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Max Stirner’s *Unmensch*: The primacy of the individual

Nelson, John William, M.A.

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MAX STIRNER'S UNMENSCH:
THE PRIMACY OF THE INDIVIDUAL

by

JOHN W. NELSON

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APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

Michael Winkler, Professor
Department of German

Klaus Weissenberger, Professor
Department of German

Steven Crowell, Assoc. Professor
Department of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Max Stirner's Unmensch: 
The Primacy of the Individual

by

John W. Nelson

As the last of the Young Hegelians, Max Stirner can be seen as continuing their general assault upon the prevailing social institutions and intellectual traditions of the German Vormärz. Yet the philosophy represented by Stirner distinguishes itself by carrying through Hegel's philosophical system to a conclusion which is antithetical to Hegelianism itself. Stirner extolls the inherently unique and particular human being, which finds itself eclipsed in the thought of Hegel. In opposition to the concept of Geist (Hegel's expression for what he believed to be an existing universal consciousness), Stirner presents a description of the Unmensch, the concrete and transitory individual which is inseparable from its own unique consciousness.
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Alles, was unsern Geist befreit,
ohne uns die Herrschaft über uns selbst zu geben,
is verderblich.

Goethe
1. Introduction

The idea that there is nothing with which we are more intimately acquainted than ourselves seems at first glance to be incontrovertible. Yet when we try to determine just what it is exactly that we refer to by the term self, or I, we often find ourselves confronted with some unexpected difficulties. The elusive nature of the self is due in part to the fact that an individual's conception of self is primarily context-dependent. In other words, the terms by which we define ourselves or explain who we are often result from the demands of a particular situation; the characterization one gives of oneself in a job interview, for example, would probably not be appropriate in a proposal of marriage.

And while it seems inevitable that a person's self-conception will also evolve over time, we nevertheless tend to believe that there exists some aspects of ourselves which are invariable and which are responsible for the preservation of that which not only distinguishes us from others, but also assures us of our inherent uniqueness. The attempt to ascertain what these aspects are which constitute this enigmatic "real self", or "essential self," is the problem of the "I" - a problem which is also a relatively recent
development in the history of Western philosophy.¹

From the classical philosophy of the ancient Greeks to the thought of the Middle Ages, a philosophical concept of the I is glaringly absent. Even in Aristotle’s Metaphysics, where one finds a brief presentation of self-consciousness in the sections on reason (Book XII, Chs. 7 and 9), the contents of consciousness are all too readily identified with corresponding external objects, and, as with Plato before him, epistemological problems of self-knowledge are left relatively untouched.

Although the fifth-century provided a preview of the beginnings of modern philosophy in Saint Augustine’s claim that one had immediate and certain awareness of one’s own existence, Augustine was nevertheless representative of a period which did not draw a distinction between philosophy and theology; the preoccupation with man’s relationship to the creator and the cosmos left little room for other, seemingly less-practical concerns. An excellent description of this intellectual situation has been provided by Arthur Drews: "Die antike Philosophie war, wie das ganze antike

¹The English-speaking philosophical community generally prefers to refer to this as "the problem of the self," since that was the word used by Locke and Hume. However, in addition to the fact that the German equivalent thereof is das Ichproblem, I will frequently favour the usage of the English pronoun "I," since I believe the subject matter is sometimes unnecessarily complicated by the tendency within the English language to render the German pronoun Ich as "self," or "ego" - the latter being inextricably laden with connotations from Freudian psychology.
Denken überhaupt, ihrem Wesen nach auf äussere, sinnliche Anschauung gegründet und konnte daher das Ich nicht zum Problem erheben, weil dieses in der äusseren Anschauung nicht vorkommt. Die mittelalterliche Philosophie musste es ebenso auf der Seite liegen lassen, weil sie ganz und gar auf Offenbarung gegründet war, die Offenbarung aber das Ich als selbstverständliche Voraussetzung betrachtet."

The first distinctive concept of the I was provided by Descartes (1596-1650), who had declared an individual's self-identity, or the way one characterizes one's essential self, to be equivalent to mind, or self-consciousness. Although the Cogito ergo sum of Descartes was generally accepted by later thinkers, such as the English philosopher John Locke, other philosophers, most notably David Hume, took issue with their claims to have located the essential self in consciousness. Sceptic that he was, Hume argued that he had never been aware of that "perfect identity and simplicity" supposedly characteristic of the I, and instead had only a vague awareness of himself as a multitude of experiences and ideas:

"In the Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690) Locke writes: "For since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that that makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things; in this alone consists personal identity..." (Smith, From Descartes to Locke, p.389).

"For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception."5

The rejection of the concept of an integrated and unique self was not to stop with Hume. Almost seventy years after Hume completed his Treatise, Hegel had published his first major work, Phänomenologie des Geistes (1807), which was essentially a phenomenological investigation into consciousness. Although it may sound peculiar to someone uninitiated in the thought of Hegel, the Phänomenologie culminates in the identification of the I with something altogether distinct from an individual person.

In essence, Hegel had determined the average individual's belief in the exclusiveness and uniqueness of his or her self-identity - however it may be defined - to be illusory, for every individual human consciousness necessarily perceives itself in the same manner. The inability to alter the nature of consciousness assures the existence of a form of universal self-identity, or a general consciousness, which Hegel refers to as Geist; the essence of the I may indeed be mind, but it is a "mind" shared among all men.

To express this idea differently, Hegel sees the implicit universal meaning of the pronoun I as necessarily detracting from any sense of particularity which one might

5Ibd., p.252.
infer from it. The philosopher J.N. Findlay describes this view as follows: "I may intend to use it [the pronoun I] to single out what is peculiar to my single self, but the 'divine' nature of the language, whose essence is universality, frustrates this intention. Everyone necessarily speaks of himself as 'I,' and there is nothing distinctive in my experience that could not in principle be in anyone's, nor anything in anyone's experience that could not in principle be in mine." In the final analysis then it appears as if the act of thinking, by which Descartes's light of reason had assured him of his own unique existence, is appropriated by Hegel as the guarantor of a universality which must take precedence over the individual.

It should not be necessary to document in this brief introduction the influence which the philosophy of Hegel exerted upon his time. Suffice it to say that contemporaries of Hegel found themselves in possession of perhaps the most comprehensive system of philosophy ever put forth, while it was left to the succeeding generation of philosophers to determine how the legacy of Hegelianism should best be preserved and expanded — something which was undoubtedly Hegel's wish. In the conclusion of his Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie Hegel himself issued the following challenge: "Ich wünsche, daß diese Geschichte der Philosophie eine Aufforderung für Sie enthalten möge, den Geist

*Findlay, Hegel, p.40.
der Zeit, der in uns natürlich ist, zu ergreifen und aus seiner Natürlichkeit, d.h. Verschlossenheit, Leblosigkeit hervor an den Tag zu ziehen und – jeder an seinem Orte – mit Bewußtsein an den Tag zu bringen." The challenge was promptly taken up by a relatively unknown figure in the history of philosophy: by Max Stirner, né Johann Caspar Schmidt (1806-1856).

While one usually encounters the name of Max Stirner in the context of his influence upon Karl Marx, Stirner’s philosophy is worthy of study in its own right. Stirner’s claim to attention is not merely founded upon his relentless championing of the individualistic I whose egoistic self-assertion is continually frustrated by "the 'divine' nature of language." One of the many interesting aspects of Stirner’s philosophical position lies in the logical connections which exist between his own thought and that of Hegel’s.

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"Hegel, Vorlesungen, p.462.

"Marx felt it necessary to answer Stirner’s incisive critique of philosophical socialism by devoting three quarters of Die deutsche Ideologie to a refutation of his position (cf. Kapitel III–Sankt Max). Unfortunately, the work is all but unreadable for, as Walter Kaufmann has remarked, Marx "sytematically preferred invective to reasons and substituted outright profanity for argument." In From Shakespeare to Existentialism (New York: Anchor, 1960), p.151.

Isaiah Berlin, one of Marx’s biographers, has also noticed that in the deutsche Ideologie Stirner "is pursued through 500 pages of heavy-handed mockery and insult." In Karl Marx (New York: Oxford, 1963), p.143.
Taking up where Hegel left off, Stirner uses the conclusion reached in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* as his starting point and repudiates the conception of all men as one, presenting, in opposition, a terse philosophical defense of the inherent and ultimately unquestionable uniqueness of every empirically distinct individual. Even though this would be more than enough to earn him the title of the "Anti-Hegel," Stirner's additional refusal to locate profundity in obscurity necessitated a manner of presentation that could only be diametrically opposed to that of Hegel. A contemporary Stirner scholar, Lawrence Stepelevich, has put the matter quite nicely: "If the form of language reflects that of thought, then the minds of Stirner and Hegel rest at antipodes."

The aim of this paper will be to present Stirner's concept of the I, or *Ich*, which he establishes as the antithesis to Hegel's absolute *Geist*. After presenting the historical background out of which Hegel's concept of *Geist* emerged, it will be easier to appreciate how Stirner's aversion towards any form of a self-denying sense of universality (which is not only a product of our own thought but something to which we have to willingly acquiesce) culminated in his own extollation of the concrete and egoistically self-aware individual:

"Wir sind nur in Gedanken gleich, nur wenn "Wir" gedacht werden, nicht wie Wir wirklich und leibhaftig sind. Ich bin Ich, und Du bist Ich, aber Ich bin nicht dieses gedachte Ich, sondern dieses Ich, worin Wir alle gleich sind, ist nur mein Gedanke."\(^{11}\)

The significance in Stirner's choosing to say Ich (or dieses Ich) instead of das Ich is also something which should not be overlooked, for the latter brings with it connotations of generality which may tend to diminish the value an individual takes in the awareness of his uniqueness, much in the same way as der Mensch can only serve as a characterization of all individuals when those aspects which are responsible for their uniqueness are abstracted:

"Ich bin Mensch und Du bist Mensch, aber "Mensch" ist nur ein Gedanke, eine Allgemeinheit; weder Ich noch Du sind sagbar, Wir sind unaussprechlich, weil nur Gedanken sagbar sind und im Sagen bestehen." [DE, 348]

Since the individual in all his particularity cannot be justifiably subsumed under any general categorization, Stirner (somewhat paradoxically) describes the concrete I by using a term which can only be properly understood as the negation of all attempts at generalization - namely, der Unmensch. As we will see, it is this idea which forms the foundation of Stirner's thought and enables him to embrace the position of egoistic self-detachment embodied in the image of der Einzige.

\(^{11}\)Stirner, Der Einzige und sein Eigentum, p.348. All further references to Der Einzige will be designated in the text by [DE].
2. Max Stirner

Common among the relatively few commentaries devoted exclusively to the philosophy represented by Max Stirner appears to be the need to provide a self-justification, an intellectually respectable motive for wanting to delve into "one of the darker corners of the moral universe." The extremist nature of Stirner's thought has resulted either in his consignment to that realm where all those hostile to society and traditional Western values are to be found - the pessimists, nihilists, egoists, anarchists, and irascible atheists of all ages find a kindred spirit in Stirner - or else, his thought is held to be the product of a Bierphilosoph and considered too extreme to be worthy of serious attention. In fact, the philosophy of Max Stirner is more often than not considered to be only of historical interest, and it often earns no more than a scant reference in many philosophical anthologies - if it is to be found at all.


13 The initial publication of Stirner's main work, Der Einzige und sein Eigentum (1844), consisted of 1,000 copies, 250 of which were immediately confiscated by the authorities in Leipzig. Yet, after deeming the work to be "too outrageous to be taken seriously by anyone," the Interior Ministry of Saxony decided that censorship of the book would be unnecessary. (Jankowsky, "Max Stirner," p.371)
The revival and popularization of Stirner’s work, which occurred just before the turn of the century, is largely due to the enthusiasm of a few self-labeled "individualist anarchists," namely John Henry Mackay⁴ and Benjamin R. Tucker.⁵ Claiming Stirner as their mentor, they concentrated on the political consequences, i.e. anarchist implications, of Stirner’s work — usually at the expense of its philosophical merits. Yet with the publication of Der Einzige und sein Eigentum in 1844, Stirner had thrown down the gauntlet against all the increasingly popular, dissident philosophical systems of his time — in particular, Ludwig Feuerbach’s liberal humanism, the philosophical socialism of Karl Marx, and Bruno Bauer’s philosophy of pure criticism — and offered in their place a philosophical treatise which distinguished itself not only by its uncompromising rigor and self-consistency, but also by its sheer readability.⁶ The unusual clarity with which Stirner presents his ideas in Der Einzige is only surpassed by the iconoclastic nature of the work, which had exceeded by far the iconoclasm


⁶The earliest assessment of Stirner’s literary style is found in a letter from December of 1844 by Arnold Ruge, Marx’s one-time friend: "Das Buch von Max Stirner...ist eine merkwürdige Erscheinung. Viele Partieen sind ganz meisterhaft, und die Wirkung des Ganzen kann nur befriedi sein. Es ist das erste leserliche philosophische Buch in Deutschland." (Ruge, Briefwechsel, p.386)
championed in the treatises presented by Stirner's philosophical *Kampfgenossen*.

Stirner counted himself among *Die Freien*, a loose association of young intellectuals and freethinkers who shared a common interest in social criticism and the philosophy of Hegel. Among the most prominent members of *Die Freien* were Feuerbach, Bruno and Edgar Bauer, Arnold Ruge, and Otto Wigand, a publisher of some of Hegel's works. (Marx and Engels were also to be found among them occasionally, and it is only from a few hasty sketches made by Engels that we have an idea of Stirner's physical appearance.) Although their regular meetings often degenerated into a drunken and boisterous free-for-all — Ruge eventually came to part company with these "ekelhaften Renommisten" —, Stirner, who had always remained somewhat aloof, was nevertheless able to complete his philosophical stocktaking.

Over a period of three years (1841-1844) Stirner composed the only treatise which he would ever write. In keeping with Hegel's desire to grasp the spirit of the

17Quoted in Jankowski, p.371.

"In the two years prior to the publication of *Der Einzige*, Stirner had published a few philosophical essays in the *Rheinische Zeitung*, which was under the editorship of Marx, and the *Berliner Monatsschrift*. While Stirner's early writings indicate his participation in "the general offensive conducted by the Left Hegelians on prevailing institutions and ideas," the tendency to extend his critiques in original directions is also evident. (Paterson, *Nihilistic Egoist*, p.10)."
times, Stirner had ultimately issued a repudiation of every philosophical position he had encountered among Die Freien along with a scathing indictment of their lack of intellectual rigor. As could be expected, Der Einzige exploded like a bombshell upon the German philosophical scene and especially upon those Hegelians who found themselves to be the object of his attack, but — much to the dismay of the operationally-strapped author — the interest in "das mühsame Werk der besten Jahre seines Lebens" disappeared almost as dramatically.

In essence, Der Einzige und sein Eigentum is a concentrated attempt to present the finitude of the individual human being in all its concreteness and inherent uniqueness, and Stirner aims his criticism at any form of authority, or any ideal (as something which is ultimately self-imposed), which threatens to subjugate the individual and thereby restrict the free expression of egoistic self-interest. While the full extent of Stirner's critiques of the most prominent members of Die Freien goes beyond the scope of this paper, it should be evident why Stirner would have felt compelled to take issue with the philosophical anthropology of Feuerbach and its resultant deification of "Man" or "Humanity:"

"Den Gott, der Geist ist, nennt Feuerbach »Unser Wesen«. Können Wir Uns das gefallen lassen, daß

19Quoted in Mackay, Max Stirner. Sein Leben und sein Werk, p.168.
The concept of a singular and integrated I had eroded in Feuerbach’s philosophy, and Marx, who had received considerable inspiration from Feuerbach’s classification of man as a species-being (Gattungswesen), found himself to be another of Stirner’s favourite targets. Marx’s exaltation of the masses and a classless society composed of self-sacrificing individuals could only be anathema to Stirner and his philosophy of uncompromising individualism. (Stirner encapsulated Marxism, or what he referred to as socialist liberalism, in one sentence: "Wir wollen sie alle zu »Lumpen« machen, wollen Alle nichts haben, damit »Alle« haben." [DE,127].) According to Stirner, to work for the betterment of "Society," itself a generality, was yet another ideal which depersonalized the I and made it a servant to something other than itself:

"Die Gesellschaft, von der Wir alles haben, ist eine neue Herrin, ein neuer Spuk, ein neues »höchstes Wesen«, das Uns »in Dienst und Pflicht nimmt!" [DE,135]

In what may be called the motto of the book, Stirner begins and ends Der Einzige with the first line of Goethe’s poem "Vanitas! Vanitatum Vanitas:" "Ich hab’ Mein Sach’ auf

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20"Stirner’s reality is the world of his immediate experience, while Marx’s reality is that of universal labour, and it is not surprising that these two worlds, the particular and the universal, never meet." (Fleischmann, The Role of the Individual in Pre-Revolutionary Society, p.225-6)
Nichts gestellt."

It is only appropriate that the representative of a philosophical position founded upon total egocentricity would place his faith in nothing other than himself; for Stirner self-knowledge is tantamount to the conscious recognition of oneself as the only legitimate source from which meaning and value emerge: "Über der Pforte unserer Zeit steht nicht jenes apollinische: »Erkenne Dich selbst«, sondern ein: Verwerte Dich!" [DE, 353]. This subjectivism and the corresponding disdain for all absolutes, or anything which may attempt to exercise some claim on him without his sanction, is evident in the very first paragraph of the preface:

"Was soll nicht alles Meine Sache sein! Vor allem die gute Sache, dann die Sache Gottes, die Sache der Menschheit, der Wahrheit, der Freiheit, der Humanität, der Gerechtigkeit; ferner die Sache Meines Volkes, Meines Fürsten, Meines Vaterlandes; endlich gar die Sache des Geistes und tausend andere Sachen. Nur Meine Sache soll niemals Meine sache sein. »Pfui über den Egoisten, der nur an sich denkt!«" [DE, 3]

The final paragraph of the relatively brief preface is also instructive, for not only is it equally illustrative of the tone which Stirner manages to sustain throughout Der Einzige; it also expresses the essence of Stirner's philosophical position:

"Das Göttliche ist Gottes Sache, das Menschliche Sache «des Menschen». Meine Sache ist weder das Göttliche noch das Menschliche, ist nicht das Wahre, Gute, Rechte, Freie usw., sondern allein

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das Meinige, und sie ist keine allgemeine, sondern ist - einzig, wie Ich einzig bin. Mir geht nichts über Mich!" [DE,5]

What one encounters in the preface appears to be nothing but the advocacy of a ruthless egoism, and some commentators, such as John Clark, have interpreted Stirner to be making psychological egoism the central tenet of his philosophy. As opposed to ethical egoism, which is essentially a normative claim about moral obligation and holds that all people should be motivated solely by self-interest, psychological egoism is the view that all people are motivated solely by self-interest. Since Stirner's philosophy is concerned with the finite and concrete I, it is understandable that Clark would more readily attribute the latter position to Stirner since it purports to be an empirical claim about human nature.

Yet Clark's interpretation rests upon a fundamental misunderstanding of Stirner. Der Einzige und sein Eigentum

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Clark, Max Stirner's Egoism, p.38.

Clark's analysis of Stirner is irreparably flawed by his consistent rendering of Ich as "ego." The tendency within the English language to imagine the ego as some kind of psychological entity leads to the confusion that Stirner is praising something "apart" from himself, whereas Stirner's Ich is his concrete and singular existence upon which his psychological processes (thoughts) are dependent. Clark's misunderstanding of Stirner is nowhere more obvious than in the following claim: "Stirner charges that Feuerbach makes humanity sacred not because he claims that it is the creator of the universe, but because he hypostasizes it by considering it apart from the individuals who compose it. But this is exactly what Stirner does when he raises the ego to an independent reality contrary to its objective place in the course of nature [emphasis added]," p.31-2.
is Stirner's self-presentation, and the portrait displayed is not intended to be the model of a prescriptive ethical norm. Even though Stirner uses the word egoistisch throughout Der Einzige to describe his philosophical position, the meaning of the English equivalent is unavoidably pejorative through its association of self-interest with selfishness. Although Stirner would not have denied being selfish, it is the English word "egocentric" which comes closest to expressing Stirner’s central belief that the I is the source from which all values emerge: "Egoistisch ist es, keiner Sache einen eigenen oder »absoluten« Wert beizulegen, sondern ihren Wert in Mir zu suchen." [DE,186]. In addition, Stirner's disavowal of all absolutes by his emphasis upon the subjectivity of the I erases any significance at all which moral terms may have had: "Ihr meint, Meine Sache müsse wenigstens die »gute Sache« sein? Was gut, was böse! Ich bin ja selber Meine Sache, und Ich bin weder gut noch böse. Beides hat für Mich keinen Sinn." [DE,5].

It is Stirner’s usage of the word einzig which is the key to understanding that his intention is not to offer a philosophical justification of an ethical position, but rather to express what he considers to be a simple existential fact. And this fact is the irreducible individuality of the I, which is the assurance of uniqueness, or Einzigkeit. In the first response which
Stirner published as an answer to the criticisms leveled against him by Feuerbach, the socialist Moses Hess, and Szeliga, an advocate of Bauer’s Critical Thought, Stirner wrote: "Das Urtheil 'Du bist einzig' heisst nicht anders als 'Du bist Du', ein Urtheil, welches der Logiker ein widersinniges Urtheil nennt, weil es nichts urtheilt, nichts sagt, weil es leer oder ein Urtheil ist, das kein Urtheil ist."  

In effect Stirner presents a phenomenological description of the empirical I - ostensibly his own - which is, and can only be, responsible for the activity of a singular and distinctive consciousness. And it is this conception of consciousness which Stirner felt compelled to set up in opposition to the deified universal consciousness of Hegel.

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23Stirner, Kleine Schriften, p.117.
2.1 Stirner’s Relationship to Hegel

By far the most intriguing aspect of Stirner’s exploration of the I is the supreme debt which his philosophical enterprise actually owes to Hegel. Lawrence S. Stepelevich, writing as one who recognizes the link between the thought of these two men, stresses that "the philosophic relationship holding between Stirner and Hegel has been left virtually unexplored,"¹ and yet, in order to truly appreciate Stirner’s intention in Der Einzige, one must first understand that Stirner’s work is the product of someone fully versed in Hegelian philosophy. In fact, Stirner was one of the few Young Hegelians who had actually learned his Hegel from the master himself. In 1827, Stirner’s initial year at the University of Berlin, he had not only attended Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of religion, but he had also enrolled in two of Hegel’s courses, the History of Philosophy and the Philosophy of Spirit.

It is not inaccurate, to be sure, to claim that Stirner was a disciple of Hegel - perhaps in the same sense in which one claims Heidegger to be a disciple of Husserl by his

¹Stepelevich, p.264.
Previous analysis of the connections between Stirner and Hegel is limited to a dissertation by Kurt Adolf Mautz, Die Philosophie Max Stirners im Gegensatz zum hegelschen Idealismus (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1936).
initial acceptance of the latter's philosophical framework)\textsuperscript{25} - yet the antithetical and ultimately hostile position which Stirner would come to take in regard to the conclusions reached by Hegel seems to suggest that Stirner be viewed more as the last "offspring" of the Hegelian school, or, to use a more elegant phrase provided by the French scholar Henri Arvon, "le dernier maillon de la chaîne hégélienne."\textsuperscript{26}

Yet, lest Stirner's debt to Hegel be underestimated, Karl Löwith, a preeminent scholar in the field of nineteenth-century German philosophy, has recognized Der Einzige to be "eine letzte Konsequenz aus Hegels weltgeschichtlicher Konstruktion, die es - allegorisch entstellt - genau wiederholt."\textsuperscript{27} The real significance of Stirner's achievement then is that he reveals his opposition to Hegel to be the final dialectical product of Hegel's own philosophical system; taking this to be the case, it appears as if Stirner, rather than Marx, is the one who truly stood Hegel on his head.

Stepelevich has taken Löwith's claim one step further. The diversity of opinion among those who had hoped to continue the philosophical achievements of Hegelianism -

\textsuperscript{25}There is, however, no record of Stirner ever having met Hegel personally, much less working with him.

\textsuperscript{26}Arvon, Aux Sources de L'Existentialisme, p.177.

\textsuperscript{27}Löwith, Von Hegel zu Nietzsche, p.134.
especially those representative of the German Vormärz, that period of history which begins roughly around 1835 (often referred to as Junges Deutschland) and ends just prior to the revolution in Berlin in March 1848—, certainly attests to the fact that there were any number of logical consequences which could be drawn using Hegel’s conceptual apparatus. However, it is Stirner who proves to be the genuine heir of Hegelianism, for the ultimate logical consequence of Hegel’s thought may very well be found within the pages of Der Einzige.

In order to establish Stirner as the "perfected" or "completed Hegel" Stepelevich delineates three fundamental principles of Hegelianism with which Stirner is not only in agreement but with which he manages to generate a position antithetical to Hegelianism itself. First, Stirner’s emphasis upon the inviolability of the individual consciousness can be seen as stemming from the Hegelian notion that the continual acquisition of knowledge ends in pure self-awareness, or self-consciousness; according to Stirner, the egoistically self-aware individual will refuse

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28Kurt Rothmann’s description of the German intellectual scene during this period is illustrative of just what an anomaly Stirner really was: "Es waren engagierte Literaten, die sich weniger mit Seelenleben und innerer Gestimmtheit des Menschen befaßten als mit weltverändernden Gedanken und Taten...Fortschritt und Sozialismus bedeuteten ihnen mehr als Individualismus und Tradition." Rothmann, Kleine Geschichte der deutschen Literatur, p.167.

29Stepelevich, Max Stirner as Hegelian, p.604.
to be enslaved to what he referred to as an idée fixe, i.e. an established ideal such as God, Truth, the State, Humanity, and even Geist, all of which can only have dominion over an individual who willingly accepts their external claim upon himself.

The second principle which Stirner adopts from Hegel is to be found towards the end of the Phänomenologie where Hegel clearly states the equivalency of absolute knowledge and pure self-consciousness:

"Die Natur, Momente und Bewegung dieses Wissens hat sich also so ergeben, daß es das reine Fürsichsein des Selbstbewußtseins ist; es ist Ich, das dieses und kein anderes Ich und das ebenso unmittelbar vermittelt oder aufgehobenes allgemeines Ich ist."

The point of departure for Stirner, however, rests in Hegel’s identification of pure self-consciousness with an I that is simultaneously particular and universal. For Stirner it is this admitted uniqueness (dieses und kein anderes Ich) which becomes central to his philosophy and forces him to deny any kind of extrapolated commonality or generality. Stepelevich explains Stirner’s position as follows: "Absolute knowledge can exist only within the particular consciousness; it is not a self-subsistent entity but rather the self-comprehending, and infinite, relationship of self to self."
The third principle which Stirner derived from Hegel is the essential "negativity" of the I. In conjunction with his belief in a suprapersonal I, Hegel asserted that the I is "die reine Negativität"\(^{32}\) since its lack of particularity, or indeterminacy of character, assures that it can never be associated with any determinate being. In other words, I may be aware of myself as J.N., the destitute, over-worked graduate student who occupies a specific position in time and space, yet "the 'I' of which I am conscious in self-consciousness is not, however, tied down to any such single position or set of determinations: whatever or wherever it is, it could always have been elsewhere or otherwise."\(^{33}\)

Moreover, according to Hegel, the I is that which is able to bear the pain of its pure subjectivity, knowing that what makes it impersonal is its ability to differentiate itself from everything - including itself:

"Nach dieser formellen Bestimmung kann [das Ich] von allem Äußerlichen und seiner eigenen Äußerlichkeit, seinem Dasein selbst abstrahieren; [es] kann die Negation seiner individuellen Unmittelbarkeit, den unendlichen Schmerz ertragen, d.i. in dieser Negativität affirmativ sich erhalten und identisch für sich sein. Diese Möglichkeit ist seine abstrakte für sich seienende Allgemeinheit in sich."\(^{34}\)

\(^{32}\)Hegel, p.556.

\(^{33}\)Findlay, p.40.

\(^{34}\)Hegel, *Philosophie des Geistes*, p.25.
The attraction which this idea of negativity had for Stirner was the accompanying aspect of creativity, albeit one entirely different from Hegel’s conception. The I, which Hegel necessarily conceived of as a *subject* and not as an antecedently existing *substance*, can not be separated from the activity of consciousness; in a sense, the I is creative in its ability to posit itself or bring itself into existence through its self-conscious activity.\(^{35}\) However, Stirner founded his philosophy upon his own finite and concrete I, from which, it should rather be said, consciousness cannot separate itself. The creativity of Stirner’s I lies in his ability not only to create the contents of consciousness but to destroy them when he deems necessary, and Stirner makes this clear in a rejoinder to Fichte:

"Wenn Fichte sagt: »Das Ich ist Alles«, so scheint dies mit meinen Aufstellungen vollkommen zu harmonieren. Allein nicht das Ich ist Alles, sondern das Ich *zerstört* Alles, und nur das sich selbst auflösende Ich, das nie seelende Ich, das -

\(^{35}\)Findlay, p.40.

Findlay also draws attention to the fact that Hegel actually appropriated this rather paradoxical idea from Fichte’s notion of a self-constituting I, or an I which only exists when it is conscious of itself:

"Also das Setzen des Ich durch sich selbst ist die reine Thätigkeit desselben. —Das Ich setzt sich selbst, und es *ist*, vermögé dieses bloßen Setzens durch sich selbst; und umgekehrt: Das Ich *ist*, und es setzt sein Seyn, vermöge seines bloßen Seyns. —Es ist zugleich das Handelnde, und das Produkt der Handlung; das Thätige, und das, was durch die Thätigkeit hervorgebracht wird; Handlung, und That sind Eins und eben dasselbe; und daher ist das: Ich *bin*, Ausdruck einer Thathandlung..." (Fichte, *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre*, p.259).
endliche Ich ist wirklich Ich. Fichte spricht vom »absoluten« Ich, Ich aber spreche von Mir, dem vergänglichen Ich." [DE,199]

In short, the I was never a merely negative entity for Hegel (or Fichte), and Stirner capitalizes upon the acknowledgement of its creative power in order to incorporate it into his own conception and, in doing so, reveal the dependency of all concepts upon the willful determinations of the singular I:

"Ich bin [nicht] Nichts im Sinne der Leerheit, sondern das schöpferische Nichts, das Nichts, aus welchem Ich selbst als Schöpfer Alles schaffe." [DE,5]

As could be expected, the one concept which Stirner witnessed as acquiring an almost religious respect, Hegel’s Geist, was not to be exempted from its "profane" origins. Geist was only one more idol whose existence was dependent upon the minds of men - but not in the sense in which Hegel intended: "»höhere Mächte« sind nur dadurch, daß Ich sie erhöhe und Mich niedriger stelle." [DE,357]. To Stirner, the total atheist, Geist was merely the next higher power which demanded his obedience and self-abasement, and an analysis of the genesis of Hegelianism’s central tenet will reveal just why Hegel had understood this eclipse of the I to be unavoidable.
3. The Meaning and Historical Foundations of Hegel's Geist

3.1 The Cogito of Kant

The transcendental philosophy of Immanuel Kant, which finds its fullest expression in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781), provides the background against which Hegel's concept of Geist can be understood, for the Hegelian Geist has its roots in Kant's concept of the *transzendentes Ich*.[36] Kant, as well as Hegel, was anxious to determine what constitutes "absolute" knowledge and how, if at all, it could be attained. Both men were also equally aware that the very foundation of knowledge is dependent upon self-knowledge, or self-consciousness, and they therefore recognized their common philosophical task to be the revelation of the nature of the knowing subject. Yet, what Kant had presented as the model of the knowing subject, the *transzendentes Ich* or *Ich denke*, Hegel found to be internally inconsistent within the Kantian epistemological framework.

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[36]The following analysis of Hegel's (unacknowledged) debt to Kant is based upon Robert Solomon's extremely lucid essay "Hegel's Concept of Geist" (1970). Solomon neglects to mention, however, that Fichte's concept of *das absolute Ich* was also a primary influence on Hegel's development of *der absolute Geist*. 
In a manner reminiscent of Descartes, Kant established the *Ich denke* (*Cogito*) as the starting point of his philosophical methodology and asserts that this self-evident philosophical truth is the necessary precondition for the existence of a self-conscious, knowing subject:

"Das: *Ich denke* muss alle meine Vorstellungen begleiten können; denn sonst würde etwas in mir vorgestellt werden, was gar nicht gedacht werden könnte, welches eben so viel heißt, als die Vorstellung würde entweder unmöglich, oder wenigstens für mich nichts sein. Diejenige Vorstellung, die vor allem Denken gegeben sein kann, heißt *Anschauung*. Also hat alles Mannigfaltige der Anschauung eine nothwendige Beziehung auf das: *Ich denke* in demselben Subject, darin dieses Mannigfaltige angetroffen wird."

The designation of the *Ich denke*, or the first-person perspective, as the only source from which all philosophical propositions emerge - and, consequently, from which they may find their justification - can be accurately referred to as "methodological solipsism." This position entails that only propositions of which we ourselves are certain, i.e. propositions which are self-evident, can be justifiably accepted. However, it is clear that methodological solipsism can only be a point of departure for Kant (and Descartes) for, in order to make an appeal to "self-evident principles," the solipsist method must be turned in on itself to reveal just what "self-consciousness" and the "first-person perspective" really is.

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"Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, p.124."
Whereas Descartes concluded in the sixth Meditation that the I is "une chose qui pense, ou une substance dont tout l’essence ou la nature n’est que de penser [emphasis added]," Kant comes to the conclusion that Descartes’s Cogito is essentially unknowable and, hence, is nothing more than a fallacious assumption. Kant argues that the Ich denke, or the I that thinks, is not to be identified with a person, nor is it to be considered as any-thing (i.e., a substance) other than that which is transcendentally necessary for the existence of consciousness. Kant refers to the Ich denke as an Urtheil, or simply a Satz, which expresses the perception (Wahrnehmung) of oneself:

"Denn diese innere Wahrnehmung ist nichts weiter als die bloße Apperception: Ich denke, welche sogar alle transcendentale Begriffe möglich macht, in welchem es heißt: Ich denke die Substanz, die Ursache usw."\(^{39}\)

The Ich for Kant is nothing but a completely empty "presentation" - "die einfache und für sich selbst an Inhalt gänzlich leere Vorstellung"\(^{40}\) - of which one cannot even say that it is a concept. Rather, it is merely the consciousness which necessarily accompanies (begleitet) all concepts:

"Durch dieses Ich oder Er oder Es (das Ding), welches denket, wird nun nichts weiter als ein transcendentales Subject der Gedanken vorgestellt

\(^{38}\)Descartes, Meditations, p.332.

\(^{39}\)Kant, p.297.

\(^{40}\)Ibd., p.299.
= x, welches nur durch die Gedanken, die seine Prädicate sind, erkannt wird, und wovon wir abgesondert niemals den mindesten Begriff haben können."

Although Kant himself felt it necessary to use the term "thing" (Ding) in the above quotation, he illustrates immediately thereafter the faulty inference from the necessity of the Ich denke to the existence of the Ich as a thing or substance:

"Das Bewuβtsein [ist] an sich nicht sowohl eine Vorstellung, die ein besonderes Object unterscheidet, sondern eine Form derselben überhaupt."  

In other words, the I that thinks and is necessary to consciousness is, by its very nature, the subject of experience; its inability to subject itself to its own categories of the understanding, which determine the conditions for the knowledge of objects (i.e., exhibition of causal relationships), precludes its being the object of experience:

"Die Einheit des Bewuβtseins, welche den Categorie zum Grunde liegt, wird hier für Anschauung des Subjects als Objects genommen, und darauf die Categorie der Substanz angewandt. Sie ist aber nur die Einheit im Denken, wodurch allein kein Object gegeben wird, worauf also die Categorie der Substanz, als die jederzeit gegebene Anschauung voraussetzt, nicht angewandt, mithin dieses Subject gar nicht erkannt werden kann. Das Subject der Categorien kann also dadurch, dass es diese

"Ibid.

"Ibid."
denkt, nicht von sich selbst als einem Objecte der Categorien einen Begriff bekommen."\(^3\)

While this analysis by Kant of the *Ich denke* is one in which Hegel finds himself in general agreement, "Hegel’s notion of Geist seeks to resolve the difficulty which Kant could not seem to avoid when discussing the transzendentales *Ich*, namely, the identification of the transcendent al *Ich denke* with a personal *Ich denke*. In addition to the fact that the problematic issue of personal identity remains largely unacknowledged in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant inadvertently undermined what he maintained to be the inherent non-substantiality, or non-corporeality, of the *Ich denke* through, among other things, the consistent use of the first-person personal and possessive pronouns (*mich, mir, mein*). One need only reexamine the first sentence of Kant’s initial recognition of the *Ich denke*, where he states that the *Ich denke* "muß alle meine Vorstellungen begleiten können" [emphasis added], and one receives the overwhelming impression that there is one such subject, or *Ich denke*, per person.\(^4\)

\(^3\)Ibd., pp.329-30.

\(^4\)"Das denken als Subject vorgestellt ist Denkendes, und der einfache Ausdruck des existierenden Subjects als Denkenden ist Ich." (Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, p.72).

"Solomon notes that in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788) it becomes even more evident that Kant identifies the noumenal *Ich* discussed therein with the *Ich* presupposed by the *Ich denke* of the first *Kritik*. ("Hegel’s Concept of Geist," p.657).
As should be clear by now, however, Kant's formulation of the *Ich denke* is such that the very nature of the *Ich*, its transcendentalism, excludes it from the empirical realm; any propositions which refer to individual human bodies must necessarily be empirical propositions and, hence, inapplicable to the *Ich denke*. Therefore, the criteria which one uses to identify persons cannot be sufficient towards the identification of the *Ich denke*. Consequently, not only is the *Ich* not a person, but as Solomon writes, "considerations about the 'I think' [*Ich denke*] are quite independent - logically and causally independent - of considerations about myself as a person."

It is this very independence which raises immense problems for Kant's *transzendentes Ich*. In short, the inability to identify or differentiate one *Ich denke* from another based upon the differentiation of persons results in any number of seemingly preposterous claims about the number of transcendental subjects - claims which are, in fact, consistent with Kant's primary thesis of the *transzendentes Ich*. It is possible, for example, that several (transcendental) subjects occupy one body - perhaps "my" body - , or that one *transzendentes Ich* is shared among many others. The impasse reached when one recognizes the impossibility of proving the falsity of either of these claims (according to Kant's own methodology) should allow

"Ibid., p.658."
one to glimpse a view as to how Hegel's Geist is to be understood as a modification and improvement upon Kant's *transzendentales Ich*.
3.2 Hegel’s Geist as Universal Consciousness

The confusion created by the attempt to individuate individual persons in transcendental philosophy did not, of course, go unnoticed by Hegel, and his concept of Geist can be seen as providing the transition from Kant’s investigations into "consciousness in general" to the idea of a literally general consciousness. In a direct reference to the Kritik der reinen Vernunft, Hegel draws attention to the misleading nature of Kant’s language and seeks to establish the fundamental "non-individuality" of the Ich:


What Hegel is saying here is that everyone may regard themselves as an individual Ich, yet, if one truly wishes to speak of such a thing at all - and we have already seen that so far this is not possible in transcendental philosophy -,

"Hegel, p.74."
it can only be in the context of being aware of oneself as an indistinguishable *Ich* among other *Ichs*. (Needless to say, this notion is completely rejected by Stirner: "Ich bin aber nicht ein Ich neben andern Ichern, sondern das alleinige Ich: Ich bin einzig." [DE,406]).

This indistinguishability resides in the nature of the *Ich* as the "reine Beziehung auf sich selbst." In other words, Hegel draws attention to the necessary commonality, or universality (*Allgemeines*), among all *Ichs*, namely, that the existence of the *Ich* and the knowledge of its own existence (*Selbstbewußtsein*) are one and the same: "Das Wissen des Ich = Ich; dieses einzelne Selbst, das unmittelbar reines Wissen oder Allgemeines ist."44 Since its transcendentality rules out any attempts at individuation, Hegel concludes that the *Ich* can only be conceived of as an abstraction which "[sich] als von aller Partikularität sonstiger Eigenschaften, Zustände usf. befreites verhält und nur das Allgemeine tut, in welchem es mit allen Individuen identisch ist."49 While there is a natural tendency for individuals to regard themselves, or more exactly, to refer to themselves as *Ich* - and, in so doing, assume that this is inherently expressive of a certain degree of individuality - the *Ich* for Hegel is characterized by its very lack of uniqueness, or particularity:

44Quoted in Möller, *Der Geist und das Absolute*, p.94.
49Hegel, p.80.

Hegel recognized that the implication of uniqueness which seemed inevitably to accompany the term Ich was that which rendered it unintelligible as the designation for the subject in transcendental philosophy. Consequently, Hegel needed to distinguish this "reine Beziehung auf sich selbst" and "das reine Fürsichsein" as something other than Ich, and this was accomplished through the notion of - Geist.

Using one of the central ideas in Hegel’s philosophical system, one could accurately say that what Hegel has presented here is a "Dialectic of the Ich:" in order to recognize the unity which exists among all Ichs, the Ich must learn to recognize its initial perception of itself as particular and unique, as nothing other than an insignificant moment of thought; the true Ich, which Hegel takes to be the "general individual" (das allgemeine Individuum), is identified as the "self-conscious Spirit" (der selbstbewußte Geist).

In short, Hegel understood Geist to be the unifying principle of consciousness, or a kind of universal

\[5^{th}Ibd., p.82-3.\]
consciousness, that emerges progressively out of that commonality (Allgemeines) among all Ichs - self-consciousness (Selbstbewuβtsein).51 In Phänomenologie des Geistes Hegel writes:

"Hiemit ist schon der Begriff des Geistes für uns vorhanden. Was für das Bewuβtsein weiter wird, ist die Erfahrung, was der Geist ist, diese absolute Substanz, welche in der vollkommenen Freiheit und Selbständigkeit ihres Gegensatzes, nämlich verschiedener für sich seiernder Selbstbewuβtsein[e], die Einheit derselben ist: Ich, das Wir, und Wir, das Ich ist."52

Geist then, considered in its most general sense, is what is referred to by the pronoun Ich, but more significantly, it is the common experience of consciousness among all Ichs which is responsible for their resultant unity (Einheit).53 The particular or concrete individual is the one whose consciousness is dominated by one view or principle and has not yet achieved full awareness of Geist: "Das besondere Individuum ist der unvollständige Geist, eine konkrete Gestalt, in deren ganzem Dasein eine Bestimmtheit

51The various stages whereby Spirit attains consciousness of itself lies beyond the scope and purpose of this paper.

52Hegel, Phänomenologie, p.140.

53As J.N. Findlay summarizes in Hegel: A Re-examination (1958): "To say that I exist, or that I think, is therefore simply to say that varying items are brought together as in a single conscious focus or crucible - the latter image is Hegel's own - and that as so brought together they lose their hard outlines and their random diversity, and become instances of a kind, or elements in a unified pattern. The pronoun I has therefore its root meaning for Hegel in the unity and universality characteristic of all conscious experience." (p.41)
herrschend ist;"54 upon self-awareness, or the awareness of oneself as Geist, the image of oneself as a concrete, particular individual is reduced to nothing more than a trivial moment of self-delusion: "In dem Geiste, der höher steht als ein anderer, ist das niedrigere konkrete Dasein zu einem unscheinbaren Momente herabgesunken."55

With the concept of Geist it seems as if Hegel had successfully provided the transition in transcendental philosophy from Kant's personal subject to a universal subject by accounting for the indistinguishability of individual consciousness within his philosophical system. And yet, while the requirements of transcendental philosophy compelled Hegel to reject and ultimately revise the traditional concepts of self-reference which were represented in the Cogito, his attempts at clarification could only be seen as futile by Stirner, who rejected transcendental philosophy and metaphysics altogether.

55Ibd.
4. *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*

To attempt to present the form of argumentation Stirner uses in *Der Einzige* as a linear development of premises and conclusions is not just doomed to failure; it is diametrically opposed to a work whose very nature is that of a virulent polemic. And yet, in between the expected hostility and emotional digressions, one finds an ever-recurring and thoroughly consistent defense of egoistic self-possession which always emerges anew, allowing itself to be observed and evaluated from yet another clearly defined perspective. It is Stirner's skillful manipulation of the German language and the vividness of his style which undoubtedly contribute to the cohesiveness of *Der Einzige* and produce "un véritable système organique"\(^{56}\) - not to mention the assault upon the philosophical positions of his day which Stirner continues from beginning to end. One has to wonder which of these factors was actually responsible for the caustic rejoinders and disparagement which Stirner found lavished upon himself by his contemporaries.

Although Stirner's phenomenological description of the I continually reappears within *Der Einzige* in distinctly different contexts, the following exposition of Stirner's philosophy will be broken down according to the main themes

\(^{56}\)Arvon, p.43.
which run through his work, and the attempt will be made whenever possible to present the arguments in Der Einzige within the framework of Stirner's confrontation with Hegelianism.

4.1 Stirner's Critiques of Geist

Stirner divides Der Einzige into two sections, the first being Der Mensch, and the second Ich. (From what has been said earlier it should be clear that the omission of the definite article in front of Ich serves to highlight the contrast between the two halves of the book, respectively characterized by the themes of universality and particularity.) The first part of Stirner's work is markedly Hegelian in that he presents an historical overview of the philosophical process by which individuals have come to be alienated from themselves. Beginning with the ancient Greeks (die Alten) and concluding with the philosophical positions advocated by the likes of Feuerbach, Marx, and Bauer (die Neuen), one is left to assume that Stirner believed his egoism to be the precursor to the third and perhaps final stage in the evolution of the human race.

As if to show that this course of events is inevitable, Stirner begins by presenting a description of the stages of
an individual human being's intellectual development. In the brief (and weakest) chapter entitled *ein Menschenleben*, the reader is confronted with a distinctively triadic process of development. This can only be intended to mirror the historical analysis that follows immediately thereafter: the child, like the philosophers of antiquity, reveals itself as a realist in its preoccupation with the material things of the world, while the intellectuals, i.e. social reformers, of Stirner's day proved themselves to be just as susceptible to that idealism to which the young perpetually succumb, inspired by notions like truth, freedom, equality, and justice. It is only the mature man who, by taking delight in his concrete self, develops an egoistic (*eigennütziges*) interest and consequently makes himself the center of all things:

"Knaben hatten nur ungeistige, d.h. gedankenlose und ideenlose, Jünglinge nur geistige Interessen; der Mann hat leibhaftige, persönliche, egoistische Interessen." [DE,14]

Stirner demonstrates his linguistic subtlety here by taking advantage of some of the ambiguities to be found within the word *Geist*. Although the contrast which Stirner has made is clearly intended to impart a pejorative sense to the word early on, it is important to recognize that in the first instance of the word, *ungeistig*, Stirner is only

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"One need not look very far to ascertain that Stirner never wavers from his position of pure subjectivism: "...Endlich der Greis? Wenn Ich einer werde, so ist noch Zeit genug, davon zu sprechen." [DE,15]"
referring to the inability of the child to access its powers of abstract thought:

"Indes gedacht haben Wir schon als Kinder, nur waren unsere Gedanken keine fleischlosen, abstrakten, absoluten, d.h. nichts als Gedanken, ein Himmel für sich, eine rein Gedankenwelt, logische Gedanken. Im Gegenteil waren es nur Gedanken gewesen, die wir Uns über eine Sache machten." [DE,12]

The object of Stirner's scorn in the above quotation is of course the "geistige Interessen" of youth, which for Stirner connotes the almost religious enthusiasm for all those seductive and elusive ideals, the "Lichtgestalten der Gedankenwelt." [DE,12]. As the child grows into a youth through the search for that which it "thinks" to be behind or beyond the world of mere things, so the man has come to realize that these Geiste are products of the creative power of his thought:

"Wie Ich Mich hinter den Dingen finde, und zwar als Geist, so muß Ich Mich später auch hinter den Gedanken finden, nämlich als ihr Schöpfer und Eigner." [DE,14]

Within the section of Der Einzige in which Stirner treats die Neuen he makes use of another meaning of Geist which does not merely refer to the basic ability to think (Denkvermögen). It is the Holy Spirit of Christianity (Der heilige Geist), as well as the inseperable emphasis upon other-worldliness common to almost every other religion, which Stirner sees as the quintessential "Lichtgestalt der Gedankenwelt." From the Son of Man, who has nothing to do with this earthly world, to the belief in immortality, the
Christian preoccupation with the soul and the practice of self-denial is seen by Stirner as one of the main contributors to the devaluation of the earth-bound I:

"Ihr unterscheidet Euch darin, daß Du [der Fromme] den Geist, er [der Egoist] aber Sich zum Mittelpunkt macht, oder daß Du Dein Ich entzweist und Dein «eigentliches Ich», den Geist, zum Gebieter des wertlosen Restes erhebst, während er von dieser Entzweiung nichts wissen will, und geistige und materielle Interessen eben nach seiner Lust verfolgt." [DE,32]

Thus the egoist is exalted as one who refuses to worship an image of his own making (the Sartrean concept of choosing not to live in "bad faith" seems appropriate here), whereas the religious man is castigated for his self-imposed submission to an idea: "Du lebst nicht Dir, sondern Deinem Geiste und dem, was des Geistes ist, d.h. Ideen." [DE,32].

The self-affirmation of the egoist then is dependent upon his refusal to accept the religious notion of Geist as well as every other idea which threatens to establish an authority of its own and consume the individual in the process: "Jedes höhere Wesen über Mir, sei es Gott, sei es der Mensch, schwächt das Gefühl meiner Einzigkeit und erbleicht erst vor der Sonne dieses Bewußtseins." [DE,412]. The point that Stirner's disavowal of the religious Geist is essentially a disavowal of all ideas which come to be endowed with the authority of an absolute has also been clearly made by the German scholar Werner Schneider:

"Gottergebenheit wäre Selbstverachtung, die Selbstbejahung beginnt mit der Gottesleugnung. Die absolute Selbstbejahung
des Ich kann sich nur durch Verneinung des Absoluten realisieren, nämlich durch Entgötterung des Göttlichen, durch Relativierung des Absoluten."

Before discussing Stirner's attempt to relativize the other "heiliger Geist," the supreme absolute of Hegel, let us examine how Stirner interprets the Cogito of Descartes as yet another early attempt to subsume the individual under the reign of thought.

In his critique of Descartes, Stirner once again makes use of the associative meanings of Geist as Denkvermögen and spirit - although in this case not a religious spirit - in order to establish the Cogito as the straightforward equation of the concrete individual with immaterial thought. According to Stirner, to say "I think, therefore I am" is to say that "nur wenn Ich geistig lebe, lebe Ich; nur als Geist bin Ich wirklich oder - Ich bin durch und durch Geist und nichts als Geist," [DE,22] or "Man lebt nur, wenn man denkt. Denkendes Leben heißt: »geistiges Leben«! Es lebt nur der Geist, sein Leben ist das wahre Leben." [DE,94].

Stirner argues that the Cogito is remarkably similar to Christianity in the sense that their respective Geiste demand the individual's primary attention and respect despite his unshakeable conviction that the world is composed of concrete individuals and material objects with which he must interact every second of the day:

58Schneiders, Der Standpunkt des Egozentrismus, p.125.

One can see in the above quotation that with just the standard uses of Geist Stirner has already proceeded to make the connection with Hegel. The equation of Geist with the powers of thought leads to its equation with the power to reason (Vernunft) and, as a consequence, immediately brings to mind the centerpiece of Hegelianism: that what is rational (vernünftig) is real and what is real is rational. Yet as one who cannot bring himself to deny the immediacy of the material world with its "unvernünftige" objects, Stirner refuses to attribute material existence to the products of thought or reason: "Keine Idee hat Dasein, denn keine ist der Leibhaftigkeit fähig." [DE,408]. And although he does not specifically address this newer, Christian philosophy as Hegelianism, Stirner never tires of reminding us that it is often impossible to determine where the philosophy of Hegel stops and theology begins.59

It should not be surprising that Stirner adopts the same strategy when approaching Hegel’s concept of Geist as

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59"Begriffe sollen überall entscheiden, Begriffe das Leben regeln, Begriffe herrschen. Das ist die religiöse Welt, welcher Hegel einen systematischen Ausdruck gab, indem er Methode in den Unsinn brachte und die Begriffssatzungen zur runden, fest-gegründeten Dogmatik vollendete." [DE,104]
he did with the Geist of Descartes and Christianity. Essentially, the idea of Geist as self-thinking thought is denounced for displacing the individual upon which it is dependent; Stirner tirelessly asserts that it is the unique and empirical I that is responsible for thought and not the other way around: "Begönne das Denken überhaupt, statt begonnen zu werden, wäre das Denken ein Subjekt, eine eigene handelnde Persönlichkeit." [DE,394]. It is this personification of thought which has resulted in the confusion surrounding the I and which has reached its zenith in the philosophy of Hegel: "Hegel verurteilt das Eigene, das Meinige, die — »Meinung«. Das »absolute Denken« ist dasjenige Denken, welches vergißt, daß es mein Denken ist, daß Ich denke und das es nur durch Mich ist."\(^{60}\) [DE,381-2].

Stirner further characterizes the dependence of thought upon the empirical I by stressing that the latter is actually distinguished by its capacity to exist without having a particular thought (Gedankenlosigkeit), especially

without having the thought of itself: "Und wirklich habe Ich nur als Mensch Gedanken, als Ich bin Ich zugleich gedankenlos." [DE,389]. As Rudolf Ružička writes: "Was [Stirner] mit dem Ich meint, ist nicht der Gedanke des Ich, sondern die unmittelbare Wahrnehmung oder Empfindung des Denken-Wollens."61 The spontaneity or creative properties of the I are once again apparent, and as that which is antecedent to thought Stirner holds the essential I to be the unthinkable and the incomprehensible (der Unbegreifliche): "Beobachte Dich einmal jetzt eben bei deinem Nachdenken, und Du wirst finden, wie Du nur dadurch weiter kommst, daß Du jeden Augenblick gedanken- und sprachlos wirst." [DE,389].

In short, it appears as if Stirner only gives his approval to the usage of the word Geist when it is used in reference to that which is most immediate and certain: i.e. the capacity for and the awareness of thought. (In fact, the only conclusion Descartes could really have drawn from the Cogito is "I am aware of a thought," or, more simply, "There is a thought.") Therefore, Stirner is able to dismiss the manifestations which Geist undergoes in both Christianity and Hegelianism by attributing their acceptance to the conscious choice of the unique individuals from whose minds they arose and upon which their continued preservation is dependent.

61Ružička, Selbstentfremdung und Ideologie, p.93-4.
4.2 Der Unmensch

Stirner’s denial of the existence of all absolutes takes the form of a consistent rejection of a spiritual or metaphysical reality; if there is nothing beyond the sensual world inhabited by the singular I, then the only non-corporeal entities can be the private thoughts thereof. There can be no "höchstes Wesen" and no "Ding-an-sich" except as the objects of our thought. Quite simply, the world is as it is, and previous generations have only tortured themselves in their "Danaidenarbeit" [DE,42] to prove the existence of that which was not there:

"Hinter der daseienden Welt suchten sie das »Ding an sich«, das Wesen, sie suchten hinter dem Ding das Unding." [DE,42]

For Stirner ultimate reality consisted in an individual and unique I as devoid of transcendental properties as the material objects surrounding him. Yet in man’s misguided attempts to find the "essence" of these material objects the I was necessarily included, and the parallel between the search for that which was behind a Ding and the equally futile attempt to find the essence of a Mensch led Stirner to define his own existence as the Unmensch.62

62Stirner’s coinage of the word Unmensch immediately brings to mind Nietzsche, the later and perhaps most well-known proponent of individualism, and his neologism for that
Stirner acknowledged that his existence as a human being — as opposed to an animal — necessitated that he be described as belonging to the species known as der Mensch, but as Max Stirner, a transitory and yet eternally unique instance in the evolution of the human species, he was not this abstract generalization but one specific Mensch:

"Der Mensch ist nur ein Ideal, die Gattung nur ein Gedachtes. Ein Mensch sein, heißt nicht das Ideal des Menschen erfüllen, sondern sich, den Einzelnen, darstellen. Nicht, wie Ich das allgemein Menschliche realisiere, braucht meine Aufgabe zu sein, sondern wie Ich Mir selbst genüge. Ich bin meine Gattung, bin ohne Norm, ohne Gesetz, ohne Muster u. dgl." [DE,200]

In his argument that it is contrary to the constitution of the I to relinquish its subjectivity Stirner’s critique is similar to that which he brought against the Gattungswesen of Feuerbach. In addition, the distinction which Stirner makes here between der Mensch and Mensch can also be contrasted with a similar distinction made by Hegel to further illustrate the use which Stirner makes of his intellectual inheritance. In the Logik Hegel writes:

"Wenn wir von einem bestimmten Tiere sprechen, wir sagen, es sei Tier. Das Tier als solches ist nicht zu zeigen, sondern nur immer ein bestimmtes. Das Tier existiert nicht, sondern ist die allgemeine Natur der einzelnen Tiere, und jedes existierende Tier ist ein viel konkreter Bestimmtes, ein Besondertes. Aber Tier zu sein,

which represented the highest stage of human development — der Übermensch. Although there is no direct evidence that Nietzsche ever read Stirner, the similarity between many of their ideas is striking. However, as an ideal that was yet to be realized, Nietzsche’s Übermensch proves to be the exact opposite of the Unmensch.
die Gattung als das Allgemeine, gehört dem bestimmten Tier an und macht seine bestimmte Wesentlichkeit aus. Nehmen wir das Tiersein vom Hunde weg, so wäre nicht zu sagen, was er sei."

The commonality between Stirner and Hegel resides in their mutual understanding that a general classification, such as *der Mensch* or *das Tier*, does not exist except as a mental association of the individual entities which comprise these categories. The point at which Stirner diverges from Hegel is the latter's assertion that the "essential" animal (like the "essential" self) is characterized by its inseperability from that which it shares with all other animals (*die Gattung als das Allgemeine*), i.e., to be a *Tier* is first and foremost to belong to the category of *Tier*, a category whose universality consists in the fact that no *Tier* is not a member of it.

The fact that the degree of complexity of an animal pales in comparison to that of a human being has nothing to do with Stirner's disagreement. It should be obvious that his point of contention here is the eclipse of the individual entities without which the category would be devoid of meaning; just as Hegel gives "thought" a life of its own and forgets that it is a product of human beings, so he overlooks the fact that the abstract classification "animal" did not exist until 1) instances of the kind existed and 2) human beings designated them as such. In

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⁶²Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, p.82.
other words, it is the use of a word which makes it universal and not the nature of the objects which it designates.

The last sentence in the above citation is an excellent illustration of how Hegel's desire to establish the incontestability of the idea of universals resulted in his slighting of the particular. Assuming that one were able to remove the aspect of "being an animal" (Tiersein) from the definition of a dog, and one could not therefore describe a dog as such, the conditions of that particular dog's immediate and concrete existence would not be altered in the least. The classification "animal" is nothing but a mental product of man's creative powers, and, more importantly, no instance of that kind recognizes itself as such with the responsibility to behave in the manner appropriate to it:

"Kein Schaf, kein Hund bemüht sich, ein »rechtes Schaf, ein rechter Hund« zu werden; keinem Tier erscheint sein Wesen als eine Aufgabe, d.h. als ein Begriff, den es zu realisieren habe. Es realisiert sich, indem es sich auslebt, d.h. auflöst, vergeht. Es verlangt nicht, etwas Anderes zu sein oder zu werden, als es ist." [DE,372].

Stirner's argument is essentially that the same conditions apply to human beings. There is no ideal to be realized, no uniquely human mission to be fulfilled:

"Ein Mensch ist zu nichts »berufen« und hat keine »Aufgabe«, keine »Bestimmung«, so wenig als eine Pflanze oder ein Tier einen »Beruf« hat." [DE,366]

Other than to live out his life in the manner he pleases the unique human being known as Max Stirner is
required to do nothing. As a singular example of Mensch his existence is as unaffected by the abstraction known as Menschsein as a Tier is from the concept of Tiersein; throughout the stages of his life he is always and everywhere "der wahre Mensch" [DE,367]. It is this sense in which Stirner identifies himself, "das allerwärts Vorhandene" [DE,161], as an Unmensch, as someone who is not the embodiment of Mensch but of that which he already is: "Ein menschliches Ich kann Ich nicht werden, weil Ich eben Ich und nicht bloß Mensch bin." [DE,157]. In short, Stirner is Mensch and Unmensch in one: "Ich bin Mensch und bin zugleich mehr als Mensch, d.h. Ich bin das Ich dieser meiner bloßen Eigenschaft." [DE,195].

In order to further clarify the distinction which he wishes to make and distance himself from the universal of humanity, Stirner dethrones reason as that quality of "man" which is most esteemable and to which everyone can appeal, as if it were another existing entity independent of individual human beings:

"Das Recht soll nach liberaler Vorstellungsweise für Mich verbindlich sein, weil es durch die menschliche Vernunft so eingesetzt ist, gegen welche meine Vernunft die »Unvernunft« ist...Und doch ist keine andere wirklich als gerade diese »Unvernunft«. Weder die göttliche noch die menschliche Vernunft, sondern allein deine und meine jedesmalige Vernunft ist wirklich, wie und weil Du und Ich es sind." [DE,225]

Reason (Vernunft) as such does not exist for Stirner, for the only reason which he knows is his own. As the
Unmensch, the only dictates which he follows are those which he establishes for himself and - it goes without saying - to his personal benefit.

4.3 Der Einzige and the Other

Although the characteristics of the Unmensch are those of Stirner himself, Stirner comes to prefer another title over this one which has essentially been "forced" upon him by those humanists who have made him assert himself in direct opposition to humanity; he identified himself as the Unmensch because they told him to honor das Menschliche, yet Stirner's refusal to let himself be measured by the ideal in man left no alternative but to characterize himself in accordance with his uniqueness as der Einzige:

"Ich bin das Unmenschliche nur gewesen, bin es jetzt nicht mehr, sondern bin das Einzige, ja Dir zum Abscheu das Egoistische, aber das Egoistische nicht, wie es am Menschlichen, Humanen und Uneigennützigen sich messen läßt, sondern das Egoistische als das - Einzige." [DE,162]

The anarchist implications of Stirner's philosophy come to light in his refusal to recognize any authority which supports itself upon an abstraction like das Menschliche, least of all the authority of law, since one of its principle foundations is that of universal and
inalienable human rights (Menschenrechte)." And is not the idea of rights in general a "religious" concept, Stirner asks? Be it the laws of God, the laws of nature, the laws of reason, etc., if their point of origin is not the I, then they are merely another "höchstes Wesen."

According to Stirner, an individual's rights are those which he acquires for himself through his own power or force (Gewalt); might is right - in both senses of the word: "Ich entscheide, ob es in Mir das Rechte ist; außer Mir gibt es kein Recht. Ist es Mir recht, so ist es recht." [DE,208]. Of course Stirner does not fail to express the immediate conclusion of such a position as it concerns others with whom he may come into contact: "Möglich, daß es darum den Andern noch nicht recht ist; das ist ihre Sorge, nicht meine: sie mögen sich wehren." [DE,208]. Such a description would no doubt have appealed to that other great nominalist, Thomas Hobbes, for in Stirner's presentation of the unique and self-assertive I we seem to have the traditional conception of the state of nature:

"Ich will Alles sein und Alles haben, was Ich sein und haben kann. Ob Andere Ähnliches sind und

"Although Stirner's thought lends itself to a defense of anarchism, it must be remembered that Stirner does not, and cannot, advocate anything without it becoming a goal. Even the idea of a revolution - although it sounds like something which would fit quite well within Stirner's philosophical viewpoint - is merely the exchange of one political fiction for another. Stirner's "revoltion" is much more dramatic, for it takes the form of a metaphysical revolt (Empörung) in which the individual rejects all social and political ties. (Fleischmann, p.223-4)
haben, was kümmer's Mich? Das Gleiche, dasselbe können sie weder sein, noch haben...Wenn sie es haben könnten, so hätten sie's." [DE,152-3]

The incongruity between Stirner's aggressive philosophy and his actual life as a meek school teacher is perhaps nowhere more evident than here, for as one who did not live in a state of nature, it was certainly not necessary that Stirner rely upon his physical prowess to assure his self-preservation. And yet, regardless of the reasons which would lead to the espousal of such a self-centered philosophy - the Marxist philosopher Sidney Hook explains it as the "social defense mechanism of a petty bourgeois soul"⁶⁵ -, Stirner needed the opportunity to make it viable, and this he apparently found in the realizable refusal to enter into any relationship that was not to his advantage.

Stirner describes his relationships with others as one founded upon usability or usefulness (Brauchbarkeit): "Ich will an Dir nichts anerkennen oder respektieren, weder den Eigentümer, noch den Lump, noch auch nur den Menschen, sondern Dich verbrauchen." [DE,153]. Even the object of Stirner's love, which naturally had no right or claim to his own affection, was filtered through his conscious egoism: "Ich liebe sie, weil die Liebe Mich glücklich macht, Ich liebe, weil Mir das Lieben natürlich ist, weil Mir's gefällt." [DE,324]. And it is Stirner's ability to

⁶⁵Cited in Stepelevich, p.597.
cultivate an indifference towards others while taking his pleasure in them which provides an insight into his notion of property (Eigentum): "Mir bist Du nur dasjenige, was Du für Mich bist, nämlich mein Gegenstand, und weil mein Gegenstand, darum mein Eigentum."[DE,153]

4.4 Eigentum

As suggested by the title of Stirner's work, the concept of property is indispensable to the conception of der Einzige. At this point it should not be necessary to state that Stirner's notion thereof is, to use an appropriate word, unique. In reformulating Stirner's presentation of the I it could be said that the I is that which expresses itself through the unbridled exercise of its creative power, and whatever should fall under this power is what Stirner refers to as the property of der Einzige: "Was

66Stirner's biography provides ample (and irresistible) evidence that he put his views into practice. After his first wife died during childbirth, the discriminating and forever impoverished Stirner married Marie Dähnhardt, someone who happened to have a considerable dowry. Thirty years after Stirner's death, his biographer found Dähnhardt in a Catholic cloister in England. Although she refused to see him, she wrote him a short note stating her desire to forget her "very sly" first husband, with whom she had "more a cohabitation than a marriage." (Paterson, p.14)
ist also mein Eigentum? Nichts als was in meiner Gewalt ist!" [DE,284]. In other words, property for Stirner is equivalent to stark possession and never something to be "respected" merely because it is in his, or anyone else's, possession.

As concerns the individual, Stirner stresses first and foremost that the I must come to realize that its most immediate power is over itself, and, hence, through virtue of self-possession, it is its own property: "Erst dann, wenn Ich Meiner gewiß bin und Mich nicht mehr suche, bin Ich wahrhaft mein Eigentum." [DE,359]. The significance of this position for the subject at hand is that the products of thought are also construed as being property, and der Einzige, as the creator and proprietor of all his ideas, has the power to do with them what he wishes. They are his property in so far as he never allows them to become an unassailable idée fixe: "Eigent ist Mir der Gedanke erst, wenn Ich ihn jeden Augenblick in Todesgefahr zu bringen kein Bedenken trage." [DE,384]. If any one of them should threaten to establish an authority of their own, as was the case with Hegel’s Geist, he will freely choose to destroy it by reclaiming it for himself:

"Zerstöre Ich ihre Leibhaftigkeit, so nehme Ich sie in die Meinige zurück und sage: Ich allein bin leibhaftig. Und nun nehme Ich die Welt als das, was sie Mir ist, als die Meinige, als Mein Eigentum: Ich beziehe alles auf Mich." [DE,14]
And in taking the world as his property, Stirner does not exempt the other individuals which inhabit it:

"Es ist keiner für Mich eine Respektsperson, auch der Mitmensch nicht, sondern lediglich wie andere Wesen ein Gegenstand, für den Ich Teilnahme habe oder auch nicht, ein interessanter oder uninteressanter Gegenstand, ein brauchbares oder unbrauchbares Subjekt." [DE,349]

Essentially, the singular human being known as Max Stirner considered his intercourse with the world to be one founded upon consumption of all that he could appropriate from it: "Lebensgenuß ist Verbrauch des Lebens." [DE,359]. As his own property he could do with himself whatever he wished or, more exactly, he could make of his life whatever the powers he had acquired permitted him. It was Stirner’s choice to squander it: "Ich genieße Mich nach meinem Wohlgefallen. Ich bange nicht mehr um’s Leben, sondern »vertue« es." [DE,359].
5. Conclusion

At first glance, the attempt to reveal and simultaneously dismantle the self-imposed tyranny of all metaphysical ideas appears to be a monumental task, especially when the primary target of this dethronement is the legacy of Hegelianism. Yet it seems only fitting that Stirrer’s philosophical project would require no more than one book. In accordance with a philosophy founded upon the pure subjectivity of the unique and emprical I, the singular human being known as Max Stirner could do nothing more than present a philosophical self-portrait. Once completed, he had definitively established himself as the self-conscious egoist par excellence, deriving all meaning from himself alone and utterly incapable of any form of self-compromise; further attempts at elaboration would not be required. 67

Exactly one hundred and fifty years after its publication Der Einzige und sein Eigentum remains every bit as compelling as it is disturbing and, in marked contrast with many other philosophical treatises, perhaps just as relevant today as it was at the time of its appearance. In an age where many forms of social and religious authority

67Interestingly enough, Stirner spent the last years of his life translating Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations. It is not difficult to understand why a book which lauded the self-interested pursuit of material gain would have captured his attention.
find themselves continually challenged, if not considerably weakened, the attractiveness which could be found in Stirner’s championing of an almost reckless individualism would be more than understandable. The question to be answered is in what sense Stirner’s intellectual enterprise should be taken when it is looked upon as more than just the ultimate confrontation with the philosophy of Hegel.

As the quintessential Himmelsstürmer Stirner’s personal quest was to rid himself of all those ideals which demanded his allegiance - without managing to set up any new ones in the process. He was no doubt aware that if he himself were to advocate such a position it would be tantamount to establishing another Sollen, another goal which all of humanity should find itself compelled to strive for. Nevertheless, not only does Stirner directly address the reader of Der Einzige, but exhortations like the following clearly appear to be inconsistent with his intentions - not to mention contrary to his own self-interest:

"Suchet nicht die Freiheit, die Euch gerade um Euch selbst bringt, in der »Selbstverleugnung«, sondern sucht Euch Selbst, werdet Egoisten, werde jeder von Euch ein allmächtiges Ich. Oder deutlicher: Erkennet Euch nur wieder, erkennet nur, was Ihr wirklich seid, und laßt eure heuchlerischen Bestrebungen fahren, eure törichte Sucht, etwas Anderes zu sein, als Ihr seid." [DE,181]

By encouraging others to become conscious egoists like himself, Stirner not only seems to be establishing his own ideal of selfhood, but more importantly he is depriving
himself of an advantage - namely, his ability to exploit those whose actions remain within the bounds of an illusory moral imperative. Yet, as R.W.K. Paterson has remarked, the inconsistencies within Der Einzige are more easily attributed to Stirner’s expository style than they are to a philosophical position which is at bottom self-consistent and unambiguous."

The clue as to why Stirner should not be considered as proselytizing may be found in his brief explanation of the reason for writing his treatise: "Ich schreibe, weil Ich meinen Gedanken ein Dasein in der Welt verschaffen will." [DE, 331]. Of course, the expected response is that one could manage to do such a thing privately - one need only think of Kafka. But if it had been Stirner’s desire to create a permanent existence in the world for himself, it could only have been done through the publication of his philosophical act of self-identification. To rely on the outside chance that another individual would appear with the literary appreciation of Max Brod and help to publish a work that a great number of people found patently absurd would not have been in Stirner’s self-interest. (Not to mention the fact that the nature and extent of his work, up to and including Der Einzige und sein Eigentum, would have given his small circle of friends neither cause nor inspiration to try and assemble a Nachlaß.)

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"Paterson, p. 273."
Perhaps yet another explanation for the misconception of Stirner as trying to offer his own moral code lies in the characterization of his interpersonal relationships as founded upon usability. The fact that Stirner never gave a personal lecture on his philosophy is of relevance here, for the bond established in Der Einzige between author and reader is of course also not a living personal relationship. If we take Stirner's character to be as he presented it, it seems plausible to maintain that the motivation to publish his work may be partly attributed to Schadenfreude and the desire to secure an eternal forum for himself, thereby making a never-ending egoistic claim on the attention of his readers: "Ich singe, weil - Ich ein Sänger bin. Euch aber gebräuche Ich dazu, weil Ich - Ohren brauche." [DE,331].

Although an indispensable contributor to the German intellectual heritage, the oblivion into which Stirner disappeared almost immediately after the publication of Der Einzige seems to lend credibility to the idea that the development of continental philosophy from the mid-nineteenth century up to the present would have followed the same course with or without him. But all questions of Stirner's influence aside, it is inarguable that his philosophical standpoint foreshadows the emergence of Nietzsche's individualism, the self-centered existentialist philosophies, and the general anti-intellectualism
characteristic of the twentieth century. In fact, it is Stirner's open hostility towards reason ("Herrscht aber die Vernunft, so unterliegt die Person" [DE,115]) which has led some commentators to conclude (erroneously) that Stirner was the one who had truly laid the foundation for the rise of German and Italian fascism. However, it is in Stirner's disavowal of reason and the consequent implications for his own position which afford the reader a better perspective from which to appreciate and judge the ultimate value of Der Einzige.

If one discounts all rational considerations, then there is nothing and no one to which one can appeal in order to justify one's personal beliefs, other than oneself. As if anticipating similar objections that might be raised.

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69 Yet in this respect even the entry entitled "Ich" in the most extensive German encyclopedia of philosophy, Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie, does not give Stirner the credit he deserves. In fact, Stirner is not even mentioned; it is the Christian existentialist Kierkegaard who is made out to be the ultimate opponent of the depersonalized I posited by both Fichte and Hegel: "Diesem absoluten Ich stellt [Kierkegaard] das empirische, konkrete Ich gegenüber, das Ich unserer alltäglichen Erfahrung." (Schönpflug, "Ich," p.3.)

70 This is the conclusion reached by Hans G. Helms, a free-lance Marxist writer, in his exhaustive work Die Ideologie der anonymen Gesellschaft: Max Stirners Einziger und der Fortschritt des demokratischen Selbstbewußtseins vom Vormärz bis zur Bundesrepublik (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1966).

against his own work, Stirner freely acknowledged the same
and criticized those who did not recognize that absolute
subjectivity forms the foundation of every world view:

"Die Hierarchie wird dauern, solange man an
Prinzipien glaubt, denkt, oder auch sie
kritisiert; denn selbst die unerbittlichste
Kritik, die alle geltenden Prinzipien untergräbt,
glaubt schließlich doch an das Prinzip." [DE,393]

Thus Stirner himself recognizes the ultimate
indefensibility of his own philosophical standpoint, which
itself is only a critique in so far as the documentation of
his own personality, as one defined by self-assertiveness,
necessitated that he confront the prevailing beliefs opposed
to it. Nevertheless, as der Einzige, Stirner’s beliefs are
always consciously chosen, and they are his personal
property for which he alone is responsible and which he may
alter or reject when they cease to gratify him; to adhere to
his thoughts without allowing for the possiblity that they
might change would merely make him another prisoner in a
self-constructed cell. Even Stirner’s own affirmation of
egoism is relegated in the end to nothing more than "eine
Phrase,"71 the most convenient way at the time to express
his current metaphysical situation.

Perhaps Paterson has provided us with the most con-
genial way of viewing Stirner’s intellectual resting place
by suggesting that Der Einzige is a form of self-contained
philosophical play, a celebration of irresponsibilty,

71Stirner, Kleinere Schriften, p.366.
absurdity, and indifference towards everything, which culminates in the author refusing to exempt even himself and his own beliefs from this frivolity.\textsuperscript{72} Moreover, Stirner's act of self-expression may be less analogous to that of a philosopher and more to that of an artist who has undertaken a work of art for his own gratification and self-commemoration. Taking this to be the case, Paterson has provided an apt description of Der Einzige und sein Eigentum as "a poem of metaphysical disenchantment for the cynical and introspective solitary."\textsuperscript{73}

Whether judged on artistic or philosophical merits, Der Einzige und sein Eigentum is inarguably a work of profound originality. When placed within its historical context it serves as a lucid and unique commentary on the intellectual situation of the time. In its own right, it is perhaps the most comprehensive and elaborate exposition of the egoistically self-conscious I to date. Yet despite its achievements one can only speculate as to the actual extent of Stirner's influence. The anarchists and fascists of later generations may very well have drawn inspiration from Stirner's ruthless disregard for all social and moral norms but that was not his concern. His intention was neither to enlighten nor inspire, and his indifference towards any use

\textsuperscript{72}Paterson, p.298.

\textsuperscript{73}Ibd., p.314.
his work was and will be put towards is best expressed in his own words:

"Sähe Ich auch voraus, daß diese Gedanken Euch um eure Ruhe und euren Frieden brächten, sähe Ich auch die blutigsten Kriege und den Untergang vieler Generationen aus dieser Gedankensaat aufkeimen: - Ich streute sie dennoch aus. Macht damit, was Ihr wollt und könnt, das ist eure Sache und kümmert Mich nicht." [DE,331]
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