Among the several puzzles that surround the intellectual development of Karl Marx, there is one which has received relatively little attention in spite of the fact that its solution would be likely to throw significant light upon the origins of Marx's mature philosophy. I have in mind the fact that only a few months after they had published their first diatribe against the Left Hegelians, *The Holy Family, being a Critique of the Critical Critique. Against Bruno Bauer & Co.*, Marx and Engels began writing another even more voluminous manuscript on the very same subject, *The German Ideology, being a Criticism of Recent German Philosophy and its Representatives.*

*The Holy Family* was written between September and November of 1844, and appeared in print at the end of February, 1845. Engels' contribution to this volume was relatively minor. In fact, his part was so minor that Engels himself was somewhat puzzled when Marx insisted not only that he sign the volume as co-author, but that his name be put before that of Marx. Only a little over one twentieth of the manuscript had been written by Engels during his brief stay at Paris in the early fall of 1844, while Marx continued to enlarge his part until the end of November. Engels' embarrassment, it is true, was in part due to the fact that a few of the passages written by Marx were rather vulgar. But he was also obviously concerned about the fact that the size of *The Holy Family* was out of all proportion to the “sovereign despise” with which they dealt with the Left Hegelians. In fact, in one of his letters to Marx he even wrote that at that point he had had more than enough of “all this theoretical twaddle” and would prefer to deal with “real live things, with historical developments and results.”

1 Engels to Marx, November 19, 1844; cf. Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels, *Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1961 ff.), XXVII, 12 (Henceforth abbreviated *MEW*, followed by volume and page). It should be noticed that this passage (in which Engels also writes that “each word that one has to waste on ‘the Man’ and each line that one has to write or read against theology or abstraction as well as against crass materialism makes me angry”) follows Engels' discussion of Stirner's book.
Yet in spite of all this, in the late summer of the same year we see Engels collaborating with Marx on another and this time truly extensive theoretical critique of Left Hegelianism. The question as to why this happened becomes even more puzzling when one adds that Marx too had more intelligent things to do than to quarrel with Left Hegelians. It is true, of course, that at that time Marx was still interested in purely theoretical matters much more than Engels, who, after all, between the fall of 1844 and the late summer of 1845 had worked on a quite empirical study of the situation of the workers' class in England, and who, furthermore, never took the argument with Hegelianism as seriously as Marx did. Still, it is obvious that Marx no less than Engels considered _The Holy Family_ a bothersome, even if interesting, interruption of more serious studies. Before Engels visited him in Paris at the end of August, 1844, Marx had feverishly worked on what became known many decades later as his _Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts_; he had made extensive excerpts from the writings of a number of political economists and interspersed them with copious critical reflections of his own. In December of the same year, after he had completed _The Holy Family_, he resumed his study of political economy, and on February 1, 1845, even signed a contract with a publisher at Darmstadt, calling his prospective book "Critique of Politics and Political Economy."² How seriously Marx viewed this study, which after all eventually resulted in major works such as _A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy_ (1859), and the first volume of _Das Kapital_ (1867), is suggested by the fact that as late as August, 1846, he again promised to submit to the publisher the complete manuscript within a few months. The contract was eventually cancelled in February, 1847, when the Darmstadt publisher realized that it might take years before the book was finished.³

All in all, then, Engels was beginning to become annoyed with theoretical issues in general, and Marx had begun to feel that the truly crucial problems were neither philosophical nor political, but socio-economic. That he nevertheless interrupted his study of economics in order to compose _The Holy Family_ can probably be explained by the fact that he had just met Engels and, realizing that they "agreed on all theoretical questions," looked forward to collaborating with his new friend on a book which, on the one hand, would settle accounts with the

² For the text of the contract see _MEW_, XXVII, 669.
it would seem very odd if Marx and Engels had decided at two different times to do the same thing.

Mehring, Marx's first biographer, tries to untangle this confusing matter. In the end, he simply restricts himself to saying that Marx's

Why, then, only a few months later, did Marx and Engels begin writing The German Ideology? In the brief sketch of his intellectual development contained in the preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Marx offers no information whatsoever on this point. In fact, he mentions only The German Ideology, not The Holy Family – a rather curious circumstance in view of the fact that only the latter work had appeared in print. In addition, Marx discusses The German Ideology in terms which would seem to apply to The Holy Family, for he writes that he and Engels “decided” to work out their standpoint together “against the ideological conceptions of German philosophy.” This is literally true as far as The Holy Family goes, but it would seem very odd if Marx and Engels had decided at two different times to do the same thing.

It is almost amusing to watch the embarrassment with which Franz Mehring, Marx's first biographer, tries to untangle this confusing matter. In the end, he simply restricts himself to saying that Marx's

4 Engels to Marx, March 17, 1845; cf. MEW, XXVII, 26. Engels of course was wrong. Within a few months after the publication of The Holy Family, Bauer published a reply entitled “Charakteristik Ludwig Feuerbachs” in Wigands Vierteljahresschrift, 1845 (3), 86–146, in which, like Stirner, he argued that Feuerbach’s humanism embraced by Marx and Engels in The Holy Family was ultimately only a variation of the Christian or “theological” position.

5 MEW, XIII, 10. Later Engels referred to The Holy Family as the book which best shows how much he and Marx were “temporarily Feuerbachians,” even though he correctly emphasizes that already in The Holy Family they had begun to overcome “the cult of abstract man, which was the kernel of Feuerbach’s new religion,” MEW, XXI, 272 and 290. However, then he wrote these lines (in 1886), he had already forgotten that the first to overcome this “cult of abstract man” had been Moses Hess, who in an article entitled “On the socialist movement in Germany,” written in the early summer of 1844, pointed out that Feuerbach’s notion of “species essence” was “rather mystical.” Cf. Moses Hess, Politische und sozialistische Schriften, 1837–1850, ed. by A. Cornu and W. Mönke, (East) Berlin, 1961, 292 ff.
"thorough, even all too thorough, settlement of accounts" is due to the fact that all these "intellectual struggles" took place in a very small circle and that "most of the combatants were very young." Gustav Mayer, the author of the first and until today by far the best biography of Engels, does not seem even as much as to notice that there is something "fishy" in all this.

In fact, as far as I can tell, only very few commentators at all realized the extreme oddness of the development just described. One of them is Sidney Hook, for although he tends to view *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology* as two slightly different versions of one and the same trend of thought, he explicitly raises the question about what there was in the Left Hegelian position to call forth so many densely printed pages of refutation. Yet his answer to this question is very unsatisfactory indeed. For Hook argues that what interested Marx in the Left Hegelians was primarily "their impact upon the central political and social problems of the day, their relation to Marx's own gradually maturing revolutionary purposes, and their bearing upon the possibility of organizing a mass movement." This interpretation, to say the least, is utterly far-fetched; in fact, it is simply false. To suggest that already in the mid-forties Marx was seriously concerned about such "party-political" problems is simply an anachronism. Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, Stirner, and the like, had not the slightest impact outside Germany (with the exception of emigrants' circles such as those to which Marx and Engels belonged) and in the Germany of that time there existed no revolutionary movement that anyone could endanger. In fact, even if such a movement had existed, it would have been more than likely that cranks such as the extremely cerebral Left Hegelians could not have had any impact upon it. In short, Hook's interpretation ultimately amounts to suggesting that Marx was a perfectly blind ideologist even to a higher degree than Marx's most violent critics would want to imply.

Somewhat more plausible is the suggestion contained in a recently published dissertation by a young German scholar, namely, that at that time Marx still believed the emancipation of mankind depended upon an emancipation of the Germans, and consequently, even though the

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only “German issues” were philosophical ones, was ultimately interested in the German intellectual scene more than in the socio-economic problems of the French and English. As in his articles in the *German-French Yearbooks* Marx in fact had suggested that mankind could not emancipate itself from its “limitations” without the help of the Germans, there is much to be said for this suggestion. But it hardly explains why Marx and Engels, after devoting over two hundred pages to the “German intellectual scene,” decided to write another four hundred pages on the same subject. Even the circumstance, recently pointed out by a French author, that Marx and Engels began to write *The German Ideology* after their return from a brief trip to England where they had taken notice of involved economic and social realities, and therefore were angrily disgusted with the never-ending Left Hegelian polemics, does not really help to explain the enormous length and preposterously detailed character of their own contribution to the very same discussion.

To find a more satisfactory answer, it would seem natural to compare briefly the content of *The Holy Family* with that of *The German Ideology*. The former is a criticism of Bruno Bauer, his brother Edgar, and other less well known figures such as Jules Faucher and Franz Zychlin von Zychlinski, who used to hide his complicated name behind the pseudonym “Szeliga.” This group, which issued from the Left Hegelian *Doktorklub* to which Marx had belonged at Berlin, and which called itself “the Free Ones (die Freien),” was well defined: all its members were close friends or Bruno Bauer and contributors to his *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, published at Charlottenburg near Berlin. As opposed to this, *The German Ideology* falls into two quite distinct parts, possibly conceived as volumes, each of which is again subdivided into several sections. The second part, which contains a criticism of the so-called “true socialists,” does not concern us here; it obviously was written rather late (after April, 1946), comprises only a little over one seventh of the manuscript, and in general has the character of an appendix, some sections of which moreover seem to have been written by Moses Hess. The first part falls into three main sections: the first originally was entitled “Feuerbach,” but actually discusses Marx’s and Engels’ own views, with only occasional innuendos against Feuerbach; the second is an analysis of Bauer’s reply to the criticism advanced in *The Holy Family*, and the third contains a discussion of Max Stirner’s book, *The Ego and Its Own.*

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Until quite recently many American readers of *The German Ideology* may not have realized that by far the longest section of the whole manuscript was that dealing with Stirner, for the translation by R. Pascal omits this section, and until a year ago no other English translation was available. In fact, the section on Stirner is so long as to suggest that it is the most important part of the whole book; it comprises over three fourths of the first volume and about three fifths of both volumes taken together, that is, including the appendix on the “true socialists.” Even more striking are two other facts: first, that this section is considerably longer than Stirner’s own book (about hundred and twenty five thousand words as against about one hundred and sixteen thousand words) and second, that it is more than five times the size of Marx’s and Engels’ exposition of their own point of view.

Later we shall argue that certainly the criticism of Feuerbach, and possibly even the renewed criticism of Bruno Bauer, have to be viewed in close connection with, and even as dependent upon, the critique of Max Stirner. For the time being, it may suffice to point out that the very size of the section on Stirner suggests that it was the publication of Stirner’s book that induced Marx and Engels to write a second diatribe against the Left Hegelians. The book in question appeared in print in the early winter of 1844, not in 1845 as the title page states. But even so, it was too late to include its criticism into *The Holy Family*. Engels read the book in the middle of November, and Marx seems to have read it a few weeks later. By that time, most of the manuscript of *The Holy Family* had already been sent to the printer at Frankfurt. Apart from that, Marx did not feel ready for a critique of Stirner. When in December someone asked him to publish a brief review, he replied that it was “impossible for him” to do so.10

This conclusion leads us, of course, to another and philosophically more significant question, namely, what was there in Stirner’s position to bother Marx so much that he decided to write another book. It is worth noticing that it was Marx, not Engels, who first realized that Stirner was a serious challenge. Engels was the first to read the book, it is true; but he understood it as a somewhat exaggerated version of Bentham’s utilitarianism, and therefore, in some sense at least, liked it. In his *The Situation of the Working Class in England*, Engels had described Bentham as one of the “two greatest practical philosophers of recent times” (the other being Godwin), and argued that Bentham was becoming an “almost exclusive property of the proletariat,” which

10 Marx to H. Börnstein, December 1844; cf. *MEW*, XXVII, 432.
meanwhile had succeeded in developing something new out of the utilitarian doctrine. Accordingly, though he felt that with respect to social issues Stirner was less consistent than Bentham, he argued that the communists would have to try to exploit the Stirnerian position, and, "turning it around, build upon it... This egoism is carried to such an extreme, is so mad, and at the same time so much conscious of itself, than in its one-sidedness it cannot hold out even a single second, but immediately must result in communism... It should be a trifle to prove to Stirner that his egoists, because of their very egoism, necessarily have to become communists."  

Marx's reply to this letter is no longer preserved. But from another letter by Engels, written exactly two months later, it is obvious that Marx took exception to Engels' claim that even though Stirner was certainly one-sided, the communists would have to incorporate into their thinking "that which is true in his principles." Almost apologetically, Engels now explained that when he wrote the first letter he had still been biased by an "immediate impression"; meanwhile he had thought it over more carefully, and "now I see it the same way as you do."  

Engels does not explain what the understanding was that he acquired through Marx's rebuke. But he adds that Moses Hess, who had not read Marx's letter, had reached the same conclusions as Marx. He seems to be referring to a draft of the pamphlet *The Last Philosophers*, which Hess published later in 1845. Hess argued there that Stirner's conception was the logical consequence of the "historical development of Christianity and German philosophy." According to his analysis Christianity since its beginnings had been trying to overcome the opposition between the "human species" or mankind, on the one hand, and the individual, the real man, on the other, But it succeeded in overcoming this tension as little as its logical outcome, modern philosophy, since it always restricted itself to abolishing it "theoretically," while the only possible solution was a "practical" one, the solution advocated by socialism. That a theoretical solution of this conflict was not viable, could according to Hess be demonstrated by pointing out that Christianity and modern philosophy ultimately ended in two kinds of egoism: a theoretical egoism, such as that of Bruno Bauer, with his despising of the "masses," and a practical egoism, such as that of Max
Stirner. Just as Bauer's theoretical egoism mirrored the state, an abstract mankind without any relationship to concrete individuals, so Stirner's practical egoism mirrored a civil society in which everyone pursued his own interests without caring for his fellow man. Only socialism, which abolishes the state and transcends philosophy in terms of a praxis that replaces the atomistic civil society by a community of collaborating individuals, could overcome this modern egoism. If one could unite the theoretician Bauer and the egoistic practitioner Stirner, one might possibly witness their resurrection as socialists. But "separated, as in fact they are, they remain lonely, unique, without being able to live, to die, to resurrect. They are and remain philosophers." 14

We have to refrain from discussing the question whether Engels was right in believing that Hess had reached the same conclusions as Marx. Apart from the fact that Hess' pamphlet, like all of his writings, is so confused as to make a meaningful comparison very difficult, we cannot really tell what Marx's reading of Stirner was, that is, whether at the end of 1844 he had already developed the line of argument found in The German Ideology. Instead, before discussing Stirner's book and Marx's reaction to it, we would like to point out another curious coincidence, namely that it was in the manuscript in which he criticized Stirner that Marx for the first time succeeded in outlining his mature "historical materialism." Is it conceivable, then, that it was Stirner's challenge that induced Marx to give up Feuerbach's sentimental humanism which he had embraced in The Holy Family, and to develop a quite different doctrine?

That The German Ideology contains the first articulate version of Marx's nature philosophy is generally acknowledged today. Even the communist editors of Marx's and Engels' collected works, who tend to view Marx's earlier writings with suspicious eyes, agree that The German Ideology represents "an important step in the working out of the philosophical and theoretical foundations of the Marxist Party." However, with the exception of a recent biographer of Stirner, no one ever seem to have suspected that there might be a close relationship between Marx's concern about Stirner's position, and the emergence of his own "historical materialism." And yet, as we shall try to show, if one puts together all the relevant facts and then tries to understand them, this interpretation appears by far the most plausible.

As far as we can tell, Marx never met Stirner personally, for Stirner seems to have joined the Left Hegelian circle at Berlin as late as September, 1841, while Marx left Berlin in the early spring of the same year. As for Engels, it is rather likely that he met Stirner in person when, beginning in September, 1841, he was in military service at Berlin for almost a year, and at that time joined the Left Hegelians. In his letter to Marx in November, 1844, Engels describes Stirner as the most talented, independent, and diligent member of the Berlin circle, and the way in which he puts it suggests that he was familiar with Stirner himself, not only with his writings.\(^{15}\)

That Marx never met Stirner personally does not mean of course that he did not know about him. In January, 1842, Stirner published his first article, a review of the pamphlet *The Trumpet of the Last Judgment over Hegel the Atheist and Antichrist*, which was published anonymously by Bruno Bauer in 1841. While affecting the standpoint of an orthodox Lutheran, Bauer tried to prove that the atheism of the Left Hegelians was a logical outcome of Hegel's philosophy. As Marx had collaborated with Bauer on this pamphlet during his brief stay at Bonn in the summer of 1841, it is highly probable that he read Stirner's review, and read it with pleasure, for Stirner was very enthusiastic about the book. Between March and October, 1842, Stirner published no less than twenty six articles in the *Rheinische Zeitung*, of which Marx, after publishing several articles himself, became editor-in-chief on October 15th. From this date on, it is true, no other article by Stirner was published in the *Rheinische Zeitung*; but this was probably not due to any personal animosity of Marx against Stirner, but rather to the simple fact that Marx, constantly harassed by censorship, tended to reject all articles submitted by his Left Hegelian allies.

Another article by Stirner that Marx is likely to have read is a review of *Les mystères de Paris*, a sentimental social novel by Eugène Sue much discussed at the period, which Stirner published in a short-lived Left Hegelian periodical in the fall of 1844. In *The Holy Family*, Marx had written a biting criticism of another review of this novel by Zychlin von Zychlinski, alias Szeliga, which had appeared in Bruno Bauer's

Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung. As he had accused Szeliga's review of being even more sentimental than Sue's novel, he probably read Stirner's almost cynical critique with considerable relish. In any case, when Engels in his letter to Marx expressed his enthusiasm for Stirner, he explicitly identified the author of The Ego and Its Own as the man who had written "about the mystères."

It has to be added, of course, that none of these earlier publications by Stirner would have permitted Marx to anticipate that one day he would have to write hundreds of pages against this strange man. Before the publication of The Ego and Its Own, he probably knew very little about Stirner and his almost tragi-comic life. Born in 1806 in Bayreuth, Max Stirner (whose real name was Johann Caspar Schmidt) had studied first at the university of Berlin, then at the University of Königsberg. Unlike most other Left Hegelians, however, he never completed his doctorate. Though he passed his written examination, the examiners considered his oral performance unsatisfactory, and therefore excluded him from teaching at the university. Thus Stirner was forced to make a living as a highschool teacher. In the fall of 1844, probably expecting the length of Marx and Engels' critical analysis. Those who only know Engels did their best to make each of Stirner's ideas, indeed almost each of his sentences, look preposterous. But it is by no means a ridiculous book.

To summarize the content of The Ego and Its Own is on the one hand easy, and on the other hand virtually impossible: easy, because the whole book is nothing but the elaboration of one relatively simple insight; difficult, because this basic idea is worked out in all its details and applications. The basic idea of Stirner's book is probably best understood by contrast with the philosophy developed by Feuerbach, whom
Stirner obviously considers as the man who advanced the last articulation both of Christianity and modern philosophy. In his Preliminary Theses for a Reform of Philosophy (1843), which had a considerable impact upon Marx, Feuerbach argued that the Christian faith and theology are an anthropology that misunderstands itself, and that modern philosophy from Spinoza to Hegel, in turn, is nothing but a “theology brought to reason and made contemporary.” Christianity’s God, according to Feuerbach, is simply the sum total of the perfections of the human species, posited as an independent and transcendent being. And although modern philosophy gradually succeeded in dissolving the Christian God into Reason, it had still continued to view Reason itself as something distinct from, superior to, and transcending, mankind.

Now just as Feuerbach had argued that God and Reason are only abstractions, the reality of which is the human species, mankind, or Man, likewise Stirner proceeded to show that all the shibboleths of the Hegelians, from Bruno Bauer’s “State” to Feuerbach’s “Man,” were abstractions as well. Feuerbach had tried to show that man cannot re-assume his fundamentally godlike nature without doing away with projections and abstractions such as God or Reason. Stirner argued that man cannot truly become himself without doing away with all abstractions whatsoever, that is, without realizing that he is ein Einziger, a unique and irreplaceable ego, compared to which Feuerbach’s “Man” is an abstraction no less than Christianity’s God or Hegel’s Spirit and Reason. According to Stirner, Feuerbach’s exaltation of mankind only misses the real point once more. Discussing Feuerbach and the Left Hegelians as “liberals,” he writes:

Whom does the liberal consider his equal? Man! But since he pays little attention to what You are privatim – indeed, provided he follows his principle, pays no attention to it at all – he views You only with respect to what You are generatim. In other words, he does not see You, but only the Species, not Tom, Dick or Harry, but only Man... To come to the point: our being men is the least significant thing in us. It is significant only in so far as it is one of our properties, that is, our own. Among many other things, I certainly am also a man, just as I am a European, an inhabitant of Berlin, and the like. But if someone were to notice me only in so far as I was a man, or an inhabitant of Berlin, he would hold me in small esteem indeed. You ask why? Because he would be attending only to my properties, not to Me.

At first sight, this only looks like one more radicalization of the dis-

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17 M. Stirner, Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1882), 178 ff.
mantling reductionism that was so characteristic of the dissolution of Hegelian ideas in the thirties and early forties. Hegel himself had started it by claiming that philosophy is the ultimate truth of religion, and by reducing Christianity’s transcendent God to a rationality immanent in Nature, History, and Thought. Strauss, in his *Life of Jesus*, took the next step and reduced Christ, who in Hegel had still been the “axis around which history turns,” to the idea of the human species. Feuerbach proceeded to reduce God to the same idea, and then to translate the idea of the human species into “the essence of Man,” and ultimately mankind. By 1844, Moses Hess and Marx had already reduced Feuerbach’s “species” to society and Hess had even written that just as the secret of theology is anthropology, so the secret of anthropology is socialism. Seen in this perspective, Stirner simply seems to have taken the next logical step, and to have reduced everything from God, through Mankind to Society, to the bare individual that each of us is.

But if one thinks over Stirner’s position more carefully, one soon realizes that his radicalization completely alters the situation. All the other Hegelians from Hegel to Hess treated existing man as a being still unredeemed, as someone who ought to become something other than what in fact he is: man ought to actualize rationality (Hegel), commit himself to mankind as if it were the saviour (Strauss), become an individual aware of and worshipping his species-essence (Feuerbach), abolish the atomism of civil society and establish socialism (Hess, Marx).

But Stirner, who had reduced everything to a “property” of the strictly

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19 Cf. D. F. Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet*, (Tübingen, 1835 ff.), vol. II, p. 734 ff.: “In an individual ... the properties and functions which the church doctrine ascribes to Christ contradict each other. In the idea of the species they harmonize. Mankind is the union of both natures, God incarnate, infinite Spirit externalized into finiteness, and finite Spirit remembering its infinity. It is the thaumaturgist ... it is the one who dies, is resurrected and ascends to heaven ... Through faith in this Christ, above all in his death and resurrection, man becomes justified before God by resuscitating in himself the idea of humanity ...”

20 Cf. Moses Hess, “Über die sozialistische Bewegung in Deutschland,” *Neue Anek­dota*, ed. by K. Grün, (Darmstadt, 1845), 203: “Feuerbach says that the essence of God is the transcendent essence of man, and that the true doctrine of the divine being is the doctrine of the human being. Theology is anthropology. This is correct, but is not the whole truth. One must add that the essence of man (das Wesen des Menschen) is the social being (das gesellschaftliche Wesen), the co-operation of various individuals for one and the same end ... The true doctrine of man, true humanism, is the doctrine of human socialization, that is, anthropology is socialism.”
individual ego, could and in fact very eloquently did, argue that all striving whatsoever for something higher is sheer nonsense. As he put it in the beginning of his book:

What is not supposed to be my cause! First of all, and foremost the good cause, then the cause of God, the cause of mankind, of truth, of freedom, of humanitarianism, of justice; furthermore the cause of my people, my prince, my fatherland; last but not least the cause of spirit, and a thousand other causes. Only my cause is never supposed to be my cause. "Shame on the egoist who thinks only of himself."

... What is good, what evil! I am my own cause, and I am neither good nor evil. Neither has a meaning for me. The divine is God's cause, the human is the cause of "Man." My cause is neither the divine nor the human, nor Truth, Goodness, Right, Freedom, etc., but only that which is mine. And this is not a general cause, but a unique one, for I am unique.

Nothing concerns me more than Myself. 21

One therefore is not astonished to see that Stirner's book falls into two parts which roughly correspond to the division of Feuerbach's Essence of Christianity. Feuerbach discusses first "the true, that is, anthropological, essence of religion," and then "the false, that is, theological, essence of religion." Stirner inverts the order: first he discusses "Man" (which corresponds to Feuerbach's God), and in the second part he analyses "Me" (which corresponds to Feuerbach's Man). Thus the first part develops the theme of alienation, while the second discusses the corresponding reappropriation. Both parts are tied together by a motto which is Stirner's ironic variation of Luther's famous dictum "I have rested my case on God": Ich hab Mein' Sach auf Nichts gestellt, I have rested my case on nothing. 22 In the first part, in which he discusses the ego's self-alienation, Stirner tries to show that all allegedly "higher" causes originate from nothing at all, while in the second part he projects a universe which completely corresponds to the exigences of the unique ego:

They say of God, "names name Thee not." That holds good of me: no concept expresses me ... Likewise they say of God that he is perfect, and has no calling to strive after perfection. That too holds good of me alone. I am the owner of my might, and I am so when I know myself as unique. In the unique individual, the owner himself returns into his creative nothingness, out of which he is born. Every higher essence above me, be it God or Man, weakens the feeling of my uniqueness, and pales only before the sun of this consciousness. If I rest my case on myself, the unique individual, then my cause rests on its transitory, mortal creator who consumes himself, and I may say: I have rested my case on nothing. 23

21 Stirner, op. cit., 5.
22 The phrase "Ich hab' mein' Sach' auf nichts gestellt" also appears in a poem by Goethe.
23 Stirner, op. cit., 378 ff.
Stirner versus Feuerbach

In the course of the past hundred years, Stirner's book has been interpreted in many different ways. We have already referred to the pamphlet by Moses Hess, who tried to describe Stirner as the last and most articulate ideologist of civil society and its atomism. Zychlin von Zychlinski published a review in the Norddeutsche Blätter, in which he interpreted Stirner's book from the point of view of Bruno Bauer's "critical critique." Although he granted that Stirner had successfully attacked the "dogmas" of freedom and unselfishness, he argued that the "unique individual" is "the spook of all spooks" through which "self-consciousness" has to pierce in order to achieve perfect "purity." Bruno Bauer, in an article published in Wigand's Vierteljahrsschrift, developed the same idea further, and at the same time criticized both Feuerbach and The Holy Family. In the preceding issue of the same periodical, Feuerbach published an article entitled "On the Essence of Christianity in connection with The Ego and Its Own," in which he tried to defend his position against Stirner's criticisms. In 1847 Kuno Fischer, later a famous historian of philosophy, and one of the initiators of neo-Kantianism, described Stirner as a typical representative of "modern sophistry" issuing from philosophical dogmatism, a subject on which Fischer had written his doctoral dissertation.

Stirner replied to all the aforementioned reviewers in a lengthy article published in the same issue of Wigand's Vierteljahrsschrift that contained Bauer's review. After this, if one disregards Marx and Engels, whose manuscript was to remain unpublished for almost a century, Stirner more or less seems to have been passed over in silence for several decades, even though his book was reprinted in 1882. Occasionally he would be mentioned in a history of philosophy, such as that of Bruno Erdmann of 1866. Eduard von Hartmann, best known for his Philosophy of the Unconscious (1869), which attempted a synthesis between natural science, Hegel's organicism, and Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will, occasionally mentions Stirner as the ethically and psychologically significant instance of a man who, in the midst of all destroyed

24 This phrase alludes to a chapter in the first part, in which Stirner describes the various forms of Spirit as "spooks," "wheels in the head," "fixed ideas," etc.


26 Cf. the article referred to in footnote 4.

27 L. Feuerbach, "Über das 'Wesen des Christenthums' in Beziehung auf den 'Einzigen und sein Eigenthum'," Wigands Vierteljahrsschrift, 1845 (2) 193-205.

illusions, holds fast to one illusion alone, namely, the reality of the ego. 29

The renewed interest in Stirner's work during the last two decades of the nineteenth century was due to three factors. In 1886, Engels initiated the interpretation generally followed by Marxists until this day, according to which Stirner was a precursor of political anarchism, and thus comparable to Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin. 30 Though it cannot be said that this interpretation is entirely incorrect, it is still nothing but a rehash of Engels' original "immediate impression," by which Stirner comes to fall into the same category as William Godwin, who in 1844 had been described by Engels as an intellectual ally of Bentham. Following this interpretation, E. Bernstein, G. Adler, V. Basch, and a number of others, discussed Stirner as a figure in the history of political or social anarchism. 31 During the nineties, a number of studies suggested that The Ego and Its Own was an early herald of Nietzsche's philosophy of the "superman." 32 To my knowledge, the first to suggest a real dependence of Nietzsche upon Stirner was E. Hartmann in an article published in 1897. 33 But a study by A. Levy, published less than ten years later, showed that even though Nietzsche in 1874 appears to have suggested to one of his pupils to read Stirner's book, there is no shred of evidence to prove that he himself had read it. 34 Finally, around the turn of the century, a German novelist of Scottish origin, who himself professed a brand of anarchism, wrote the first biography of Stirner, and edited Stirner's most important articles. 35

More recently it has been suggested that Stirner should be viewed as a precursor of modern existentialism—an interpretation which is not as far-fetched as it might seem, if one considers the fact that one of Stirner's central insights was that I cannot be expressed and pinned down by any concept. "Which unique individual could ever have

29 See for example E. Hartmann, Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins, (Berlin, 1879), 403 and 803 ff.
30 Cr. MEW, XXI, 271: "Stirner, the prophet of contemporary anarchism—Bakunin has taken a great deal from him..."
32 E. g. R. Schellwien, Max Stirner und Friedrich Nietzsche, (Leipzig, 1892).
33 E. Hartmann, "Verherrlichung des Egoismus," Gegenwart (Berlin), August 3 and 10, 1897.
Christianity

standable only if one assumes that Stirner had touched a sore spot in spots, quite different in character. The more obvious one is quite familiar to Marx scholars, and has to do with Feuerbach's defensive out of proportion with the rest of his manuscript that it becomes under­ ideas further than any other Left Hegelian. Marx's own philosophy. In fact, as we shall see, there are two such had pretended to stand up for Feuerbach's "real humanism" as against reply to Stirner's accusations. In

op. cit., Bruno Bauer's "spiritualism or speculative idealism." They had published in a journal of psychopathology in 1903 even tried to show that Stirner's whole idea was simply the product of a paranoiac mind. Infin­ more important, however, is the fact that Marx obviously did not consider Stirner an anarchist, a Nietzschean, or an existential­ first of all, namely, the man who carried the profanization of Hegelian ideas further than any other Left Hegelian.

As we have pointed out earlier, Marx's criticism of Stirner is so much out of proportion with the rest of his manuscript that it becomes understandable only if one assumes that Stirner had touched a sore spot in Marx's own philosophy. In fact, as we shall see, there are two such spots, quite different in character. The more obvious one is quite familiar to Marx scholars, and has to do with Feuerbach's defensive reply to Stirner's accusations. In The Holy Family, Marx and Engels had pretended to stand up for Feuerbach's "real humanism" as against Bruno Bauer's "spiritualism or speculative idealism." They had argued that the "brilliant arguments" of the author of the Essence of Christianity had long ago transcended the categories which Bauer's "critical critique" now wielded, and they had described Feuerbach's

36 M. Stirner, op. cit., 181. Cf. Max Stirner's kleinere Schriften, ed. Mackay, p. 113 ff., where Stirner explains that even though he has to use a universal (the expression the 'unique individual'), he does not mean a universal.
37 Stirner, op. cit., 378.
40 MEW, II, 7.
41 Ibid., 98.
atheistic humanism as the theoretical counterpart of French and English socialism. This is not to say, of course, that Engels was wrong when, forty years later, he wrote that in *The Holy Family* Marx had already begun to transcend "the Feuerbachian standpoint." While Feuerbach had never really succeeded in distinguishing "man's species-essence" from real society, and therefore saw the perfection of the human species in a sort of cumulative togetherness of men (for example, in the "I and Thou"), Engels, and especially Marx had by that time already emphasized the *practical* dimension of humanism so much, they that almost inevitably tended to translate Feuerbach's "consciousness and attitude of the species" into "social relations of man to man." In spite of all this, however, *The Holy Family* is basically a Feuerbachian work. It abounds in Feuerbachian terminology, and leaves dozens of issues at the highly abstract level characteristic of Feuerbach's thought.

When Marx read *The Ego and Its Own*, he must have realized that this Feuerbachian mentality could not possibly be defended against Stirner's claim that Feuerbach's Man was as much of a "religious" abstraction as the Christian God or Hegel's Spirit or Reason. As Stirner put it in a brief preface to the second part of his book:

> The other world (*Jenseits*) outside us is indeed brushed away, and the great undertaking of the Enlightenment completed. But the other world in us has become a new heaven, and calls us forth to renewed heaven-storming: God has had to give place not to us, but to Man. How can you believe that God-incarnate (*Gottmensch*) is dead before the man in him, besides the God, is dead?

And in another passage:

> ... since Man represents only another Supreme Being, nothing has in fact taken place but a metamorphosis in the Supreme Being, and the fear of Man is merely an altered form of the fear of God.

> Our atheists are pious people ...

Marx reluctantly had to admit that Stirner's denunciation of Feuerbach as a pious atheist had a great deal of truth to it. This impression was even reinforced when Marx read Feuerbach's reply. For even though Feuerbach somewhat lamely tried to argue that since Stirner did not abolish everything, he too was a pious atheist, nevertheless he frankly admitted that his own atheism was "religious." Already in the

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43 *MEW*, XXI, 290.
44 For example, *MEW*, II, 40 ff.
45 Stirner, *op. cit.*, 158.
Essence of Christianity Feuerbach had argued that while a genuine atheist would deny the existence of divine predicates such as love, wisdom and justice, he himself only denied that there existed a subject of these predicates other than man. Now he added that the statement ‘God does not exist’ was merely the “negative form” of another statement, namely, the “practical and religious, that is, positive,” claim that “Man is the God.”

In addition, when Feuerbach began to defend before Stirner his notion of the “human species-essence,” Marx must have realized that this certainly was not what he himself had in mind when, following Moses Hess, he had described this species-essence as cooperation in production and consumption, and therefore had claimed that communism is the ultimate actualization of man’s nature. For Feuerbach did not even so much as mention social cooperation, nor did he allude to the necessity of changing the existing social order. Even though he used the expression ‘communism’ twice, he did not seem to have had in mind anything but a vague sort of a community based upon mutual recognition and love. It must have become obvious to Marx that Feuerbach’s “Man” had no revolutionary drive whatsoever: he did not feel disillusioned with reality but on the contrary reveled in his natural divinity, and was a “communist” only to the extent to which he saw the Gemeinschaft, the community of men, as the ultimate fulfilment of man’s nature.

Ideals versus Historical Necessities

However, there is still another much more significant sore spot in Marx’s early philosophy that had been uncovered by Stirner’s attack. As a former Left Hegelian, Marx was keenly aware of what one might describe as the “logic” of the “progress” of Hegelianism after the master’s death. And precisely in terms of this very “logic,” Stirner’s position, being so diametrically opposed to his communist views, must have appeared to him more radical and “progressive” than his own.

In order to explain this point, we have to say a few words about Hegel. For, as paradoxical as it may sound, it was Hegel himself who supplied his disciples with the principle in terms of which after his death they proceeded step by step to dismantle his philosophy and

48 Ibid., 297.
50 Feuerbach, op. cit., 310.
reduce Hegelianism to a variety of torsos. The principle in question may be expressed as follows: all universes of discourse except one do not succeed in expressing what they are meant to speak about, and therefore have to be abandoned and transcended in the name of a "truth" immanent to but not expressible in them; they have their "truth" outside themselves. This is the principle in terms of which in the Phenomenology of Mind Hegel succeeds in ascending from mere "sense certainty," that is, the standpoint of an extreme empiricism, to the heights of "Absolute Knowledge." Each of the many universes of discourse that Hegel analyzes fails even in its attempt to express what it takes to be the really real. It therefore has to be given up for a "higher" one, until eventually a universe of discourse is reached which, as it represents the self-awareness of this whole process, will embrace all other universes of discourse, and at the same time be entirely transparent to itself. "The goal is fixed for Knowledge just as necessarily as the succession in the process. It is to be found at that point where Knowledge is no longer compelled to go beyond itself, where it finds its own self, and the concept corresponds to the object and the object to the concept."51

Listing the various stages through which Hegel leads the reader in the Phenomenology of Mind, "sense certainty" finds its truth in "perception," "perception" in "understanding," "understanding" in "self-consciousness," "self-consciousness" in "reason," abstract "reason" in culture and "spirit," "spirit" in "religion," and finally "religion" in "Absolute Knowledge." However, at the point at which Hegel proceeds to show that the ultimate truth of "religion" is "absolute Knowledge," Wissenschaft, or Hegelian philosophy itself, there occurs a curious and far-reaching reversal which later became the driving force in the dissolution of the Hegelian school. For even though Hegel claims to sublate "religion" (even in its highest form, Protestant Christianity) into "Absolute Knowledge," he in fact dissolves religion into a universe of discourse that is inferior to it. Hegel had no particular difficulty in showing that a thing-oriented realism is the "truth" of extreme empiricism (in Hegel's terminology, that "perception" is the truth of "sense certainty"), or that the modern scientific attitude with its theoretical entities such as "mass" and "force" is the "truth" of traditional naive realism (in Hegel's terminology, that the level of "under-

51 Hegel, Sämtliche Werke, vol. II, 73. For an analysis of this procedure see the highly interesting remarks in P. Henrici, Hegel und Blondel, (Pullach bei München, 1938), 35 ff.
standing” is the truth of “perception”
that, just as the Holy Spirit, the ever developing self-consciousness of
the Christian community, is the “truth” of Jesus Christ.
Hegelian philosophy is the “truth” of all religious thought, Hegel clearly reduced
religion to a somewhat modified rationalism of the Enlightenment.
Hegel himself, of course, was not aware of doing anything of the kind.
Yet it is obvious that this is what happened. Instead of being crowned
by a “scientific” grasp of the Absolute, religion got dissolved into plain
rational and enlightened philosophy.

This curious reversal of Hegel’s method of Aufhebung was the point
from which the Left Hegelians started. While Hegel believed himself
able to find the “truth” of religious symbolism in a superior type of
“rational thought,” the Left Hegelians quickly realized that this
Aufhebung was in fact a reduction of religion to profane rationality.
When Hegel transcended religion toward philosophy, he intended to
uncover a rational articulation of religious insight in a higher realm of
spirit. When the Left Hegelians reduced religion to philosophy they
saw themselves as reducing a mystification, an erroneous projection,
to a more sober truth. More generally, while Hegel found the “truth”
of each universe of discourse in a “higher” type of discourse, the Left
Hegelians began to discover the “truth” of each universe of discourse
in a “lower” one. In this sense, the history of Left Hegelianism in the
thirties and early forties of the last century might be described as the
history of a more and more radical disenchantment and profanization
of Hegelian ideas, a process in which Hegel’s speculative and mystical
categories were translated into the language of everyday experience
and common sense. Friedrich Richter and David Friedrich Strauss
reduced Hegel’s speculative interpretation of Christianity to talk about
mankind and its fate in this world. Bruno Bauer extended this profan-
zation to religious thought in general, and later, together with Arnold
Ruge, to “religious” (i.e. speculative) aspects of political life. Feuer-
bach reduced both religion and Hegel’s own philosophy to a quasi-
materialistic anthropocentrism. Moses Hess and Marx began trans-
lating Feuerbach’s still “religious” anthropology into the language of

53 It is seldom noticed, and therefore worth pointing out that Hegel states several times that what he calls “speculative” is a continuation and articulation of what in earlier times was called “mystical.” See for example Hegel, Sämtliche Werke, vol. VIII, 197 ff.; vol. XIX, 91.
54 Cf. J. Gebhardt, Politik und Eschatologie, (München, 1963), 71 ff.
socialism. And finally, Stirner reduced all this to an extreme individualistic egoism. Now *everything* except the naked ego was dissolved into “fixed ideas,” “ghosts,” “spooks,” “phantoms,” “loose screws,” “wheels in the head” – history, mankind, society, socialism, communism together with Christ, the Absolute Spirit, Reason, and the ideals of bourgeois society, against which the other Left Hegelians were still writing.

In any case, this is the way Marx must have viewed Stirner, for he implicitly agreed with the other representatives of the Left Hegelian movement that a philosophical position was more radical and “progressive” the more it succeeded in bringing down to earth the “other-worldly” categories and atmosphere of Hegelian philosophy. Like Strauss, Bauer, and Feuerbach, and in a sense more radically than any of them, Marx had worked at a profanization of all the spheres that had been mystified by Hegel. He had fought against all the “opiates” of his time: religion, political ideals, Hegel’s philosophy as a whole, the values of bourgeois society.

At the same time, however, he had not given up the hidden eschatological attitude, and the implicit revolutionary drive underlying Hegelianism after Hegel’s death. Hegel had tried to “reconcile” his fellow men with the many aspects of the contemporary world by somehow transfiguring reality. Instead of criticizing religion or the state, he tried to describe them in such a way as to make them appear entirely “rational,” and thus acceptable. His disciples soon discovered that when Hegel spoke about a rationality whose grasp permits one to bear the cross of the world,55 he did not describe the world as in fact it was. However, instead of rejecting on these grounds Hegel’s speculative transfiguration of man and his world, they gave it a new interpretation: whatever Hegel claimed the world was they understood as a *norm* to which reality had to adjust. As Marx himself wrote in a footnote to his dissertation: philosophy had turned against an unphilosophical world, trying to make it philosophical.56 In this way, Hegel’s basically conservative, and almost quietist philosophy became revolutionary. The Left Hegelians, in any case, viewed their speculations as so many attempts at transforming the world.

Around 1844, Marx was already fully aware of the fact that Hegel’s *speculative* reconciliation was a self-deception. But instead of admitting that man could not be reconciled with the existing world, he continued

56 Cf. *MEGA*, I, 1/1, 63 ff.
to adhere to the general idea underlying Hegel's philosophy that some reconciliation was required. If he worked incessantly at disillusioning man (for example, by showing that religion was a mystification, and therefore no solution to man's problems), he did so only to force man to achieve a real reconciliation instead. As he put it in 1843: "The critique of religion disillusioned man, and thus makes him think and act and shape his reality like a man who has lost all hope and has come to reason."\textsuperscript{57}

Then came Stirner, arguing that communism was only replacing one illusion by another. In his fight against Hegelian abstractions, Stirner went further than even Marx. He declared a "phantom" even the eschatological attitude of the Hegelians, and the revolutionary enthusiasm issuing from it. Marx certainly wanted to abolish speculative philosophy, but only in order to eventually transform it into a revolutionary activity. Stirner simply abolished philosophy \textit{in toto} by declaring it all nonsense. In particular, while Marx had believed it was obvious that civil society was "unphilosophical," and therefore had to be abolished and transcended, Stirner made the egoism of civil society his very principle. And he did this in the name of a "progress" in which Marx himself believed – in the name of the reduction of all transcendent and speculative categories to worldly realities.

We can put what we have just said in another and simpler way. Hegel had \textit{idealized} the existing world. His disciples from Strauss to Marx felt forced to translate Hegel's idealizing \textit{description} of the world into a language of \textit{ideals to be achieved}. In the course of this development they also tried to \textit{concretize} Hegel's abstract idealizations by translating talk about religion into talk about mankind, talk about the state into talk about existing bourgeois society, etc. Stirner might be described, and in any case was understood by Marx as the man who made the final step in this development – a step which leads beyond Hegelian idealism and negates it. For Stirner achieved the final concretization of Hegelianism by reducing all Hegelian categories to the naked individual self; he denounced not only a certain type of ideal, but all ideals whatsoever. In the end, Stirner's position can be described as a wholesale condemnation of each and every ideal or "ought" in the name of a last concretization of Hegelianism, namely, an inexorable egocentric reductionism.

In a word, then, Stirner had reached the conclusion that the Left

\textsuperscript{57} MEW, I, 379.
Hegelian revolutionary ideal-ism, together with the whole revolt against existing reality, was bogus. As he put it:

Man, you are not quite right in your head; you have a screw loose! You imagine great things and depict to yourself a whole world of gods which is supposed to exist for you, a spiritual empire to which you suppose yourself to be called, an ideal that beckons to you. You have a fixed idea! Do not think that I joke or speak figuratively when I regard those persons who cling to the Higher, and (because the vast majority belongs under this head) almost the whole world of men, as veritable fools, fools in a madhouse.58

Marx may not have been particularly impressed when he saw Stirner applying this cynical analysis to Bruno Bauer. He even might have put up with the unpleasant fact that Stirner extended the same analysis to Feuerbach, whose position Marx and Engels had embraced in *The Holy Family*. But Stirner was consistent enough to denounce in the same way all *socialist* and *communist* ideals. According to him, the “society” and “social existence” about which Hess and Marx had speculated was a “divinity” no less than Feuerbach’s “Man”:

The beautiful dream of a “social duty” continues to be dreamed. People think again that society gives what we need, and that we therefore are under obligation to it ... They cling to the idea that they want to serve a “supreme giver of all goods” ... (This) society, from which we have everything, is a new master, a new spook, a new “Supreme Being” ...59

This criticism is mainly directed against French socialists such as Proudhon, and their German disciples, for example, Moses Hess. As for Marx, Stirner erroneously saw in him a Feuerbachian.60 But it obviously applies to Marx’s brand of socialism as well. Prior to *The German Ideology*, Marx’s peculiar brand of socialism clearly was “ideal-ist” in the sense of assuming that it is meaningful to pursue ideals. Far from simply predicting how reality would develop, Marx tried to outline how reality ought to develop, and to indicate, what had to be done in order to push reality in the desired direction. In so far as he thought of a “historical necessity” at all, he had in mind a “hypothetical necessity,” that is, the kind of necessary connection that obtains between ends and means, but in no way warrants the end’s realization if the means are not put into action. What is more, prior to *The German Ideology* Marx never seems to have felt it necessary to prove that his

58 Stirner, *op. cit.*, 45.
60 Thus Stirner quotes from Marx’s review of Bruno Bauer’s “On the Jewish Question”; Marx argues there that human emancipation is achieved only when man has become a *Gattungswesen*, a “species being.” Cf. Stirner, *op. cit.*, 179; and MEW, I, 370. In his reply to the reviews, Stirner contrasts Marx with Hess, emphasizing the “sagacious versatility” of the former, *Max Stirner’s kleinere Schriften*, ed. Mackay, 158.
socialist ideals are really worth pursuing. Like all other Left Hegelians, he simply assumed as self-evident an ideal of human existence that he inherited from German Idealism, and therefore restricted himself to showing that his more specific socialist ideals were the best articulation of the ideals pursued by the whole Left Hegelian movement.

Thus in his review of Bruno Bauer’s book on the Jewish question Marx assumed as self-evident the ideal of human emancipation, and restricted himself to showing that Bauer was wrong when he described this emancipation as an emancipation from religion and religiously oriented politics, and not also from modern political life in general. He demanded that man recognize and organize his forces propres as social forces, and thus reincorporate the political sphere into his social existence. In his powerful article on Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, Marx pointed out that mankind’s emancipation depended upon an emancipation of the Germans, and that the latter could be achieved only if the revolutionary-minded philosopher joined the proletariat in a common cause — a revolutionary practice that would lead Germany “to human heights that are the immediate future of ... (modern) nations.” In the Manuscripts of 1844, Marx developed his theory of alienated labor, and described communist society as its only positive Aufhebung: “In order to abolish the idea of private property, a mental communism is enough. In order to abolish real private property, real communist action is required.”

In The Holy Family, it is true, one already finds arguments trying to show that the proletariat not only should, but really will save mankind from alienation. Thus Marx writes that private property in its economic movement drives itself towards its own dissolution, but it does so only in terms of a development that is independent of it, not conscious of itself, happening against its will, determined by the nature of things, namely, by generating the proletariat qua proletariat, the misery conscious of its spiritual and physical misery, the dehumanization conscious of its dehumanization and therefore self-abolishing.

It is obvious that in passages such as this one, Marx no longer speaks of mere ideals. He has in mind a historical necessity. But it should be noted that there are two quite different kinds of necessity involved here. The necessity that capitalism generate a constantly increasing proletariat is an economic and thus in a broad sense “physical”

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61 Cf. MEW, I, 370.
62 Ibid., 385.
63 MEGA, I, 3, 134.
64 MEW, II, 37.
necessity. In this respect, Marx only repeats what Hegel had already claimed, namely, that in spite of its enormous wealth civil society is not rich enough to prevent the emergence of a “penurious rabble” that threatens its existence. As opposed to this, the fact that thereby capitalism generates its own destruction merely involves a “psychological” necessity, in the sense in which one might want to argue that men who have nothing to lose, and therefore everything to win, will eventually resort to violence in order to liberate themselves. As Marx himself once put it, the proletariat can and must liberate itself because its very misery “forces” it to rebel against the inhumanity of a social system that generates its suffering.

Marx tries, of course, to argue that this second necessity is not merely psychological. Thus, using an untranslatable pun, he argues that misery (Not) is the “practical expression of necessity (Notwendigkeit),” by which he probably means that between misery and revolutionary action there is a necessary causal relationship. Moreover, he tries to convince the reader that it makes no difference what the individual proletarian or even the proletariat as a whole thinks; the only thing that really counts is the proletariat’s very “being,” in terms of which it is “historically forced” to perform its salvific deed. However, on the very same page Marx speaks of the proletariat’s “historical task,” and intimates that this task cannot be fulfilled if the proletariat does not become conscious of itself – which obviously entails that the proletariat has to know what it wants, and thus has to have ideals. In short, even at that point Marx still had not abandoned the notion so brilliantly developed in the German-French Yearbooks, that the “lightening of thought” has to strike the proletariat, and that consequently it is the philosopher who has to supply the proletariat’s “spiritual weapons.” Without the philosopher the proletariat might never act; accordingly the philosopher has to provide the ideals in terms of which the saviour of history should proceed to action.

When he read Stirner’s denunciation of ideals, Marx probably became aware of the fact that his only possible defense consisted in describing the proletariat’s salvific deed as completely independent of philosophical ideas. If he could not show that the proletariat by necessity, and by itself, would achieve the ultimate human emancipation, he had to justify the ideals that the philosopher was supposed to

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66 Cf. MEW, II, 38.
67 Cf. MEW, I, 391.
bring to the proletariat. To put it in other terms: if he could not predict the proletarian revolution in terms of historical necessities entirely independent of philosophic speculations and ideals, Marx had to defend his own ideals against Stirner's attack. And this he was neither willing to do nor capable of doing.

"Historical Materialism"

When in 1859 Marx wrote the only summary of his mature position ever to be published during his lifetime, he introduced it by saying that in the mid-forties he was led by his studies to the conclusion that all socio-political relationships are rooted in the "material conditions of life" summed up by Hegel under the name of 'civil society,' and that the anatomy of this civil society is to be sought in political economy. As abstract and over-simplified as this conclusion and its subsequent elaboration may sound to anyone who has read *The German Ideology*, there can be no doubt that it fairly well sums up the position that Marx had reached around 1845.

However, the phrase "I was led by my studies to the conclusion that ..." is highly misleading. For it completely conceals the fact that this conclusion was not the outcome of an impassioned and objective inquiry, but rather the result of Marx's desperate effort to defend his communist ideas against Stirner's philosophy of total disillusionment. More specifically, it is an attempt to show that even after Stirner's critique of all ideals it was still possible to retain the critical and revolutionary enthusiasm of the Left Hegelians issuing, to use Marx's own words, from the "putrescence of Hegel's system." More adequately, one may say that instead of giving up his revolutionary socialist ideals, Marx advanced an interpretation of history in terms of which it became possible to retain the content of these ideals without at the same time referring to their normative character. If one compares the doctrine advanced in *The German

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69 *MEW*, III, 17.
Ideology with the ideas that Marx developed prior to 1845, one soon discovers that except for a few minor points they differ only in one major respect: what earlier had been described as an ideal is now described as a historical necessity and the revolutionary role of the philosopher has been replaced by a historical dialectic entirely independent of ideas. Stirner had forced Marx to give up his approach, but he had not succeeded in forcing him to abandon his ideals. Marx simply translated his ideals into laws of history.

As it is impossible in this paper to work out all the details, I shall restrict myself to making two points. First, I will try to show that as soon as one takes into account everything hitherto said, it becomes relatively easy to see The German Ideology as a homogeneous whole. Secondly, I shall point out that The German Ideology exhibits in a particularly striking way the basic ambiguity of Marx’s mature thought, and therefore of all later Marxism, namely, its oscillation between a historical determinism and a call for revolutionary practice.

The basic unity of The German Ideology becomes most obvious if one takes into account the two aspects of Stirner’s book that seem to have bothered Marx the most: the application of the Left Hegelian reductionism to Feuerbach, and the critical destruction of all ideals. Thus the section on Bruno Bauer is a critical analysis of an article in which Bauer defended himself against the criticism advanced in The Holy Family by denouncing Marx and Engels as Feuerbachians, and by applying to them Stirner’s analysis of Feuerbach. As Marx and Engels saw that Bauer was entirely correct when he followed Stirner in claiming that the Feuerbachian “human species” was nothing but “a new God or God anew,”70 they had to dissociate themselves from Feuerbach. On the other hand, they were not willing to admit publicly that Bauer was right. Accordingly, they decided to criticize Feuerbach by once again denouncing Bauer.71

The appendix on “true socialism” is in fact a critique of the “ethical” socialism to which Marx and Engels had adhered, and which had become unviable because of Stirner. Whoever wrote this appendix made the criticism of socialism contained in Stirner’s book his own. As H. Arvon has rightly pointed out, many passages are nothing but a paraphrase

71 Another article by an old friend of Bruno Bauer and former editor of the Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung seems to have escaped Marx’s and Engels’ attention, even though it explicitly insisted on the Feuerbachian origins of Marx’s humanism. Cf. G. Julius, “Der Streit der sichtbaren mit der unsichtbaren Menschenkirche oder Kritik der kritischen Kritik,” Wigands Vierteljahrsschrift, 1845 (2).
of the arguments that Stirner himself had advanced against socialist ideals, and which had forced Marx to transform his ethical socialism into a historical determinism.\textsuperscript{72}

Interestingly enough, in his lengthy criticism of Stirner Marx quite consciously tries to avoid discussing both Stirner's criticism of Feuerbach, and his rejection of ideals. Occasionally, he touches on the latter point. Thus, for example, he once intimates that even Stirner has ideals, since after all he desires to become something which in fact he is not, namely, an absolute egoist.\textsuperscript{73} On the whole, however, Marx criticizes Stirner along the lines first developed by Moses Hess: he ridicules Stirner as a typical exponent of petty bourgeoisie, whose ideas reflect the nature of civil society. Moreover, he attacks Stirner from the point of view of the position into which he had retreated in order to be able to parry his opponent’s blows. Thus, for example, he tries to undermine Stirner’s claim that in the past people always acted because of some ideals by arguing that in reality people always did and would do whatever their material conditions forced them to do.\textsuperscript{74}

Even the famous first part of \textit{The German Ideology} is determined by Marx’s defense against Stirner. In order to see this, however, one has to notice that, contrary to what is usually said, this part is not an \textit{ex professo} criticism of Feuerbach. As it remained incomplete, and in most editions carries the title “Feuerbach,” it has become customary to claim that this first part was supposed to culminate in a criticism along the lines sketched in the “Theses on Feuerbach.” But this interpretation is hardly tenable, since it overlooks, first, that Marx himself deleted the title,\textsuperscript{75} and secondly, that the written sections in no way seem to lead up to an attack on Feuerbach.

Actually, in spite of occasional innuendos against Feuerbach, the first part of \textit{The German Ideology} develops Marx’s and Engels’ own point of view – the point of view into which they had been pushed by Stirner, and from which they now criticized not only Feuerbach and Bauer, but also Stirner himself. In a passage that abounds with deletions, and eventually was completely deleted, Marx says just this. He writes that he intends to introduce his criticism of the individual representatives of Left Hegelians with a few general remarks “that will suffice to characterize the point of view of our criticism,” and adds

\textsuperscript{73} Cf. \textit{MEW}, III, 250.
\textsuperscript{74} Cf. \textit{Ibid.}, 415 ff.
\textsuperscript{75} See the critical apparatus in \textit{MEGA}, I, 5, 566.
that he addresses these remarks to Feuerbach,” since he is the only one
who at least made a progress, and whose ideas one can take up in good
faith.” To this paragraph there immediately follows the section en-
titled “Ideology in general, especially the German,” which without
more ado concentrates on Marx’s own views for the ninety sheets that
comprise the first part of the manuscript.

If one views the first part of The German Ideology as a summary of
the position from which Marx hopes to counter Stirner’s objections,
some of its many curious features become more intelligible. Among
these is, for example, the fact that Marx begins the exposition of “the
point of view of our criticism” by putting great emphasis upon the fact
that his presuppositions “are not arbitrary, not dogmas, but real pre-
suppositions from which abstraction can be made only in the imagina-
tion.” In other words, Marx’s line of defense against Stirner consists
in arguing that, unlike Feuerbach and Bauer, he had succeeded in
translating his ideals into empirical facts which it is beyond man’s
power to disregard. The same point reappears in the passage criticizing
Stirner’s claim that since his own position presupposes only himself,
it is entirely presuppositionless. To this Marx replies that even if Stirner
really succeeded in freeing himself from all “dogmatic presuppositions,”
he could never free himself from the “real presuppositions.”

In this way Marx very cleverly succeeds in creating the impression
that Stirner is less radical than himself. What I mean is this: Marx
describes Stirner’s ideas as the last phase of “the putrescence of Abso-
lute Spirit.” This description certainly is justified but it applies to
Marx as well. Until 1845, in any case, Marx belonged to the penultimate
phase of the very same “putrescence.” However, by throwing Stirner
into a heap with Feuerbach and Bauer, Marx misleads the reader into
believing that he himself stands on one side of the fence while all other
Left Hegelians, including Stirner, stand on the other side. This might
be correct if one considered Marx after he had found a way of defending
himself against Stirner. But it hardly is correct when one considers
him before he discovered how to tackle Stirner’s challenge. At that time,
Marx in a sense was an ally of the Left Hegelians. He was searching for
a way that would permit him to retain the “ethico-critical” concern
which he shared with all other Left Hegelians. In this sense, The
German Ideology was a defense of the critical mentality and revolution-

76 MEW, III, 18 ftn.
77 Ibid., 20.
78 Ibid., 248 ff.
ary pathos of Left Hegelianism against Stirner's cynical letting-go of ideals. Of course, as soon as he realized that this Left Hegelian heritage could not be defended without giving up all explicit appeal to ideals, Marx had to retreat into a position from which he could now argue that Stirner was ultimately an ally of Bauer. For both Bauer and Stirner believed that ideas and ideals were the essential limitation of past and present human existence. They differed only in that Bauer had in mind specific ideals, while Stirner applied the same criticism to each and every ideal. As opposed to this, Marx argued that ideas were nothing but a reflection of more basic "material conditions," and that therefore the limitations of human existence would disappear only when these "material conditions" had disappeared. Yet this should not make us forget that Marx developed this idea solely in order to be able to retain the ideals which he shared with the Left Hegelians and which Stirner had put into question.

Of course, for this very reason Marx's new "materialistic conception of history" was and forever remained hopelessly ambiguous. For even though he translated his ideals into historical necessities, Marx was not willing to give up his critical attitude toward the existing world. In order to show this, I shall restrict myself to a single particularly striking example. In *The German Ideology* Marx emphasizes several times that communism is not something "which ought to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself," but rather a "real movement which abolishes the present state of affairs," the conditions of which "result from the presuppositions now in existence."\(^{79}\) From such passages it seems natural to conclude that Marx had given up any invitation to revolutionary action. People do change the world in a definite way and thus push history in a definite direction, and therefore it is meaningless to tell them what they should do. Instead of urging the proletariat to act, Marx predicts that it will act.

Yet how could this be compatible with the famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, in which Marx accuses the philosophers of only interpreting the world differently, while in reality the point is to change it? It will not do to say that, after all, the "Theses on Feuerbach" seem to have been written a few months prior to *The German Ideology*, at a time when Marx was possibly still not fully aware of the implications of his new historical determinism. For exactly the same idea is found in *The German Ideology*. There Marx argues against the Left Hegelians that

\(^{79}\) *Ibid.*, 45. For the fact that this passage is a later insertion by Marx's own hand, cf. *MEGA*, I. 5. 572, sub 25, line 5.
they only "put to men the moral postulates of exchanging their present consciousness for human, critical, or egoistic consciousness." And he adds: "This demand to change consciousness amounts to a demand to interpret the existing order in another way, that is, to recognize it by means of another interpretation."80

Seeing that Marx no longer asks us to pursue ideals, but rather predicts their inevitable realization, this certainly is a very curious criticism. Marx accuses the Left Hegelians of restricting themselves to changing their **ideas** about the world, of not wanting to change the world itself. But if Marx really meant what he wrote, namely, that communism is not an ideal, that it is nothing that ought to be established, then he seems as little willing to change the world as the Left Hegelians do. Certainly he says that the world **does** change. But the difference between him and the Left Hegelians is not that he intends to change the world, while the latter do not intend to. Rather, it consists in that the latter pretend to save the world by changing ideas, while Marx has reached the immutable idea that the world will save itself independently of philosophical speculations.

Of course Marx **does** intend to change the world. He is simply inconsistent. On the one hand, he translates all his ideals into historical necessities; on the other hand he wants to remain a critic and a voice for revolutionary action. This ambiguity is the result of the intellectual genesis that we tried to sketch. No one can meaningfully claim that it makes sense to criticize or to applaud necessary events, at least not in the sense of criticism that Marx always had in mind, namely, a criticism that achieves something. But if the necessary events are materialized they are of course all too easy to forget their character of necessity.

I should like to conclude this paper by adding that the ambiguity under discussion has to my mind little if anything to do with the much discussed question as to whether according to Marx men have free will. Contemporary Soviet authors rightly point out that even an "iron" historical necessity may be statistical in nature, that is, apply to and be verifiable only with respect to a relatively great number of individuals and over a relatively long period of time. The point under discussion is not whether men can be free if historical necessities exist, but rather whether very definite events such as communism can be both historically necessary, and objects of deliberation, criticism and purposeful revolutionary action. And it seems quite obvious that they cannot be both. Either Stirner is right, and then every critical stance is meaning-

80 MEW, III, 20.
less – this is the starting point of Marx’s historical determinism. Or else communism and the humanization of man is an ideal inviting men to action – and in this case Marx’s attempt to translate his communist ideal into a historical necessity is self-defeating.