 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.”

It is not our intention to enter here into a detailed criticism of Stirner’s book. We will only point out that society will practically remain the same whether we consider social arrangements as voluntary contracts or as organically developed social institutions, or as imposed upon mankind by the divine world-order, or even if czars and kings claim to govern “by the grace of God.” Whatever religious or natural sanction any government may claim to possess, the method of keeping order will be the same everywhere. Wrongs have been done and in the future may still be committed in the name of right, and injustice may again and again worst justice in the name of the law. On the other hand, however, we can notice a progress throughout the world of a slow but steady improvement of conditions. Any globe-trotter will find by experience that his personal safety, his rights and privileges are practically the same in all civilized countries, whether they are republics like Switzerland, France and the United States,

or monarchies like Sweden, Germany and Italy. At the same time murders, robberies, thefts and other crimes are committed all over the world, even in the homes of those who pride themselves on being the most civilized nations. The world-conception lying behind our different social theories is the same wherever the same kind of civilization prevails. Where social evils prevail, dissatisfaction sets in which produces theories and reform programs, and when they remain unheeded by reaching a certain climax, leads to revolution.

Stirner's book begins with a short exhortation headed with Goethe's line,

"My trust in nothingness is placed."

He discusses the character of human life (Chap. I) and contrasts men of the old and the new eras (Chap. II). He finds that the ancients idealized bodily existence while Christianity incarnates the ideal. Greek artists transfigure actual life; in Christianity the divine takes abode in the world of flesh, God becomes incarnate in man. The Greeks tried to go beyond the world and Christianity came; Christian thinkers are pressed to go beyond God, and there they find spirit. They are led to a contempt of the world and will finally end in a contempt of spirit. But Stirner believes that the ideal and the real can never be conciliated, and we must free ourselves from the errors of the past. The truly free man is not the one who has become free, but the one who has come into his own, and this is the sovereign ego.

As Achilles had his Homer so Stirner found his prophet in a German socialist of Scotch Highlander descent, John Henry Mackay. The reading public should know that Mackay belongs to the same type of restless reformers, and he soon became an egoistic anarchist, a disciple of Stirner. His admiration is but a natural consequence of

conditions. Nevertheless Mackay's glorification of Stirner proves that in Stirner this onesided world-conception has found its classical, its most consistent and its philosophically most systematic presentation. Whatever we may have to criticize in anarchism, Stirner is a man of uncommon distinction, the leader of a party, and the standard-bearer of a cause distinguished by the extremeness of its propositions which from the principle of individualism are carried to their consistent ends.

Mackay undertook the difficult task of unearthing the history of a man who, naturally modest and retired, had nowhere left deep impressions. No stone remained unturned and every clue that could reveal anything about his hero's life was followed up with unprecedented devotion. He published the results of his labors in a book entitled "Max Stirner, His Life and His Work."<sup>1</sup> The report is extremely touching not so much on account of the great significance of Stirner's work which to impartial readers appears exaggerated, but through the personal tragedy of a man who towers high over his surroundings and suffers in the misery of poverty and failure.

Mr. Mackay describes Stirner as of medium height, rather less so than more, well proportioned, slender, always dressed with care though without pretension, having the appearance of a teacher, and wearing silver- or steel-rimmed spectacles. His hair and beard were blonde with a tinge of red, his eyes blue and clear, but neither dreamy nor penetrating. His thin lips usually wore a sarcastic smile, which however had nothing of bitterness; his general appearance was sympathetic. No portrait of Stirner is in existence except one pencil sketch which was made from memory in 1892 by the London socialist Friedrich Engels, but the criticism is made by those who knew Stirner that his features, especially his chin and the top of his head,

<sup>1</sup> *Max Stirner, sein Leben und sein Werk.* Berlin, Schuster, 1898.

were not so angular though nose and mouth are said to have been well portrayed, and Mackay claims that he never wore a coat and collar of that type.

Stirner was of purely Frankish blood. His ancestors lived for centuries in or near Baireuth. His father, Albert Christian Heinrich Schmidt of Anspach, a maker of wind-instruments, died of consumption in 1807 at the age of 37, a half a year after the birth of his son. His mother, Sophie Eleanora, née Reinlein of the city of Erlangen, six months later married H. F. L. Ballerstedt, the assistant in an



PENCIL SKETCH OF MAX STIRNER.

The only portrait in existence.

apothecary shop in Helmstedt, and moved with him to Kulm on the Vistula. In 1818 the boy was sent back to his native city where his childless god-father and uncle Johann Caspar Martin Sticht and his wife took care of him.

Young Johann Caspar passed through school with credit, and his schoolmates used to call him "Stirner" on account of his high forehead (*Stirn*) which was the most conspicuous feature of his face. This name clung to him throughout life. In fact his most intimate friends never

called him by any other, his real name being almost forgotten through disuse and figuring only in official documents.

Stirner attended the universities of Erlangen, Berlin and Königsberg, and finally passed his examination for admission as a teacher in gymnasial schools. His stepfather died in the summer of 1837 in Kulm at the age of 76. It is not known what became of his mother who had been mentally unsound for some time.

Neither father nor stepfather had ever been successful, and if Stirner ever received any inheritance it must have been very small. On December 12 of 1837 Stirner married Agnes Clara Kunigunde Burtz, the daughter of his landlady.

Their married life was brief, the young wife dying in a premature child-birth on August 29th. We have no indication of an ardent love on either side. He who wrote with passionate fire and with so much insistence in his philosophy, was calm and peaceful, subdued and quiet to a fault in real life.

Having been refused appointment in one of the public or royal schools Stirner accepted a position in a girls' school October 1, 1839. During the political fermentation which preceded the revolutionary year of 1848, he moved in the circle of those bold spirits who called themselves *Die Freien* and met at Hippel's, among whom were Ludwig Buhl, Meyen, Friedrich Engels, Mussak, C. F. Köppenn, the author of a work on Buddha, Dr. Arthur Müller and the brothers Bruno, Egbert and Edgar Bauer. It was probably among their associates that Stirner met Marie Dähnhardt of Gadebusch near Schwerin, Mecklenburg, the daughter of an apothecary, Helmuth Ludwig Dähnhardt. She was as different from Stirner as a dashing emancipated woman can be from a gentle meek man, but these contrasts were joined together in wedlock on October

21, 1843. Their happiness did not last long, for Marie Dähnhardt left her husband at the end of three years.

The marriage ceremony of this strange couple has been described in the newspapers and it is almost the only fact of Stirner's life that stands out boldly as a well-known incident. That these descriptions contain exaggerations and distortions is not improbable, but it cannot be denied that much contained in the reports must be true.

On the morning of October 21, a clergyman of extremely liberal views, Rev. Marot, a member of the Consistory, was called to meet the witnesses of the ceremony at Stirner's room. Bruno Bauer, Buhl, probably also Julius Faucher, Assessor Kochius and a young English woman, a friend of the bride, were present. The bride was in her week-day dress. Mr. Marot asked for a Bible, but none could be found. According to one version the clergyman was obliged to request Herr Buhl to put on his coat and to have the cards removed. When the rings were to be exchanged the groom discovered that he had forgotten to procure them, and according to Wilhelm Jordan's recollection Bauer pulled out his knitted purse and took off the brass rings, offering them as a substitute during the ceremony. After the wedding a dinner with cold punch was served to which Mr. Marot was invited. But he refused, while the guests stayed on and the wedding carousal proceeded in its jolly course.

In order to understand how this incident was possible we must know that in those pre-revolutionary years the times were out of joint and these heroes of the rebellion wished to show their disrespect and absolute indifference to a ceremony that to them had lost all its sanctity.

Stirner's married life was very uneventful, except that he wrote the main book of his life and dedicated it to his wife after a year's marriage, with the words,

“Meinem Liebchen  
Marie Dähnhardt.”

Obviously this form which ignores the fact that they were married, and uses a word of endearment which in this connection is rather trivial, must be regarded as characteristic for their relation and their life principles. Certain it is that she understood only the negative features of her husband's ideals and had no appreciation of the genius that stirred within him. Lauterbach, the editor of the Reclam edition of Stirner's book, comments ironically on this dedication with the Spanish motto *Da Dios almendras al que no tiene muelas*, “God gives almonds to those who have no teeth.”

Marie Dähnhardt was a graceful blonde woman rather under-sized with heavy hair which surrounded her head in ringlets according to the fashion of the time. She was very striking and became a favorite of the round table of the *Freien* who met at Hippel's. She smoked cigars freely and sometimes donned male attire, in order to accompany her husband and his friends on their nightly excursions. It appears that Stirner played the most passive part in these adventures, but true to his principle of individuality we have no knowledge that he ever criticized his wife.

Marie Dähnhardt had lost her father early and was in possession of a small fortune of 10,000 thalers, possibly more. At any rate it was considered quite a sum in the circle of Stirner's friends, but it did not last long. Having written his book, Stirner gave up his position so as to prevent probable discharge and now they looked around for new resources. Though Stirner had studied political economy he was a most unpractical man; but seeing there was a dearth of milk-shops, he and his wife started into business. They made contracts with dairies but did not advertise their shop, and when the milk was delivered to

them they had large quantities of milk on hand but no patrons, the result being a lamentable failure with debts.

In the circle of his friends Stirner's business experience offered inexhaustible material for jokes, while at home it led rapidly to the dissolution of his marriage. Frau Schmidt complained in later years that her husband had wasted her property, while no complaints are known from him. One thing is sure that they separated. She went to England where she established herself as a teacher under the protection of Lady Bunsen, the wife of the Prussian ambassador.

Frau Schmidt's later career is quite checkered. She was a well-known character in the colony of German exiles in London. One of her friends there was a Lieutenant Tchow. When she was again in great distress she emigrated with other Germans, probably in 1852 or 1853, to Melbourne, Australia. Here she tasted the misery of life to the dregs. She made a living as a washerwoman and is reported to have married a day laborer. Their bitter experiences made her resort to religion for consolation, and in 1870 or 1871 she became a convert to the Catholic Church. At her sister's death she became her heir and so restored her good fortune to some extent. She returned to London where Mr. Mackay to his great joy discovered that she was still alive at the advanced age of eighty. What a valuable resource her reminiscences would be for his inquiries! But she refused to give any information and finally wrote him a letter which literally reads as follows: "Mary Smith *solemnly avowes* that she will have *no more* correspondence on the subject, and authorizes Mr. —<sup>2</sup> to return all those writings to their owners. She is ill and prepares for death."

The last period of Stirner's life, from the time when

<sup>2</sup>The name of the gentleman she mentions is replaced by a dash at his express wish in the facsimile of her letter reproduced in Mr. Mackay's book (p. 255.)

his wife left him to his death is as obscure as his childhood days. He moved from place to place, and since his income was very irregular creditors pressed him hard. His lot was tolerable because of the simple habits of his life, his only luxury consisting in smoking a good cigar. In 1853 we find him at least twice in debtor's prison, first 21 days, from March 5 to 26, 1853, and then 36 days, from New Year's eve until February 4 of the next year. In the meantime (September 7) he moved to Philippstrasse 19. It was Stirner's last home. He stayed with the landlady of this place, a kind-hearted woman who treated all her boarders like a mother, until June 25, 1856, when he died rather suddenly as the result of the bite of a poisonous fly. A few of his friends, among them Bruno Bauer and Ludwig Buhl, attended his funeral; a second-class grave was procured for one thaler 10 groats, amounting approximately to one American dollar.

During this period Stirner undertook several literary labors from which he possibly procured some remuneration. He translated the classical authors on political economy from the French and from the English, which appeared under the title *Die National-Oekonomen der Franzosen und Engländer* (Leipsic, Otto Wigand, 1845-1847).

He also wrote a history of the Reaction which he explained to be a mere counter-revolution. This *Geschichte der Reaction* was planned as a much more comprehensive work, but the two volumes which appeared were only two parts of the second volume as originally intended.

The work is full of quotations, partly from Auguste Comte, partly from Edmund Burke. None of these works represent anything typically original or of real significance in the history of human thought.

His real contribution to the world's literature remains his work *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, the title of which is rendered in English *The Ego and His Own*, and this,

strange to say, enthrones the individual man, the ego, every personality, as a sovereign power that is not subject to morality, or rules, or obligations, or duties of any kind. The appeal is made so directly that it will convince all those half-educated and immature minds who after having surrendered their traditional faith find themselves without any authority in either religion or politics. God is to them a fable and the state an abstraction. Ideas and ideals, such as truth, goodness, beauty, are mere phrases. What then remains but the concrete bodily personality of every man of which every one is the ultimate standard of right and wrong?

It is strange that neither of these philosophers of individuality, Nietzsche or Stirner, has ever taken the trouble to investigate what an individual is. Stirner halts before this most momentous question of his world-conception, and so he overlooks that his ego, his own individuality, this supreme sovereign standing beyond right and wrong, the ultimate authority of everything, is a hazy, fluctuating, uncertain thing which differs from day to day and finally disappears.

The individuality of any man is the product of communal life. No one of us could exist as a rational personality were he not a member of a social group from which he has imbibed his ideas as well as his language. Every word is a product of his intercourse with his fellow-beings. His entire existence consists in his relations toward others and finds expression in his attitude toward social institutions. We may criticize existent institutions but we can never do without any. A denial of either their existence or their significance proves an utter lack of insight into the nature of personality.

We insert here a few characteristic sentences of Stirner's views, and in order to be fair we follow the condensation of Mackay (pp. 135-192) than whom certainly we

could find no more sympathetic or intelligent student of this individualistic philosophy. Stirner claims the ancients came to the conclusions that man was spirit. They created a world of spirit, and in this world of spirit Christianity begins. But what is spirit? Spirit has originated from nothing. It is its own creation and man makes it the center of the world. The injunction was made, thou shalt not live to thyself but to thy spirit, to thy ideas. Spirit is the God, the ego and the spirit are in constant conflict. Spirit dwells beyond the earth. It is in vain to force the divine into service here for I am neither God nor man, neither the highest being nor my being. The spirit is like a ghost whom no one has seen, but of whom there are innumerable creditable witnesses, such as grandmother can give account of. The whole world that surrounds thee is filled with spooks of thy imagination. The holiness of truth which hallows thee is a strange element. It is not thine own and strangeness is a characteristic of holiness. The specter is truly only in thine ownhood . . . . . Right is a spleen conferred by a spook; might, that is myself. I am the mighty one and the owner of might . . . . . Right is the royal will of society. Every right which exists is created right. I am expected to honor it where I find it and subject myself to it. But what to me is the right of society, the right of all? What do I care for equality of right, for the struggle for right, for inalienable rights? Right becomes word in law. The dominant will is the preserver of the states. My own will shall upset them. Every state is a despotism. All right and all power is claimed to belong to the community of the people. I, however, shall not allow myself to be bound by it, for I recognize no duty even though the state may call crime in me what it considers right for itself. My relation to the state is not the relation of one ego to another ego. It is the relation of the sinner to the saint, but the saint is a

mere fixed idea from which crimes originate (Mackay, pages 154-5).

It will sometimes be difficult to translate Stirner's declarations in their true meaning; for instance: "I am the owner of mankind, I am mankind and shall do nothing for the benefit of another mankind. The property of mankind is mine. I do not respect the property of mankind. Poverty originates when I can not utilize my own self as I want to. It is the state which hinders men from entering into a direct relation with others. On the mercy of right my private property depends. Only within prescribed limits am I allowed to compete. Only the medium of exchange, the money which the state makes, am I allowed to use. The forms of the state may change, the purpose of the state always remains the same. My property, however, is what I empower myself to. Let violence decide, I expect all from my own.

"You shall not lure me with love, nor catch me with the promise of communion of possessions, but the question of property will be solved only through a war of all against all, and what a slave will do as soon as he has broken his fetters we shall have to see. I know no law of love. As every one of my sentiments is my property, so also is love. I give it, I donate it, I squander it merely because it makes me happy. Earn it if you believe you have a right to it. The measure of my sentiments can not be prescribed to me, nor the aim of my feelings determined. We and the world have only one relation towards each other, that of usefulness. Yea, I use the world and men." (Pp. 156-157.)

As to promises made and confidence solicited Stirner would not allow a limitation of freedom. He says: "In itself an oath is no more sacred than a lie is contemptible." Stirner opposes the idea of communism. "The community of man creates laws for society. Communism is a communion in equality." Says Stirner, "I prefer to depend

on the egotism of men rather than on their compassion." He feels himself swelled into a temporary, transient, puny deity. No man expresses him rightly, no concept defines him; he, the ego, is perfect. Stirner concludes his book: "Owner I am of my own power and I am such only when I know myself as the only one. In the only one even the owner returns into his creative nothingness from which he was born. Any higher being above, be it God or man, detracts from the feeling of my uniqueness and it pales before the sun of this consciousness. If I place my trust in myself, the only one, it will stand upon a transient mortal creator of himself, who feeds upon himself, and I can say,

*"Ich hab mein Sach' auf nichts gestellt."*

"In nothingness I placed my trust."

We call attention to Stirner's book, "The Only One and His Ownhood," not because we are overwhelmed by the profundity of his thought but because we believe that here is a man who ought to be answered, whose world-conception deserves a careful analysis which finally would lead to a justification of society, the state and the ideals of right and truth.

Society is not, as Stirner imagines, an artificial product of men who band themselves together in order to produce a state to the benefit of a clique. Society and state, as well as their foundation the family, are of a natural growth. All the several social institutions (kind of spiritual organisms) are as much organisms as are plants and animals. The cooperation of the state with religious, legal, civic and other institutions, are as much realities as are individuals, and any one who would undertake to struggle against them or treat them as nonentities will be implicated in innumerable struggles.

Stirner is the philosopher of individualism. To him the individual, this complicated and fluctuant being, is a

reality, indeed the only true reality, while other combinations, institutions and social units are deemed to be mere nonentities. If from this standpoint the individualism of Stirner were revised, the student would come to radically different conclusions, and these conclusions would show that not without good reasons has the individual developed as a by-product of society, and all the possessions, intellectual as well as material, which exist are held by individuals only through the assistance and with the permission of the whole society or its dominant factors.

Both socialism and its opposite, individualism, which is ultimately the same as anarchism, are extremes that are based upon an erroneous interpretation of communal life. Socialists make society, and anarchists the individual their ultimate principle of human existence. Both are factors and both factors are needed for preserving the health of society as well as comprehending the nature of mankind. By neglecting either of these factors, we can only be led astray and arrive at wrong conclusions.

Poor Stirner wanted to exalt the ego, the sovereign individual, not only to the exclusion of a transcendent God and of the state or any other power, divine or social, but even to the exclusion of his own ideals, be it truth or anything spiritual; and yet he himself sacrificed his life for a propaganda of the ego as a unique and sovereign being. He died in misery and the recognition of his labors has slowly, very slowly, followed after his death. Yea, even after his death a rival individualist, Friedrich Nietzsche, stole his thunder and reaped the fame which Stirner had earned. Certainly this noble-minded, modest, altruistic egotist was paid in his own coin.

Did Stirner live up to his principle of ego sovereignty? In one sense he did; he recognized the right of every one to be himself, even when others infringed upon his own well-being. His wife fell out with him but he respected

her sovereignty and justified her irregularities. Apparently he said to himself, "She has as much right to her own personality as I to mine." But in another sense, so far as he himself was concerned, he did not. What became of his own rights, his ownhood, and the sweeping claim that the world was his property, that he was entitled to use or misuse the world and all mankind as he saw fit; that no other human being could expect recognition, nay not even on the basis of contracts, or promises, or for the sake of love, or humaneness and compassion? Did Stirner in his poverty ever act on the principle that he was the owner of the world, that there was no tie of morality binding on him, no principle which he had to respect? Nothing of the kind. He lived and died in peace with all the world, and the belief in the great ego sovereignty with its bold renunciation of all morality was a mere Platonic idea, a tame theory which had not the slightest influence upon his practical life.

Men of Stirner's type do not fare well in a world where the ego has come into its own. They will be trampled under foot, they will be bruised and starved, and they will die by the wayside. No, men of Stirner's type had better live in the protective shadow of a state; the worst and most despotic state will be better than none, for no state means mob rule or the tyranny of the bulldozer, the ruffian, the brutal and unprincipled self-seeker.

Here Friedrich Nietzsche comes in. Like Stirner, Nietzsche was a peaceful man; but unlike Stirner, Nietzsche had a hankering for power. Being pathological himself, without energy, without strength and without a healthy appetite and a good stomach, Nietzsche longed to play the part of a bulldozer among a herd of submissive human creatures whom he would control and command. This is Nietzsche's ideal, and he calls it the "overman."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The translation "superman" is a solecism, for it is unnecessarily a com-

Here Nietzsche modified and added his own notion to Stirner's philosophy.

Goethe coined the word "overman" (*Uebermensch*) in German and used it in the sense of an awe-inspiring being, almost in the sense of *Unmensch*, a man of might without humanity, whose sentiments are those of Titans, wild and unrestrained like the powers of nature. But the same expression was used in its proper sense about two and a half millenniums ago in ancient China, where at the time of Lao-tze the term *chün jen* (君人), "superior man," or *chün tze*, "superior sage," was in common usage. But the overman or *chün jen* of Lao-tze, of Confucius and other Chinese sages is not a man of power, not a Napoleon, not an unprincipled tyrant, not a self-seeker of domineering will, not a man whose ego and its welfare is his sole and exclusive aim, but a Christlike figure, who puts his self behind and thus makes his self—a nobler and better self—come to the front, who does not retaliate, but returns good for evil,<sup>4</sup> a man (as the Greek sage describes him) who would rather suffer wrong than commit wrong.<sup>5</sup>

This kind of higher man is the very opposite of Nietzsche's overman, and it is the spirit of this nobler conception of a higher humanity which furnishes the best ideas of all the religions of the world, of Lao-tze's Taoism, of Buddhism and of Christianity. Stirner in his personal life is animated by it, and, thinking of the wrongs which the individual frequently suffers in a bureaucratic state through red tape and unnecessary police interference and other annoyances, he preaches the right of the individual and treats the state as non-existent—or rather as a spook, an error which exists only because our spleen endows it with

bination of the Latin *super* and Saxon *man*. Say "superhuman" and "overman" but not "overhuman" nor "superman."

<sup>4</sup> *Lao-tze's Tao Teh King*, Chaps. 49 and 63.

<sup>5</sup> For a collection of Greek quotations on the ethics of returning good for evil, see *The Open Court*, Vol. XV, 1901, pp. 9-12.

life. A careful investigation of the nature of the state as well as of our personality would have taught Stirner that both the state and the individual are realities. The state and society exist as much as the individuals of which they are composed,<sup>6</sup> and no individual can ignore in his maxims of life the rules of conduct, the moral principles, or whatever you may call that something which constitutes the conditions of his existence, of his physical and social surroundings. The dignity and divinity of personality does not exclude the significance of super-personalities; indeed the two, superpersonal presences with their moral obligations and concrete human persons with their rights and duties, cooperate with each other and produce thereby all the higher values of life.

Stirner is onesided but, within the field of his onesided view, consistent. Nietzsche spurns consistency but accepts the field of notions created by Stirner, and, glorying in the same extreme individualism, proclaims the gospel of that individual who on the basis of Stirner's philosophy would make the best of a disorganized state of society, who by taking upon himself the functions of the state would utilize the advantages thus gained for the suppression of his fellow beings; and this kind of individual is dignified with the title "overman."

Nietzsche has been blamed for appropriating Stirner's thoughts and twisting them out of shape from the self-assertion of every ego consciousness into the autocracy of the unprincipled man of power; but we must concede that the common rules of literary ethics can not apply to individualists who deny all and any moral authority. Why should Nietzsche give credit to the author from whom he drew his inspiration if neither acknowledges any rule which he feels obliged to observe? Nietzsche uses Stirner as Stirner declares that it is the good right of every ego to use his

<sup>6</sup> See the author's *The Nature of the State*, 1894, and *Personality*, 1911.

fellows, and Nietzsche shows us what the result would be—the rise of a political boss, a brute in human shape, the overman.

Nietzsche is a poet, not a philosopher, not even a thinker, but as a poet he exercises a peculiar fascination upon many people who would never think of agreeing with him. Most admirers of Nietzsche belong to the class which Nietzsche calls the “herd animals,” people who have no chance of ever asserting themselves, and become hungry for power as a sick man longs for health.

Individualism and anarchism continue to denounce the state, where they ought to reform it and improve its institutions. In the meantime the world wags on. The state exists, society exists, and innumerable social institutions exist. The individual grows under the influence of other individuals, his ideas—mere spooks of his brain—yet the factors of his life, right or wrong, guide him and determine his fate. There are as rare exceptions a few lawless societies in the wild West where a few outlaws meet by chance, revolver in hand, but even among them the state of anarchy does not last long, for by habit and precedent certain rules are established, and wherever man meets man, wherever they offer and accept one another’s help, they cooperate or compete, they join hands or fight, they make contracts, they cooperate, and establish rules and the result is society, the state, and all the institutions of the state, a government, the legislation, the judiciary and all the intricate machinery which regulates the interrelations of man to man.

P. C.