

MAX STIRNER AND THE LAST MAN

LAWRENCE S. STEPELEVICH
Villanova University, USA

Alexander Kojève linked two major events that occurred in October of 1806: the first political, Napoleon's victory at Jena; the second philosophical, Hegel's completion of *The Phenomenology of Mind*. Kojève held these events to be complementary, both completing the initial formation and expression of 'modernity'. This thesis was accepted by Leo Strauss and later by Strauss' disciple Francis Fukayama. The latter's two works *The End of History* and *The Last Man*, both 'neo-conservative' in character, have exercised a powerful influence on the policies of the United States Department of State. Although optimistic in regarding the global advance of democratic societies as the end of history, both Kojève and Fukayama nevertheless conclude that this advance will stop short of its proper end with the appearance of a morally vapid Nietzschean 'Last Man'. This essay connects the birth of Stirner to the events of 1806; Stirner set his own 'cause' before all external ideals or romantic programs, such as a striving to be a Nietzschean *Übermensch* or joining a revolution of Marxian 'Lumpen'. Following the signals of both Hegelianism and democratic politics, Stirner can be considered, and would be pleased to present himself, as the 'Last Man'.

In the month of October, 1806, three significant events occurred. I propose that these events were of a world-historical character and define the character of our own age. On that date the 'Old Europe', that of the *Ancien Régime* in its extent, political power and culture, was catapulted into a new form of consciousness; 'modernity' entered world history. A world once divided into masters and slaves, lords and servants, aristocrats and peasants, clergy and laity turned toward decline and began to vanish rapidly. A hierarchical society that had seemed the fixed and unquestionable expression of a divinely grounded order began crumble.

The first of the three events was a battle. On the 14th of October a young, modern, and mobile army commanded by Napoleon defeated a large Prussian army that had gathered at Jena to halt the French advance. In retrospect the sudden defeat and rout of the Prussians was no surprise. Their army, filled with aged and incompetent officers 'totally unfit for military service' were 'but a single manifestation of the helplessness, the moral deadness that ran through every part of its official and public life.'¹ It was the feeble response of an aging world that was unable to defend itself. Napoleon's victory at Jena put an end to the relic of the Holy Roman Empire.

The second event went unnoticed amid the excitement surrounding the Napoleonic victory. On the eve of the battle an obscure young professor, George Wilhelm Frederick Hegel, mailed the final draft of a manuscript that bore the puzzling title *Phänomenologie des Geistes* to a publisher in Bamberg.² It was quite possible, as Hegel knew, that his manuscript might get lost in the fire and confusion of the battle. But it did not, and it was published. It has been claimed that Hegel's work is the philosophical equivalent of Napoleon's victory; at the very least, it is understood to have revised radically the conception of the philosophical project, if not actually putting an end to philosophy itself.

The third event was the birth of Johan Kaspar Schmidt, known later as 'Max Stirner'. That he should be born at this time seems of little or no consequence and hardly worth noting, then or now. Nevertheless, it can be argued that Stirner's philosophy - or more properly, his 'non-philosophy' - was nothing less than a direct intellectual outcome of both the Napoleonic victory and Hegel's philosophy. What Napoleon and Hegel set in motion at Stirner's birth became fully articulated almost four decades later in Stirner's major work, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*.³ At first sight, of course, to suggest such significance for this book seems absurd; but, as a bibliography of works devoted to Stirner⁴ reveals, there has been an undiminishing interest in his work from its first appearance. Since the second edition in 1882 it has never been out of print, and it has been translated into over a dozen languages.

These three events of October 1806 are here presented as the clarion call and premises for a new age, the 'modern age'; they achieved mature expression in the program of 'modernism' after the First World War, and more definitively in the 'post-modernism' of our own period.

The first sign of this change in human political relationships was flashed in 1776, in the *Preamble to the American Declaration of Independence*. In 1789 these principles were expanded and formally restated by the Revolutionary government of France as *The Declaration of the Rights of Man*. With their publication, and subsequent support and expansion through Napoleon's conquests, Western society began to be profoundly transformed. As if in tacit recognition of this as the deeper meaning of the British defeat by the Americans and French at the Battle of Yorktown, as the British signed the surrender, their own band played 'The World Turned Upside Down'.

Although Jena was not the first of Napoleon's victories, it had the greatest effect, for it insured that the Declaration of the Rights of Man, embodied and installed throughout much of Europe in the 'Napoleonic Code', could no longer be ignored. Within a few decades the principles of the *Declaration* were infiltrating all political discourse; since then they have been, if not always acted upon, at least unable to be ignored. In 1989, as if marking two-hundredth birthday of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man, the Berlin Wall was dismantled, and the youth in China gathered at Tiananmen Square. The Mullahs of modern Iran and the North Korean dictators have yet to accept the course of history - but they eventually will.

Then as now the 'Old Order' used force to attempt to restore itself and to stifle the growing awareness of human rights. The efforts of the 'Holy Alliance' failed, however - at least until Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo by Lord Wellington.⁵ In 1815 Prince Metternich, presiding over the Congress of Vienna, was clear enough about what the proceedings foretold: 'Old Europe was at the beginning of its end . . . and a New Europe was coming into being.'⁶

One year later, Hegel cast the whole progress of modernization into a military metaphor:

I adhere to the view that the world spirit has given the age marching orders. These orders are being obeyed. The world spirit, this essential, proceeds irresistibly like a closely drawn armored phalanx advancing with imperceptible movement, much as the sun through thick and thin. Innumerable light troops flank it on all sides, throwing themselves into the balance for or against its progress, though most of them are entirely ignorant of what is at stake and merely take head blows as from an invisible hand.⁷

But what Hegel said in 1816 was but an echo of what he had stated a decade earlier, in the *Preface to his Phenomenology of Mind*:

Our epoch is a birth-time, and a period of transition. The spirit of man has broken with the old order of things hitherto prevailing, and with the old ways of thinking, and is in the mind to let them all sink into the depths of the past and to set about its own transformation.⁸

Stirner agreed that ‘We stand at the boundary of a period’⁹ – at the boundary between an old order of fixed ideas, of ‘the old ways of thinking’, and the beginning of a new era.

The *Declaration of Human Rights* expressed a program that formulated the goal towards which all human history had been unconsciously seeking; for Hegel all history is human history, all else is mere spatial change. The course of history worked toward one end, which once realized, would conclude the meaning, the significance of the entire course of history. The end of history is the end of human desire, the goal of all the bloody wars played out upon the ‘slaughter bench’ of history. At this concluding moment the final goal of human freedom would be fully manifested; as a consequence, with the success of the historical struggle, political history would come to an end. He wrote:

The substance of the spirit is freedom. From this we can infer that its end in the historical process is the freedom of the subject to follow its own conscience and morality, and to pursue and implement its own universal ends; it also implies that the subject has infinite value and that it must become conscious of its supremacy. The end of the world spirit is realized in substance through the freedom of each individual.¹⁰

Stirner agreed with Hegel that this would be the end of history. It would come at the moment in which the individual becomes conscious of his freedom, would ‘follow his own conscience and morality’, and thereby recognize his infinite value and supremacy.

The long history of the wars for the recognition of human freedom and equality are not, alas, over, for there have been many retrograde steps; nevertheless, there are signs that they are coming to an end.

The 18th Century *Declarations* of both the Americans and the French found recent expression in June, 2009, when the President of the United States, speaking in Cairo to the Muslim world, concluded that

I . . . have an unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn’t steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose.¹¹

Recent political revolutions throughout the Middle East, known as the ‘Arab Spring’, are suggestive echoes of Obama’s talk.

Hegel was aware of how history in his time was being prosecuted in conformity with the universal human need for respect and recognition. The day before the Battle of Jena Hegel had seen Napoleon. Shortly after, Hegel wrote a letter describing the event:

I saw the Emperor – this world soul – riding out of the city on reconnaissance. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the whole world and masters it . . . this extraordinary man, whom it is impossible not to admire.¹²

To conceive of Napoleon as a ‘world soul’ who ‘reaches out over the whole world to master it’ was a remarkable insight into the significance of Napoleon’s victory. In his biography of Hegel, Terry Pinkard noted an even more remarkable insight by Hegel as to the meaning of this event:

At that point he [Hegel] had already composed the crucial section of the *Phenomenology* in which he remarked that the Revolution had now officially passed to another land (Germany) that would complete 'in thought' what the Revolution had partially accomplished – as it were, that the 'novel of the Revolution' was to be completed by German philosophy, not by French politics.¹³

The *Phenomenology* can indeed be compared to a '*Bildungsroman*' in which the dialectical adventures of consciousness lead finally to its self-discovery in Absolute Knowing.

Just how this 'novel of the Revolution' ended was clearly set forth by the émigré Russian philosopher Alexandre Kojève. In a series of occasional lectures delivered between 1933 and 1939 at the *École des Hautes Études* in Paris, Kojève presented a brilliant and provocative reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*. His lectures attracted some of the leading French intellectuals of the time such as J. P. Sartre and M. Merleau-Ponty, as well as the American political philosopher Leo Strauss. Much later and over time, Strauss' acceptance and understanding of Kojève's reading of Hegel exercised a deep influence on the course of American foreign policy during the presidency of G. W. Bush. Kojève's reading was recast in the form of a political doctrine: 'neo-conservatism'. It was an optimistic doctrine holding that liberal democracy is the final and inevitable goal of political history – the 'End of History'. The doctrine was well-argued and publicized by a young scholar within the U.S. State Department, Francis Fukayama. In 1989 he wrote two articles in the widely read governmental journal, *National Interest*; these established him as a leading neoconservative theoretician and influenced much of the United States' foreign policy – including the invasion of Iraq. Both journal articles later appeared in book form, *The End of History*, and *The Last Man*¹⁴ - with both titles drawn directly from Kojève's work, *An Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*.¹⁵ In this publication of his lectures, Kojève exposed a deep connection between two events that occurred in Jena, in October, 1806 – the Napoleonic victory and the completion of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. The present paper adds a third event: the birth of Stirner – who gives a revisionary reading of 'The End of History', and who plays 'The Last Man'.

In his lectures Kojève traced the path of the stages of human consciousness as presented by Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*. This work, which Hegel described as a 'journey of discovery' had once borne a significant subtitle: *The Science of the Experience of Consciousness*.¹⁶

In its quest for wisdom, the journey of philosophy could only come to an end when human consciousness found fulfillment and completion in perfected self-consciousness. This final shape and stage of consciousness, as set forth in the final chapter of the *Phenomenology*, is said to be 'Absolute Knowing'. This final knowledge for Kojève is found the first 'Wise Man', Hegel, who is 'fully and perfect self-conscious'. With Hegel the goal of philosophy has been reached; in his thought, in 'Hegelianism', the long history of striving for a comprehensive knowledge has finally come to a successful end. The history of philosophy, from its first awakening with Thales to its final panoramic vision with Hegel, has been the story of a journey toward a final satisfaction of the love of wisdom. Every philosopher, in his turn, has contributed an incremental but important element toward the completion of the final edifice; all find themselves equally encompassed and expressed in Hegel's final philosophy. The logical, or better, dialectical path that leads to such wisdom was traced in the *Phenomenology*; there, the halting course of knowledge is recorded, from its first encounters with stunted and limiting configurations of itself to its termination in the all-encompassing mode of Absolute Knowing. Only at the end of what Hegel calls 'The

Path of Doubt' does consciousness become fully aware of itself, does it become completed self-consciousness.

The moment when Hegel's history of philosophy reached its final term in his own thought was also the moment that signaled the beginning of the conclusion of the human drive to be recognized as human, as an autonomous and self-conscious being. For Hegel 'recognition' and 'self-consciousness' are internally related.¹⁷ To 'be' a human being is to be *recognized* as one, and thereby to be enabled to recognize *oneself* as such – to become self-conscious of oneself as a free individual. The 'self' is socially constructed, and the 'other' is an essential component to my coming to proper self-understanding. 'Freedom' is a property projected in a society, or it is nothing at all; nature knows no such property. The obtaining of self-consciousness in mutual recognition finally ends the long struggle for sole domination between the antithetical polarities of Master and Slave that propelled human history.

Napoleon's victory at Jena was the beginning of the end of political history, which, to Kojève, also entails the goal of that being called 'man' – who, unlike the animal, is defined as a being that seeks to know itself by being recognized. Hegel's *Phenomenology* is the story of that search, and the historical struggle between Master and Slave, in which both strive to be recognized, to find reflection and endorsement in the mind of the other. For Kojève Hegel is the first philosopher to obtain wisdom. He was able to understand the full significance of the Battle at Jena, which signaled that the human struggle for universal self-consciousness, for mutual recognition, was coming to an end. In Kojève's words:

Now, according to Hegel, it is in and by the wars of Napoleon, and in particular, the Battle of Jena, that this completion of History is realized through the dialectical overcoming (*Aufheben*) of both Master and Slave. Consequently, the presence of the Battle of Jena in Hegel's consciousness is of capital importance. It is because Hegel hears the sounds of that battle that he can know that History is being completed or has been completed, that – consequently – his conception of the World is a total conception, that his knowledge is an absolute knowledge.

However to know this, to know that he is the thinker who can realize the absolute science, he must know . . . how and why History, which began with the first fight for prestige, ended in the wars of Napoleon.¹⁸

The battle confirmed that his philosophy, which ended philosophy, was also the mirror of what had been and was happening in history. Both history and philosophy were coming to their 'end'. Philosophy terminated in the 'Wise Man', and the long love affair with wisdom is consummated. After obtaining of wisdom, all subsequent philosophy is redundant, nothing more than the repetition of empty criticisms of Hegelianism – as with Heidegger, or that now forgotten anti-Hegelian episode in British philosophy known as 'analytic philosophy'.¹⁹

If it can be said that the resolution of the 'bloody' battles between master and slave, wars fought to satisfy the human need for recognition, is now coming to an end, then it is an end concurrent with the conclusion of the pre-Hegelian philosophical 'wars'. The wars of blood and words are essentially tied to one another. The military victory of Napoleon and the philosophical dominance of Hegelianism are not coincidental, they are fundamentally one and the same. The campaigns of Napoleon prepared the ground for Hegelianism, and Hegelianism is the philosophical expression of that world. There can be no political truth that contradicts philosophical truth, and no philosophical truth that stands apart from political truth. For Hegel,

Philosophy . . . is its time apprehended in thoughts. It is just as foolish to fancy that any philosophy can transcend its present world, as that an individual could leap out of his time or jump over Rhodes.²⁰

The terminus of the philosophical quest for wisdom is the Absolute *Wissen* of Hegel's philosophy; it is the thought of the world which could only come into being at 'the fullness of time', through the victories of Napoleon that gave birth to the fundamental truths contained in the *Declaration of Human Rights*.

The philosopher is the person who apprehends the essential thought of his world and his time. But if the world he apprehends is incomplete, has not yet obtained full rationality, then so is its thought, its idea, and so then is its philosophy. We can, as Hegel says, 'be Platonists no longer'. The age of Plato is past, and with it the world that his thought reflected. If, however, there is a moment in history in which the philosopher's world reveals its completed rationality by its registering of the human need for recognition, of the value of human equality and the nature of freedom, then the philosopher of *this* world and age would be the *final* philosopher. This is indeed Hegel's claim.

For Kojève the 'End of History' is the end of the human odyssey. The end of the struggle for freedom and equality, once realized, will generate a type of human without fundamental ideals left to achieve, either in thought or in action. Kojève, like Fukayama, knew that with the advance of universal mutual recognition, recognition itself has done its job and run its course; without a need for recognition, the time for meaningful historical action and further philosophical advance draws to a close. The satisfaction of the desire for recognition marks the end of history, leading, as Kojève puts it, to a 're-animalisation' of humanity, with the human becoming merely a contented animal:

But one cannot then say that all this 'Makes Man happy.' One would have to say that post-historical animals of the species *Homo sapiens* (which will live amidst abundance and complete security) will be content as a result of their artistic, erotic and playful behavior, inasmuch as, be definition, they will be content with it.²¹

At this end time, the democratic ideals of mutual respect, tolerance, and equality will be accepted as universal values; it will be a time in which nothing is to be challenged because nothing further needs to be gained. At this point, as Fukayama describes it, 'in the soft glow of private life'²², the 'Last Man' will emerge. For Kojève the symptoms of this final closure are to be discerned in the so-called 'American Way of Life.'

What the character of this Last Man might be is suggested in the final sections of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Two of these are devoted to a consideration of the philosophic significance of the French *Aufklärung*, the first entitled 'The Struggle of the Enlightenment with Superstition'²³ and the second, 'The Truth of Enlightenment'.²⁴

For Hegel, the truth of the *Aufklärung* emerges as the dialectical conclusion of two antithetical world views, two prior states of consciousness that both claim absolute certainty and truth. On one side is the faithful consciousness certain that objective truth is to be found in a distant and as yet unrealized realm of faith. On the other lies critical consciousness, a negating consciousness that can find certitude only through a rejection of the positive but unreal realm of faith. Insofar as the latter presupposes the positive realm of faith in order to negate it, it exists essentially as the denial of this realm. Critical consciousness has no 'intrinsic being' of its own and exists only to the extent that its external object, the realm of faith, exists. As might be expected, what has been called 'Hegel's Project of Reconciliation'²⁵ comes to expression in the concluding section of his

study, *Die Wahrheit der Aufklärung*, in which consciousness discovers itself in the objectivity of *useful* being, of utility or the useful [*Nützlichkeit*].²⁶ Faith and criticism find common ground only if they view their object under the category of the 'useful'. Peace between faith and reason is restored when objectivity is reduced to being any form of meaning, when it becomes relative to a purpose imposed upon it, and thereby has only that meaning. It becomes 'useful' – a 'third reality' so to speak, the dialectical resolution of faith and criticism. Criticism, the *Aufklärung*, has come to terms with *Aberglauben* in the concept of the 'useful'.

For Stirner the same opposition exists between faith and criticism, between the 'men of the Old Time and men of the New'.²⁷ Stirner followed Hegel's path to its end in the 'Truth of the Enlightenment', to its termination in the concept of 'utility', and this latter became central to his understanding of the world and of the relations between individuals:

Yes, I utilize the world and men! With this I can keep myself open to every impression without being torn away from myself by one of them. I can love, love with a full heart, and let the most consuming glow of passion burn in my heart, without taking the beloved one for anything else than the nourishment of my passion, on which it ever refreshes itself anew. All my care for him applies only to the object of my love, only to him whom my love requires, only to him, the 'warmly loved.' How indifferent would he be to me without this - my love! I feed only my love with him, I utilize him for this only: I enjoy him.²⁸

Stirner's most irreverent attacks and caustic criticism of the 'Old Order' are directed towards its inability to justify rationally its continued existence. In this Stirner followed closely Hegel's description in the *Phenomenology* of the degenerate nobility, which he saw exhibited in Diderot's short work *Rameau's Nephew*. Stirner's 'anarchism' and 'atheism' are but expressions of his refusal to recognize the claims of this 'useless class', or the ideals that seemed to call for their continued existence. Stirner's brand of anarchism is conveyed in his statement: 'The North Americans asked themselves 'Do we need a King?' The answer: 'For us, he and his work are useless.'²⁹ King George III, along with all other members of the fading aristocratic order, are in the same class of empty shades scathingly rejected in the opening passages of *Der Einzige*.³⁰

It is not surprising that Stirner, by making central the value of utility, would advocate the individualism of free-market capitalism. Hegel had read and appreciated the works of Adam Smith.³¹ Stirner joined him in this positive estimation and introduced Smith in Germany by making the first translation of *The Wealth of Nations*.³² The title of his own work indicates the importance he attached to private property - '*sein Eigentum*'.

Stirner's capitalistic inclinations were soon detected by the young Marx. The latter's fear and loathing of Stirner's individualism resulted in that heap of invective published as *The German Ideology*. Stirner had hit a nerve, but he had also uncovered the fundamental hypocrisy within Marxism: like all religious ideals for Stirner, it concealed its intent to enslave under an appearance of compassion. Stirner writes:

All attempts to enact rational laws about property have put out from the bay of love into a desolate sea of regulations. Even Socialism and Communism cannot be excepted from this. Every one is to be provided with adequate means, for which it is little to the point whether one socialistically finds them still in a personal property, or communistically draws them from the community of goods. The individual's mind in this remains the same; it remains a mind of dependence.³³

In the final analysis, despite the loving promises of socialism and communism, those who live in a realm of promissory notes, of ideals that are perpetually yet to be, remain dependent and slaves.

But the concept of ‘utility’, even if it plays a central role in Stirner’s thought, is not the end of human consciousness as set out in the *Phenomenology*. If, as it has been suggested, the *Phenomenology* should be compared to a *Bildungsroman*, ‘a novel of self-development’³⁴, there remains one last experience, a ‘shape of consciousness’ that opposes the advance of consciousness as a final obstacle to its goal in completed self-awareness. This obstacle is the ‘religious consciousness’ that finds expression for Hegel in the morality of the ‘beautiful souls’, the minds of humanistic liberals. This ‘pious’ mind for Stirner also opposes but is unable to break through that ‘boundary of a period’, beyond which lies the age of the *Einzigiger* - ‘The Last Man’.

In the first sentence of the first paragraph of the final chapter of the *Phenomenology*, entitled ‘Absolute Knowing [*Absolute Wissen*]’, Hegel portrays the character of this inhibited religious consciousness. It is the mind that is still unable to overcome its self-alienation in religion. Here

The Spirit of revealed religion has not yet surmounted its consciousness as such, or what is the same, its actual self-consciousness is not the object of its consciousness.³⁵

The inability to grasp and to accept itself as self-related, and not merely the reflection of another, be it Man or God, drives the religious consciousness to seek itself in another, in one external to itself. Still in thrall to the religious ideals of Man and Mankind, neither Bauer nor Feuerbach could advance to the final configuration of consciousness, that of the fully realized self-consciousness of the *Einzigiger*. From their alienated perspective, Stirner could only be described through the pejorative distortion of ‘Egoist’.

It was evident to Stirner that liberal humanism did not bring to a close the history of consciousness; on the contrary, it merely defined a new Holy and ‘fixed idea’ to worship, a new stopping point – Man or Mankind. Stirner’s thought coincided with Hegel’s intuition of how the *Phänomenologie* must conclude, at the moment when the

Spirit has made its existence identical with its essence; it has itself for its object just as it is, and the abstract element of immediacy, and of the separation of knowing and truth, is overcome. Being is then absolutely mediated; it is a substantial content which is just as immediately the property of the ‘I’ . . . With this the Phenomenology of Spirit is concluded.³⁶

It is impossible for anyone with even a passing knowledge of Stirner not to find his thought immanent in the *Preface to the Phenomenology*. He is the ‘self’ that has passed over and grown into maturity through the overcoming the ‘forms of consciousness’ chronicled in *The Experience of Consciousness*. In the end the self returns to itself – as with the absolute circle of Heraclitus, in which the beginning and the end coincide, are one and the same. In Stirner’s words, ‘I am the creator and creature in one’.³⁷ This constituted a return, a rediscovery of himself.

I propose Stirner is the existential expression, the concrete individual consciousness of what is entailed in the consummation that philosophy has always desired, ‘Absolute Knowing’. It is the conclusion of the grand project of self-consciousness, when, as Hegel puts it, consciousness comes to be ‘at home with itself’. In the final position the individual self no longer seeks to find itself in another; rather, it is at ease in its world and enjoys its autonomy, for as Stirner has it, ‘In everything ‘Holy’ there is something uncomfortable . . . wherein we are not quite either at ease or at home.’³⁸ Stirner, at home with himself, was prepared to enjoy himself in the here and now:

My intercourse with the world consists in my enjoying it, and so consuming it for my self-enjoyment. Intercourse is the enjoyment of the world, and belongs to my - self-enjoyment.³⁹

He probably would not join Nietzsche in the practice of keeping his room so cold that his hands turn blue – all to ‘strengthen’ him.⁴⁰

Even such as Zarathustra had an enjoyment, the only enjoyment permitted a religious mind: to choose between the false alternatives of salvation and damnation. And for Zarathustra-Nietzsche, as for all preachers of ‘righteousness’, there had to be no delay in making this choice. Now is ‘the great noontide, when man is in the middle of his course between animal and Superman.’ The ‘Last Man’ must choose to be an animal, as Kojève predicted, or as Zarathustra prophesized, to be raised to a higher form of humanity, the ‘*Übermensch*’. The ‘pious atheism’ of Bruno Bauer and Feuerbach finds an echo in Zarathustra’s declaration: ‘Dead are all the Gods: now do we desire the Superman to live’ – Let this be our final will at the great noontide.⁴¹

Kojève and Fukayama both see, as did Nietzsche, at the end of history, the emergence of a type of man that has no ideals and no purpose other than himself. To choose to be comfortable is an option that neither Nietzsche, Marx, nor any other moral idealist can consistently offer. As Fukayama writes:

By putting self-preservation first of all things, the last man resembles the slave in Hegel’s bloody battle that began history. But the last man’s situation is made worse as a result of the entire cumulative evolution of human society toward democracy. For, according to Nietzsche, a living thing cannot be healthy, strong, or productive except by living with a certain horizon, that is, a set of values and beliefs that are accepted absolutely and uncritically.⁴²

Of course, such uncritical acceptance of a proposed ‘set of values’ which accompanies ‘a certain horizon’ is for Stirner simply voluntary slavery. In his view of history, the fixed ideals and values of the past eventually come under judgment and become the possession of one’s final self, as the title of his work indicates: *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*.

And so, somewhat to the chagrin of his moralizing critics, Stirner seems satisfied with being at home with himself. He might even take reassurance from Nietzsche’s prediction: ‘There cometh the time when man will no longer launch the arrow of his longing beyond man.’⁴³ As the contented ‘Last Man’ he turned aside from the shrill demands of such would-be saviors as Marx or Nietzsche, whose new Gods, either the ‘*Lumpen*’ or the ‘*Übermensch*’, were just as insistent upon self-sacrifice and pain as the old.

The ‘Last Man’ is the hero of the grand ‘novel of the revolution’, the *Phenomenology*. He inhabited and transcended the many passing forms of thought, the ‘*Geistesgestalten*’, and surmounted the unavoidable impediments to be found along the path of self seeking itself. The long history of the ‘Experience of Consciousness’ traced in Hegel’s *Bildungsroman* has a happy ending. Even the usually dour Hegel celebrated this successful conclusion with a verse from Schiller’s Ode to Joy⁴⁴. For Zarathustra, however, that creation of a parson’s son, this was an unacceptable rejection of his call for humankind’s salvation and redemption. The last man, whom he held to be the most contemptible of beings [‘*Verächtlichsten*’],⁴⁵ appeared not only to have endured but to have prevailed. With the anger of an ignored Jeremiah, Zarathustra heaps contempt on the satisfactions of this last man:

We have discovered happiness’ – say the last man . . . No Shepherd and one herd! Everyone wanteth the same; everyone is equal: he who hath other sentiments goeth voluntarily into the madhouse. Formerly all the world was insane,’ – say the subtlest of them.⁴⁶

Might Nietzsche have had Stirner in mind here? Would not the ‘subtlest of them’ perhaps be Stirner, who understood well that the ‘Higher Man’, the *Übermensch*, would function as but another ‘God’ for those still in the idealistic madhouse? It seems that Stirner anticipated Nietzsche when he wrote:

Do not think that I am jesting or speaking figuratively when I regard those persons who cling to the Higher, . . . as veritable fools, fools in a madhouse.⁴⁷

Jean Hyppolite, in his study of the *Phänomenologie*, wrote that for Hegel, ‘The history of the world is finished; all that is needed is for the specific individual to rediscover it in himself’.⁴⁸ Stirner would be that ‘specific individual’, that ‘*Einziger*’ who rediscovered himself after being lost in the other. He could not find himself in Bauer’s ‘Mensch’, nor in Nietzsche’s ‘*Übermensch*’, nor in any of the Marxian or totalitarian ‘new discoveries’. The novel of the revolution ends as a comedy. Stirner recovered himself, and as a contented ‘Last Man’ – returned home.

Notes

1 C. A. Fyffe, *A History of Modern Europe: 1792-1878* (New York: Henry Holt, 1896), 214.

2 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952). Further citations will refer to both this text and the English translation, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, tran. A.V. Miller (Oxford: University Press, 1977).

3 (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991). Further citations will refer to both this text and the English translation, *The Ego and Its aOwn* (Cambridge: University Press, 1995).

4 <http://www.msges.de/bibliographie/bibliografieA-K.pdf>

<http://www.msges.de/bibliographie/bibliografieL-Z.pdf>

5 But another Lord, Lord Byron, well understood the true meaning of ‘Wellington’s Victory’:

Never had mortal man had such opportunity
 Except Napoleon, or abused it more:
 You might have freed fallen Europe from the unity
 Of tyrants, and been blest from shore to shore:
 And now – what is your fame? Shall the Muse tune it ye?
 Now – that the rabble’s first vain shouts are over?
 Go! hear it in your famished country’s cries!
 Behold the world! And curse your victories!

Beethoven might also have understood the true meaning of ‘Wellington’s Victory’ by penning one of his worst works of the same name.

6 On this and similar sentiments from Goethe and his contemporaries regarding the ‘beginning of a new era’ see Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, p 25ff.

7 Letter to Niethammer, July 5, 1816.

8 *Phenomenology*, 6; *Phänomenologie* 15.

9 *The Ego*, 282; *Der Einzige*, 358. ‘an der Grenzscheide einer Periode.’

10 *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: University Press, 1975), 55.

11 The radical changes within the political world during the last two centuries is illustrated by considering what Francis II of Austria wished to take after he surrounded claim to being the last Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire: ‘We, . . . by the grace of God Emperor of Austria; King of Jerusalem, Hungary, Bohemia, Dalmatia, Croatia, Slavonia, Galicia and Lodomeria, Archduke of Austria.; Duke of Lorraine, Salzburg, Würzburg, Franconia, Styria, Carinthia and Carniola, Grand Duke of Cracow, Grand Prince of Transylvania.; Margrave of Moravia.; Duke of Sandomir, Masovia, Lublin, Upper and Lower Silesia, Auschwitz and Zator, Texchen and Friule, Prince of Berchtesgaden and Mergentheim; Princely Count of Habsburg, Gorizia and Gradisca and of the Tirol; and Margrave of Upper and Lower Lusatia and in Istria, and President of the German Confederation.’ In this exhaustive listing of antique and dying titles, only one has remained, the last claimed by the ex-Emperor Francis, is hat of ‘President.’ It is worth noting that this modern title has even been hypocritically applied to the most dictatorial of dictators. In 1998, Kim il-sung was, by the Democratic People’s Republic of [North] Korea, elected to be the ‘Eternal President of the Republic’. The use of the terms ‘democratic’ and ‘Republic’ are also worth noting. As La Rochefoucauld said in 1678, ‘Hypocrisy is an homage that vice renders to virtue.’

12 Briefe I, #74, 114

- 13 *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), 229. There are more than a few works on Hegel's understanding and approval of the French Revolution, one of the best being by Joachim Ritter.
- 14 Both appear under one cover as *The End of History and The Last Man* (Macmillan, 1992).
- 15 *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1969).
- 16 See *Phänomenologie* on Editorial discussion of the various revisions to the title, 677.
- 17 See Robert R. Williams *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
- 18 *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 44.
- 19 See G.R.G. Mure *Retreat from Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958).
- 20 *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: University Press, 1967), 11.
- 21 Kojève, n. 6, 158-162.
- 22 *The End of History*, 272.
- 23 *Phenomenology* 329; *Phänomenologie* 385 [*Die Kampf der Aufklärung mit dem Aberglauben*].
- 24 *Phenomenology* 349; *Phänomenologie* 407 [*Die Wahrheit der Aufklärung*].
- 25 See Michael O. Hardimon's *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: University Press, 1994).
- 26 *Phenomenology* 355; *Phänomenologie* 414.
- 27 The title of the second section of Part I of *The Ego*.
- 28 *The Ego*, 393; *Der Einziger*, 331.
- 29 31 *Der einzige*, 295. [Brauchen Wir einen König? fragen sich die Nordamerikaner, und antworten: Nicht einen Heller ist er und sein Arbeit wert]
- 30 What is not supposed to be my concern! **First and foremost, the Good Cause, ***then God's cause, the cause of mankind, of truth, of freedom, of humanity, of justice; further, the cause of my people, my prince, my fatherland; finally, even the cause of Mind, and a thousand other causes. Only *my* cause is never to be my concern. 3.
- 31 E.g., James P. Henderson and John B. Davis, 'Adam Smith's Influence on Hegel's Philosophical writings' in *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* (1991), 13:184-204.; also Norbert Waszek *The Scottish Enlightenment and Hegel's Account of 'Civil Society'* (New York: Springer Verlag, 1988).
- 32 Stirner translated Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* [Untersuchungen über das Wesen und die Ursachen des Nationalreichthums] as well as J.B. Say's *A treatise on Political Economy* [*Ausführliches Lehrbuch der praktischen Politischen Oekonomie*]. These appeared in a series *Die National-Oekonomen der Franzosen und Engländer* published by Otto Wiegand, from 1845-47.
- 33 *The Ego*, 228; *Der Einzige*, 285 [Alle Versuche, über das Eigentum vernünftige Gesetze zu geben, liefern vom Busen der Liebe in ein wüstes Meer von Bestimmungen aus. Auch den Sozialismus und Kommunismus kann man hiervon nicht ausnehmen. Es soll jeder mit hinreichenden Mitteln versorgt werden, wobei wenig darauf ankommt, ob man sozialistisch sie noch in einem persönlichen Eigentum findet, oder kommunistisch aus der Gütergemeinschaft schöpft. Der Sinn der Einzelnen bleibt dabei derselbe, er bleibt Abhängigkeitssinn].
- 34 See MacDonald, Michael J. *Losing Spirit: Hegel, Levinas, and the Limits of Narrative Narrative* - Volume 13, Number 2, May 2005, pp. 182-194
- 35 *Phenomenology*, 479; *Phenomenologie*, 548. 'Religion hat sein Bewusstsein als solches noch nicht überwunden, oder, was dasselbe ist, sein wirkliches Selbstbewusstsein ist nicht der Gegenstand seines Bewusstseins'
- 36 *Phenomenology*, 21; *Phänomenologie*, 32-33. 'der Trennung des Wissens und der Wahrheit ist überwinden. Das Sein ist absolut vermittelt: – es ist substantieller Inhalt, der ebenso unmittelbar Eigentum des Ichs Hiermit beschließt sich die *Phänomenologie des Geistes*.'
- 37 *The Ego*, 135; *Der Einzige*, 168 [Ich bin Schöpfer und Geschöpf in Einem].
- 38 *The Ego*, 47 (Byington translation) 47; *Der Einzige*, 40 [Fremdheit ist ein Kennzeichen des 'Heiligen'. In allem Heiligen liegt etwas' Unheimliches', d. h. Fremdes, worin Wir nicht ganz heimisch und zu Hause sind].
- 39 *The Ego*, 282; *Der Einzige*, 358 [Mein Verkehr mit der Welt besteht darin, daß Ich sie genieße und so sie zu meinem Selbstgenuß verbräuche. Der Verkehr ist Weltgenuß und gehört zu meinem – Selbstgenuß].
- 40 *End of History*,
- 41 *Thus Spake*, 83; *Also Sprach*, 84.
- 42 *End of History*, 306.
- 43 *Thus Spake*, 11; *Also Sprach*, 13.
- 44 Beethoven, in concluded his great 9th Symphony with the same verses, redeeming himself for 'Wellington's Victory'.
- 45 Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (New York: Modern Library, . . .) 11; *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (Stuttgart: Kroner 1964) 13.
- 46 *Thus Spake*, 11-12; *Also Sprach*, 14.
- 47 *The Ego*, 43; *Der Einzige*, 46. [Denke nicht, daß Ich scherze oder bildlich rede, wenn Ich die am Höheren hängenden Menschen, und weil die ungeheure Mehrzahl hierher gehört, fast die ganze Menschenwelt für veritable* Narren, Narren im Tollhause ansehe]. An answer is suggested here to the long-debated issue of Nietzsche's relationship to Stirner: that Nietzsche, through his known admiration of Bruno Bauer, had indeed read Stirner. But what he discovered was a justification of 'the last man'. This was unacceptable, and so Stirner was left unmentioned. This would not be the only instance wherein a knowledge of Stirner was suppressed – as it was with such as Edmund Husserl, Carl Schmitt, Ernst Junger, and others documented in the work of Bernd Laska.
- 48 *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. S. Cherniak and J. Heckman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974) 40.