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自我和本我

The Ego and Its Own

Stirner 施蒂纳

Edited by
DAVID
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中国政法大学出版社

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Introduction

I

The Ego and Its Own has been called 'the most revolutionary [book] ever written',[1] and yet, when the Leipzig Kreisdirektion seized part of the first edition, the Saxon Minister for the Interior ordered the release of the confiscated copies on the grounds that the book was 'too absurd' to constitute a danger to social or political order. Of all possible responses to Max Stirner's work, indifference is perhaps the most unlikely.

But Stirner's book is not only striking and provocative; it has also played an important, if neglected, role in the history of political thought. Stirner's polemic was, most obviously, an impulse to, and an indication of, the decline of the Hegelian left as a coherent intellectual movement. But it was, also, central to the formation of Marxism, forcing Karl Marx to break with left Hegelian modes of thought (he discusses the book in unparalleled detail over some 400 pages of *The German Ideology*). Since then *The Ego and Its Own* has appeared ambiguous enough to provide subsequent generations with their own Stirner. For example, at the turn of the century, *The Ego and Its Own* was taken up – not least because of its adumbration of libertarian themes in its discussion of property and the state – as a founding text of individualist anarchism (especially in America, where it was an important influence on Benjamin R. Tucker and the journal *Liberty*). Stirner has been counted, moreover, as an important precursor of Friedrich Nietzsche; although, despite the claims of some commentators, he cannot be definitively shown to have directly influenced

[1] James Huneker, *Egoists. A Book of Supermen* (New York, 1909), p. 350.

Nietzsche, Stirner's work anticipates, both stylistically and substantively, certain Nietzschean motifs in modern political thought. Then in the 1960s Stirner was rediscovered again, this time as a thinker with conceptual affinities – for example, in his anti-essentialist conception of the self as a 'creative nothing' (p. 7) – with existentialist thought. This plurality of interpretations should scarcely disappoint Stirner himself, since, rejecting any notion of external constraints on our understanding, his claim about the Bible would seem to apply equally to his own work:

> In fact, the child who tears it to pieces or plays with it, the Inca Atahualpa who lays his ear to it and throws it away contemptuously when it remains dumb, judges just as correctly about the Bible as the priest who praises in it the 'Word of God', or the critic who calls it a job of men's hands. For how we toss things about is the affair of our *choice*, our *free will*: we use them according to our *heart's pleasure*, or, more clearly, we use them just as we *can*. (p. 297)

Apart from his authorship of this remarkable book, Stirner's life was largely unexceptional. Born as Johann Caspar Schmidt on 25 October 1806 in Bayreuth, to conventional lower-middle-class parents of Lutheran persuasion, 'Stirner' was a childhood nickname (referring to his large forehead, exaggerated by the way in which he parted his hair) that he subsequently adopted as a literary pseudonym and then as his preferred name. He passed through university without distinction, eventually becoming a teacher at a respectable private girls' school in Berlin. His spare time, in contrast, was spent in the more avant-garde of Berlin's intellectual haunts, mixing in particular with 'the free' – the increasingly Bohemian group of teachers, students, officers, and journalists organized largely under the tutelage of the left Hegelian Bruno Bauer. During this period, Stirner often alluded to the existence of a *magnum opus*, on occasion even pointing to the desk which supposedly concealed the work, to the general scepticism and straightforward disbelief of his associates. When that work did appear (although dated 1845, *The Ego and Its Own* was published towards the end of October 1844), Stirner quickly discovered that widespread critical reaction does not necessarily translate into financial reward, and he fell back on hack journalism and competent translation (of the economic writings of Adam Smith, and his popularizer Jean-Baptiste Say, into German) to support himself.

From this point onwards, Stirner increasingly adopted a solitary and rather pathetic existence; his second wife left him (his first wife had died giving birth to a still-born child) although not before he had frittered away the bulk of her inheritance, and he mainly expended his energies on continually moving to evade creditors (although not quickly enough to escape two brief periods in a debtors' prison). Finally, after being stung in the neck by a winged insect, Stirner contracted a severe fever, and, after a brief remission, died on 25 June 1856, largely unnoticed by the outside world.

2

The Ego and Its Own is not always an easy work to engage with. Stirner's unyielding prose has its admirers – Arnold Ruge, a contemporary left Hegelian, for example, proclaimed it 'the first readable book in philosophy that Germany has produced'[2] – yet almost every feature of his writing seems calculated to unnerve. The use of aphorism and metaphor, the neologisms, the mixture of self-consciously obscure terminology with colloquial language, the excessive italicization and hyperbole, all confound the received framework in which philosophical argument is conducted. Perhaps most striking is Stirner's repeated juxtaposition of words with formal similarities or related meanings not simply for humorous effect, but as a way of presenting his views. This method of proceeding by assertion (rather than by argument) exploits etymological connections – for example, between words with connotations of individuality and words referring to ownership, as in the play between *Eigentum* and *Eigenheit* ('property' and 'ownness' or 'belonging distinctively to oneself') – in order to insist on (rather than demonstrate) a claim – here, the Hegelian assertion that property is expressive of selfhood.

The point, however, is not simply that Stirner has a highly idiosyncratic and somewhat relentless style, but that there is a connection between the form of Stirner's writing and his conception of language and rationality as human creations that have come to bind and restrict their creators. This dominance of language and reason is sustained, for Stirner, by a conception of truth as constituting a privileged

[2] Letter to his mother, 17 December 1844, Arnold Ruge, *Briefwechsel und Tagebuchblätter aus den Jahren 1825–1880*, ed. Paul Nerrlich (Berlin, 1886), volume 1, p. 386.

domain lying beyond the individual. As long as you believe in this truth, he insists, you are a *'servant'* (p. 312). To subvert this tyranny, truths must be deprived of 'their sorry existence' as independent subjects and subordinated to the individual. *'I'*, he insists, 'am the criterion of truth' (p. 314). It is this radical assertion of the relativity of rationality, truth, and language, that grounds Stirner's bizarre prose. The only restriction on the forms of expression and mode of argumentation acceptable to him is that they serve our individual ends, and it seems that received meanings and traditional standards of argumentation do not always satisfy that criterion.

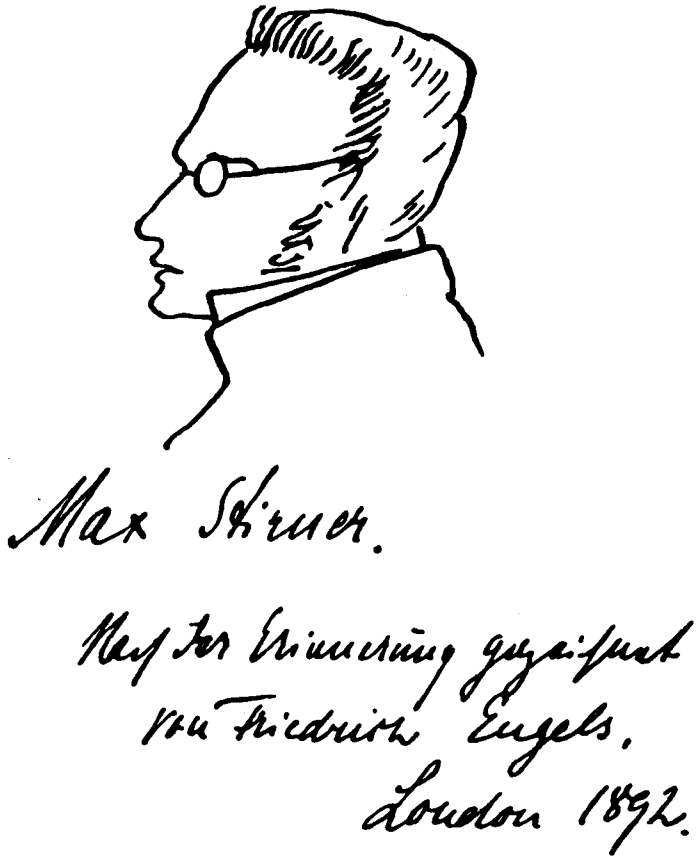
Despite its appearance as an inchoate *mélange* of aphorisms and word plays, *The Ego and Its Own* has a decipherable, if complex, architecture, structured around Stirner's tripartite division of human experience into the categories of *realism*, *idealism*, and *egoism*, embodied in his accounts of individual development, of human history, and in his racial rereading of that history.

This division is introduced in Stirner's account of 'A human life', which treats individual development as a difficult process of self-discovery divided into the three chronological stages of childhood, youth, and adulthood. Children are *realistic*, their development frustrated by the external forces of their world (parental disapproval, for example). This initial and inadequate stage is overthrown when, with the self-discovery of mind, children discover in their own courage and shrewdness a means to outwit those powers. However, this liberation is simultaneously a new enslavement, since the youth is released into a still more exhausting battle with conscience and reason which constitutes the period of *idealism*. This dialectic of progression and curse is broken only with the transition to adulthood which takes place with a second self-discovery, of the corporeal self, in which individuals discover their own embodiment, their existence as individuals with material interests of their own. In this adulthood of *egoism*, individuals deal with everything as they wish, setting their personal satisfaction above all else.

Stirner sees this dialectic which organizes the experience of individual development as an analogue of a process being played out on a grander scale throughout history. The tripartite division of history into the ancient or pre-Christian, the modern or Christian, and the future, corresponds to the epochs of realism, idealism, and egoism, and structures the remainder of the book.

The First Part of *The Ego and Its Own* is concerned with an account of human history up to the present, although its primary focus is on the nature of the modern epoch of *idealism* – the ancient world is discussed only insofar as it contributes to the genesis of modernity. Stirner begins with an analogy between the historical development of humankind and the stages of a human life; although the received nomenclature for pre-Christian societies is 'the ancients', he suggests that 'they ought properly to be called children' (p. 19). The ancient world stands in the same relation to the Christian world as the child stands to youth: they are opposites, the former concerned with material and natural, rather than intellectual and spiritual, relations, and Stirner's concern is to trace how that opposite gave birth to its other. The ancients, of course, had thoughts, but they were always thoughts of *things*; an attitude which, in Stirner's reproduction of a familiar Hegelian conceit, he describes as having been carried down to the present day by the Jews, the 'precocious children of antiquity' (p. 23). The ancient world, in short, is an epoch of *realism*, characterized by a deference to natural relations, overthrown only with the self-discovery of mind that Stirner portrays as the cumulative result of the intellectual history of fifth-century Athens. His highly abbreviated account runs from the Sophists to the radical nominalism of Timon and Pyrrho. It was the latter's break with the natural world – in which all social bonds are dissolved and dismissed as burdens which diminish spiritual freedom – which constituted a final successful revolt against the natural and this-worldly, and formed the ancients' bequest to the moderns.

Stirner's account of the historical development of modernity is essentially reduced to a single event, the Reformation, which punctuates the succession of Catholic to Protestant hegemony. His primary concern is to show that, from the perspective of the individual, this fracture constituted an extension and intensification of, rather than a break with, the domination by spirit. First, whereas the Middle Ages had maintained the distinction between the spiritual and the sensuous, the Reformation extended the religious principle to the sensuous (allowing its priests to marry, for example), thereby destroying the independence of the latter. Second, the Reformation bound the religious principle more effectively to the individual, by virtue of the more inward faith of Protestantism which established a constant 'tearing apart of man' into natural impulses and sacred



'Max Stirner. Drawn from memory by Friedrich Engels, London 1892.'

duties. Stirner captures the resulting internal conflict in the striking image of the modern self as a country divided between the populace on the one hand and the secret police, the spies and eavesdroppers of conscience, on the other.

Images do as much work as arguments in Stirner's text, and his images of modernity are always stark and unsettling. At one point he describes the activity of the moderns as 'the bustle of vermin' moving about on a 'stony and indomitable' other, 'like parasitic animals on a

body from whose juices they draw nourishment, yet without consuming it' (p. 63). But the dominant images of the modern – playing, not least, on the many connotations of *Geist* – are of the spectral and the insane. The modern world is peopled by 'ghosts', 'spirits', 'phantasms', 'demons', and 'bogies' of every kind. But the spectral does not merely walk abroad; the individual in the modern world, in imagining both the world and her corporeal self as the merest semblance, is, for Stirner, literally possessed. This image of modernity as an asylum is, he insists, not intended figuratively; almost all of humankind are fools in a madhouse, their illusion of sanity and freedom only the result of that asylum's extent.

Most of Stirner's illustrations of progressive Protestant hegemony are taken from the realm of ideas, and combine to make up a short, schematic, and typically idiosyncratic history of modern philosophy. Descartes is the Luther of philosophy, inaugurating the break with a common consciousness which dealt with things whether rational or not. Descartes' conception of the self as constituted by thought alone, and his rejection of anything that mind does not legitimate, establishes the Christian principle on which modern philosophy is founded, namely that 'only the rational is, only mind is!' (p. 78). This struggle to seek out and demonstrate the spiritual in the mundane, initiated by the Cartesian ego, culminates in the rational theodicy of Hegel, in which an ordered hierarchy of concepts governs the world. The move beyond the sensuous to spirit, which makes German thought paradigmatically philosophical and excludes the English 'clear heads' (p. 79), like Hume, from the canon, is perfectly captured, for Stirner, in Chamisso's account of the *wundersame Geschichte* of Peter Schlemihl – the archetype of the Christian rejection of the physical, a man so modern he could not even cast a shadow.

Individual and historical development are the two primary forms of the Stirnerian dialectic, but in order to clarify its form he inserts 'episodically' a racial (and racist) analogue of the historical account. Human history, in this new narrative, 'whose shaping properly belongs altogether to the Caucasian race', is divided into three 'Caucasian ages'. The first, in which the Caucasian race works off its 'innate *Negroidity*', is vaguely located as including the era of Egyptian and North African importance in general and the campaigns of Sesostris III in particular, but its importance is clearly symbolic.

'Negroidity' is the racial parallel of antiquity and childhood, representing a time of dependence on things: 'on cock's eating, bird's flight, on sneezing, on thunder and lightning, on the rustling of sacred trees and so forth' (p. 63). The second epoch, in which the Caucasian race escapes its '*Mongoloidity* (Chineseness)', includes 'the invasions of the Huns and Mongols up to the Russians', and parallels the modern age and youth in representing the time of dependence on thoughts. Stirner's concern with the continuity of this Christian epoch is emphasized by his choice of 'Mongolism' as the parallel of the modern, 'Chineseness' being a standard and pejorative Hegelian shorthand for lack of qualitative change. 'Reserved for the future' is the '*really Caucasian*' era in which, having thrown off the Negroid and Mongol inheritance, the egoistic self can escape its dependence on both natural forces and ideas.

Stirner's dialectic is obviously repetitive (Karl Marx, exasperated by this reiteration, wrote 'Repetitio est mater studiorum'[3] against his notes on Stirner's conception of history) but also both highly schematic and derivative. First, empirical detail, insofar as it appears at all, functions solely as the bearer of conceptual development. The ancients, for example, like the child and 'Negroidity', are not serious objects of investigation, but simply the disguises of 'realism'. In *The German Ideology*, Marx calls the book a *Geistergeschichte*, a history of 'ghosts' within which empirical details are utilized only to provide convenient bodies for the 'spirits' of realism, idealism, and egoism in turn. The point is not simply that this is not good history, but also that it begins to look suspiciously like the very 'Christian' vice that Stirner denounces elsewhere at length – the neglect of the concrete and the particular in favour of abstract conceptual categories. Second, much of the content and structure of Stirner's history is derived from Hegel or his followers. There are scarcely digested 'borrowings' from Hegel's own work throughout. To take only one example, apart from schematizing what are prefatory and passing remarks in Hegel into all that needs saying, Stirner's portrayal of the epoch of 'Negroidity' does little more than reproduce the description of Africa in Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History:*

[3] 'Repetition is the mother of learning', *The German Ideology, Marx Engels Collected Works* (London, 1976), volume 5, p. 186.

Introduction as 'the land of childhood', where humankind 'has not progressed beyond a merely sensuous existence'.[4] However in its overall construction or structure, Stirner's dialectic is derivative of Hegelian*ism* more generally. In particular, in his two most obvious 'innovations' in regard to Hegel's own historical schema – first, in following a tripartite rather than quadripartite division of history; and second, in treating the future as the third synthesizing dimension in that configuration – Stirner's predecessors include both August Cieszkowski, in his opuscule *Die Prolegomena zur Historiosophie* (1838), and Moses Hess, in *Die europäische Triarchie* (1841). Both Cieszkowski and Hess, themselves consciously following Herder, also draw analogies with individual development, the three stages of history representing the childhood, youth, and maturity of humankind.

3

Throughout the First Part of *The Ego and Its Own*, Stirner constructs a lengthy and unorthodox genealogy of the modern, not only in the mundane sense of tracing a linear progression through modes of experience, but also in the Foucauldian sense of trying to unsettle by demonstrating that modernity fails to escape from the very thing that it claims to have outgrown – namely religious modes of thought. This is clearest in Stirner's treatment of Ludwig Feuerbach, the leading figure of the Hegelian left. The very structure of the book would have revealed Feuerbach as the primary target of Stirner's polemic to contemporary readers. The two parts of Stirner's book headed *Man* and *I* are an implicit structural parody of the sections *God* and *Man* of Feuerbach's best-known work, *The Essence of Christianity* (1841).

Stirner rejects the contemporary consensus that Feuerbach had completed the critique of religion, and provocatively insists that the Feuerbachian problematic reproduces the central features of Christianity. For Feuerbach, the central error of religion was that it separated human attributes from actual individuals by transferring the predicates of the species into another world as if they constituted a self-sustaining being. But, for Stirner, the errors of religion are not

[4] G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 172.

overcome with a rejection of God as transcendent subject; rather, religion is defined formally as the subordination of the individual to spirit in any of its guises. Because Feuerbach's transformative criticism leaves the divine predicates untouched, he is charged with allowing the sacred to remain, if not as God then as 'Man with a capital M!' (p. 55). Feuerbach had not revealed human nature as it was, but rather deified a purely prescriptive account of what being human involved, thus leaving the 'real kernel' of religion, the positing of an 'essence over me' (p. 46), intact. Indeed, Feuerbach's achievement was a '*change of masters*' (p. 55) which actually established a more complete tyranny than before, tying the individual even more securely to a divine ruler: first, by rejecting the transcendence of religion in favour of an *immanent* divinity, making a God of our supposed nature; second, in thus discovering a 'God' who could possess *all*, believers and unbelievers alike.

Feuerbach's failure to escape from the religious is no isolated incident for Stirner, but is rather paradigmatic of modernity. 'The free', who do not constitute a distinct epoch in their own right, but are included as the most modern of the moderns, are found guilty of the same offence. Although Stirner's characterization of 'the free' owes much to the eponymous Berlin Hegelians with whom he had earlier associated, they are clearly intended to embody more widespread intellectual temptations, which, subdivided into 'political', 'social', and 'humane' 'liberalisms', he discusses in turn. Although they disagree about the exact nature of our humanity (identifying the species respectively with citizenship, labour, and critical activity) all the 'liberals' reproduce the Feuerbachian problematic, whereby, first, individuals are separated from their human essence, and, second, that essence is set above those individuals as something to be striven for. For Stirner, this modern propaganda for the species, which culminates in the demand that the mundane and private individual must work to become truly human (he refers, as an example, to an article by an obscure contemporary, the young Karl Marx), simply reproduces the religious division of individuals into 'an essential and unessential self' (p. 34). For the individual, the experience of alienation remains the same. Whether we strive to become more like God or more like the 'true man', Stirner insists that 'I can never take comfort in myself as long as I think that I have still to find my true self' (p. 283).

In contrast, Stirner 'will hear nothing of this cutting in two' (p. 32)

Engels' caricature of 'die Freien'. Reading from left: 'Ruge, Buhl, Nauwerck, [Bruno] Bauer, Wigand, Edgar [Bauer], Stirner, Meyen, stranger, Koppen the Lieutenant'. The squirrel in the top left corner represents the Prussian minister Eichhorn.

and insists that alienation can only be overcome by rejecting the human essence of the 'liberals' as the enemy of selfhood rather than its true content and aspiration – as the striking epigraph to the Second Part has it, 'Man', as well as God, must die. In its place Stirner seeks to rehabilitate the prosaic and mortal self, the 'un-man [*Unmensch*]' for whom the notion of a 'calling' is alien, the 'man who does not correspond to the *concept* man' (p. 159). For Stirner, because there are no universal or prescriptive elements in human nature, the concept cannot ground any claim about how we *ought* to live:

> I am a man just as the earth is a star. As ridiculous as it would be to set the earth the task of being a 'thorough star', so ridiculous it is to burden me with the call to be a 'thorough man'. (p. 163)

Rather, we need to learn, as Stirner's Nietzschean injunction has it, to give up our 'foolish mania to be something else' (p. 149) and become what we are.

4

Whereas the negative project of the First Part of *The Ego and Its Own* was to demonstrate that modernity had striven unsuccessfully to overcome religious modes of thought, the positive project of the Second Part is to characterize the future epoch of egoism.

Egoism, for Stirner, is not self-interested action *simpliciter*, but is rather related to another good which he values above all else, characterized, somewhat opaquely, as the 'ownness [*Eigenheit*]' of individuals. The centrality and importance of 'ownness' for Stirner can hardly be exaggerated – not least it was the 'ownness' of individuals that was suppressed in the ancient and modern worlds, and 'ownness' which is fully realized in the epoch of egoism.

'Ownness' is best understood as a variety of self-mastery, a form of substantive individual autonomy which insists that any actions or desires which involve waiving or suspending individual judgement violate the self-mastery and independence of the person concerned. 'I am my *own*', he writes, 'only when I am master of myself, instead of being mastered . . . by anything else' (p. 153). Stirner accepts that for some it may well be the case that 'I can make very little out of myself', but insists that 'this very little is everything', that any existence I create for myself is 'better than what I allow to be made out of myself by the might of others' (p. 163). Occasionally 'ownness' is described in terms of a prescription of law to oneself; autonomous individuals, he claims, 'bear their law in themselves and live according to it' (p. 182). But some care is needed here, since law is a declaration of will that is supposed to be binding on the individual, and yet Stirner insists that the individual cannot legitimately bind herself. Even a law that we prescribe for ourselves does not bind, since 'in the next moment I can refuse obedience' (p. 174). Importantly, Stirner is here rejecting the classic modern method, perhaps most familiar from the social contract tradition, for reconciling autonomy and obligation, by claiming that even *self-assumed* obligations are incompatible with autonomy – a self-assumed obligation is still a duty, and 'ownness' can be realized 'only by recognizing no *duty*, not *binding* myself nor letting myself be bound' (p. 175).

In places Stirner simply *identifies* the concept of egoism with autonomy, as in his provocative description of God as an egoist on the grounds that 'He serves no higher person' (p. 6), or in repeated

references to heteronomy (rather than altruism) as the antonym of egoism. However, it might be clearer to talk here of egoism being *subordinated* to 'ownness', of an egoism which is not literally 'self-sacrificing' (p. 70). This is perhaps most marked in those passages where Stirner discusses the case of individuals who venture everything for a single end or passion. Take the example of the 'avaricious man' who sacrifices everything else in order 'to gather treasures' (p. 70); his actions are clearly self-interested (he acts only to enrich himself), but it is an egoism that Stirner rejects as 'a one-sided, unopened, narrow egoism' (p. 70), because with the subordination of everything to a single end, that end begins to 'inspire, enthuse, fanaticize' us, it 'becomes our – master' (p. 58). In short, this one-sided, 'self-sacrificing' egoism is rejected because it violates our 'ownness'; the avaricious man, Stirner suggests, rather than being self-determining, is 'dragged along' (p. 56) by his appetites.

Stirnerian self-mastery thus has both external and internal dimensions, demanding not only that we avoid subordinating ourselves to others, but also that we avoid submitting to our own appetites or ends. Stirner accepts the claim that if any idea or desire 'plants itself firmly in me, and becomes indissoluble', then I have 'become its prisoner and servant, a possessed man' (p. 127). This attack on the Christian 'fixedity' of ideas does not entail that the egoist can no longer allow herself to have ideas, but rather that she must never allow an idea to make her 'a tool of its realization' (p. 302). The egoist must exercise 'power' not only over 'the exactions and violences of the world', but also exercise this '*power* over my nature' and avoid becoming the 'slave of my appetites' (p. 295). Stirner thus encourages the individual to cultivate and extend an ideal of emotional detachment towards both her passions and her ideas.

5

Morality is defined for Stirner by its positing of an obligation or duty on the individual to behave in certain ways, and by its 'fixedity': morality is 'a rigid unbending *master*' (p. 60). Like religion, morality demands that the individual sacrifice her autonomy to an alien end, that she give up her own will 'for an alien one which is set up as rule and law' (p. 75), and it is this opposition between individual autonomy and moral obligation that grounds Stirner's rejection of the latter.