

## NOTES ON STIRNER AND NIETZSCHE - S. E. Parker

During the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of this there was a great awakening of interest in the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche. At the same time there began an assiduous search for his precursors. The philosopher of egoism, Max Stirner, was one of those suggested and some commentators even went so far as to claim the Nietzsche was his disciple. Others vehemently rejected this claim and argued that either Nietzsche knew nothing about Stirner or, if he did, was not influenced by him. It is certainly true that there are parallels between the thinking of Stirner and Nietzsche on some points, but are these enough to identify one with the other? I do not think so.

Both Stirner and Nietzsche are outspoken iconoclasts. Both emphatically reject the Judeo-Christian-humanist moral code. Both savage the idiocies of democratic egalitarianism. Both express anti-statist sentiments, but both scorn anarchists - Stirner in the figure of Proudhon, one of the first theoreticians of anarchism, and Nietzsche anarchists in general. Indeed, so often do they appear to speak with one voice that the claim that Nietzsche was a disciple of Stirner seems, at first glance, plausible. A few examples will show their similarities.

For Stirner, as for Nietzsche, "truth" is an instrument, not a sacred "thing-in-itself". Stirner writes "before me truths are as common and indifferent as things... There exists not even one truth... that has stability before me, and to which I subject myself" (The Ego and His Own - all quotations from Stirner are from this, his main work). This is not to say that there are no truths in the sense of the "fact of the matter" since "for thinking and speaking I need truths and words as I do food for eating," but that "all truths beneath me are to my liking; a truth above me, a truth I should have to direct myself by, I am not acquainted with." Nietzsche, too, states that the truths he proclaims are "my truths" (Beyond Good and Evil).

Stirner rejects possession by fixed ideas. When an idea becomes a "maxim" for a man "he himself is made a prisoner of it, so that it is not he that has the maxim, but rather it has him... The doctrines of the catechism become our principles before we find it out, and no longer brook rejection." For Nietzsche, also, convictions are prisons: "The man of faith, any kind of 'believer', is necessarily subservient to something outside himself: he cannot posit himself as an end... Any kind of faith is the expression of self-denial, and of estrangement from self." (The Anti-Christ)

Both Stirner and Nietzsche proclaim an "ethic of power". Stirner states: "Might is a fine thing, and useful for many purposes; for 'one goes further with a handful of might than with a bagful of right'. You long for freedom? You fools! If you took might, freedom would come of itself." According to Nietzsche life is "appropriation, injury, conquest of the strange and weak, suppression, severity, obtrusion of its own forms, incorporation, and, at least, putting it mildest, exploitation". (Beyond Good and Evil) When Stirner writes "what I can get by force I get by force,

and what I do not get by force I have no right to, nor do I give myself airs, or consolation with my imprescriptible right" one cannot imagine Nietzsche disagreeing.

However, despite their apparent agreement about certain matters, Stirner and Nietzsche are not one but two and their destinations lie in different directions. Both, for example agree that "God is dead", but their responses to this realization are not the same. For Stirner it is not enough that "God is dead" - "Man" must also perish in order to make way for himself, the unique one. "At the entrance to modern times stands the God-man. At its exit will only the God in the God-man evaporate? They did not think of this question, and thought they were through when in our days they brought to a victorious end the work of the Illumination, the vanquishing of God; they did not notice that Man has killed God in order to become now 'sole God on high'."

For Nietzsche, on the other hand, the "death of God" creates an anguishing moral void that must be filled with a new ideal for "mankind": the creation of the Superman. "All beings have created something beyond themselves, are ye going to be the ebb of this great tide? Behold I teach you Superman" (Thus Spake Zarathustra). Indeed the language he uses to describe the advent of his ideal being is that of religious prophet: "Awake and listen ye lonely ones! From the future winds are coming with a gentle beating of wings, and there cometh good tidings for fine ears/Ye lonely ones of today, ye who stand apart, ye shall one day be a people; from you, who have chosen yourselves, a chosen people shall arise and from it Superman (Thus Spake Zarathustra) In order to achieve this "elevation of the type man (Beyond Good and Evil) Nietzsche demands the sacrifice of self. Stirner, in contrast, repudiates any setting up a goal for future being and does not worry himself about "Man". For him the question is: "Why will you not take courage now to really make yourselves the central point and the main thing altogether?" The Stirnerian egoist's reply to the Nietzschean ideal is succinctly put by J. L. Walker: "We will not allow the world to wait for the overman. We are the overmen" (The Philosophy of Egoism).

Again, Nietzsche, for all of his fierce onslaughts on Judeo-Christian morality, is a moralist. In place of the levelling doctrines preached by the pious of the pulpit and the political platform, Nietzsche seeks to create two types of morality: that of the masters and that of the slaves. In negating existing morality his concern is to replace it with a new morality. Although Zarathustra is a "destroyer" and breaks "value to pieces", he does so in order "to be a creator of good and evil". Stirner, too, negates existing morality, but he does so not that he may cleanse it of any poison he believes infects it, but that he can put his own satisfaction in its place. He does not wish to submit to any moral principle no matter what fixed [idea] is invoked to sanction it: God, Man or Superman. However much Stirner might have relished reading Nietzsche's caustic criticism of current moralizing his conclusion would have been that Nietzsche is incapable of ridding himself of the domination of morality itself and so remains - a possessed man. The conscious egoist is literally "beyond good and evil" and accepts with an untroubled mind that all things within his power are "permissible" even if they are not all expedient.

In his The Philosophy of Nietzsche Georges Chatterton-Hill claims that Nietzsche "depasses" Stirner because "with Stirner the individual is himself the ultimo ratio, and his own individual satisfaction constitutes the justification of his egoism." With Nietzsche "the egoism of the

individual is justified only in the light of its ultimate value to the race... Nietzsche has gone out beyond Stirner. He has adopted Stirner's conception and surpassed it." Chatterton-Hill is wrong. Nietzsche does not adopt "Stirner's conception" and hence cannot "surpass" it. At bottom Stirner and Nietzsche are two disparate facts that cannot be reasoned into one. Despite Nietzsche's scintillating idol-smashing he is haunted by yet another idol: the idol of an abstractified "Man" scheduled for redemption by the creation of the Superman. Nietzsche's championing of "egoism" is conditioned by the achievement of this goal and he frankly states that when an individual does not correspond to his prescriptive ideal of an "ascending course of mankind" then "it is society's (sic) duty to suppress egoism" (The Will to Power) This is not the view of an egoist, but that of a moralist demanding that a choice be made of his view that "mankind" is more important than individuals. Nietzsche's philosophy implies that supra-individual "entities" like "mankind" or "race" are entitled to the subordination of my interests and even the sacrifice of my life. Stirner, on the contrary, rejects all such sacrificial creeds. He joyfully prizes himself as more important than "mankind" or its "ascending course". He does not concern himself with myths of human redemption, but with the real world of his own, unique being.

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## STIRNER ON NIETZSCHE?

Editorial Note: In 1917 appeared a work entitled The Will to Freedom. Its author, a Christian theologian named J. N. Figgis, devotes several pages to the relationship between Stirner and Nietzsche. He concludes them by imagining what Stirner's response to Nietzsche would have been had they been contemporaries:

"Bah!" he would have said, "free air, pure air. Get out of my sight with you Gesperster, your will to power, your life with a capital L, and your superman - superghost you should have said. You call yourself Zarathustra the ungodly, the Antichrist, the immoralist. Go away! You are no better than the cobweb spinner of Konigsberg and his great-aunt the Categorical Imperative. Your eternal recurrence, and all your talk of eternity, the aim of all delight, your belief in the genii of the ring, your finding eternity in the moment recalls to me that hoary old humbug of Jena, who found the Absolute Idea objectified in the Prussian State. As to your superman, he is a ghost - like all other ghosts, and your disciples will slaves like the rest of their crowd. Idealists, Comtists, Liberty-loving atheists - all of you are no better than the Christians you despise.

"Yes, I tell you you are a Christian, like all the others, except that you have added self-deception to their vices. You think you are new, yet you are as much a preacher of duty as Lycurgus. Your Dionysus cult is religion back once more. Whether you call it Dionysus or Christ, it is all the same, if you are to fall down in reverence. Capital letters are all idolatry. You even make an idol out of Life. What is Life, pray, that I am to fall down and worship it? I reject the monstrous slavery of your amor fati. Besides, I know nothing about it. I only know that I am here.

"Poor fellow! You have tried hard to be shocking, and have succeeded only in being silly. You actually talk of redemption, of the salvation of man. Go back to your Frau Pastorin and to Church."

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When the Drury Lane Theatre burned to the ground, it destroyed Sheridan's limited wealth. Throughout the fire he sat in a coffee house across the street, watching his livelihood going up in smoke. When a friend commented on his phlegmatic behaviour, Sheridan replied: "A man may surely be allowed to take a glass of wine by his own fireside."

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## STOURZH ON STIRNER AND NIETZSCHE

(The following is extracted from the unpublished English translation of Max Stirners Philosophie des Ich by Herbert Stourzh, Berlin, 1923)

Compared with Nietzsche, Stirner has been termed "lacking in temperament," to which one can only reply that this judgement based on taste derives from erroneous presuppositions. Stirner's teaching does not abolish longing; its redemption is not extinction. The end of "possession" is not the end of inspiration, nor is the abolition of "fixed ideas" the abolition of the ideal. Max Messer aptly remarks of the "egoist": "It is not from the right of universal validity or of the universal human applicability of this ideal world, but from the right of the personality that he takes for himself that the egoist's courage comes and his ability to resist and to hold his own in his own world... no matter how crazy and useless this world may appear to others."<sup>1</sup> Stirner's quietism is a strange quietism, all right. He is indeed quietistic with regard to prescribed temperament, and passive with regard to decreed emotions. Yet his joy in the free ideal that can replace service to the fixed idea is accompanied by all that vitality and activism which first makes possible the supplanting of the allocentric with the egocentric.

Regardless of whether one looks more at the negative or the positive side of Stirnerian "egoism," more at his joyful nihilism or his buoyant self-confident teaching of "selfhood," or (in another dimension) more at his relationship to the outward or the inward - one can everywhere observe the same wonderful elasticity that the special attitude (or rather change in attitude) of the "unique individual" necessarily brings with it.

Oswald Spengler says of Nietzsche: "... he himself did not fulfil his demand that the thinker should stand beyond good and evil. He wanted to be a sceptic and a prophet, a critic and a herald of morality at the same time."<sup>2</sup>

Does Stirner, the moral critic and moral sceptic, fulfil this demand? - which, incidentally, Spengler himself does not.

To be sure, Stirner too is a "herald of morality" and a prophet - though this time truly beyond good and evil. There no doubt that Stirner - without contradicting himself - would have seen in Nietzsche a "man possessed," a "fanatical" servant of "fixed ideas," a slave of his master-morality exchanging old chains for new. One will look in vain for imperative systems of feeling and behaviour in Stirner. Though Nietzsche's artistry is admirable, and though his polyphony and polychromy deserve special mention, he nevertheless often mingles the meaningful with the chaotic. John Henry Mackay, the rediscoverer of Stirner, expresses himself on this point with particular vehemence. He calls it "an absurdity not deserving serious rebuttal to compare Stirner's profound, tranquil and

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1 Max Stirner Berlin, 1907, p35

2 Der Untergang des Abendlandes, Munich, 1920, I, p.473.

lucid genius with Nietzsche, that confused, vacillating, self-contradictory spirit staggering about almost helplessly between truth and error." He continues: "I have observed that most Nietzsche enthusiasts talk about Stirner with a sort of cool and most comical superiority: they do not quite dare approach this giant and are secretly afraid of his stringent logic. With Nietzsche they do not need to think so much: they let themselves be lulled by his language, while the real Nietzsche usually remains a stranger to them."<sup>3</sup> Instructive too is Messer's assessment, particularly since it is positive towards Nietzsche on the whole: "Regardless of how much more prolific, powerful and comprehensive Nietzsche is, it was Stirner who at one stroke produced that sublime perception to which, but not beyond which, Nietzsche rose. And so Stirner with his one book is like a monolith rising directly up from the plain like a narrow cone, while Nietzsche's work resembles a long mountain range with delightful valleys and icy chasms, whose highest peak scarcely overtops the summit of the solitary pointed rock."<sup>4</sup> Even an adversary of Stirner like Kronenberg confesses that it is particularly Stirner's "greater clarity and intellectual energy" that distinguishes him from Nietzsche.<sup>5</sup> Edward von Hartmann, too, finds that Stirner's book "is stylistically the equal of Nietzsche's writings, while it towers above them in philosophical content."<sup>6</sup>

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## LETTER

If one has to assume that liberty, as Giovanni Papini proposes (EGO 13), is a universal ideal to be parcelled out in equal shares to each individual, then the inevitable conclusion resulting from this belief would be a condition of despotism, but anyone with sleight-of-hand logic can stack the deck to come out with such pre-selected conclusions.

I would like to propose the notion that Liberty can be thought of as a practicable concept rather than an ideal, It can be a useful tool in the hands of a self-conscious individual.

Liberty is a state of being; one being at liberty, without restraint to act. There is nothing sacred about it. Mother Nature puts all sorts of perimeters on one's actions. Society heaps on another bunch and individuals acting on their own behalves just about top off the restrictions that an individual can run into constantly in daily life. So what good is a concept that has been reduced so well by the powers that are? Liberty is a useful concept precisely because it enables an individual to define his own power, what he is at liberty to do, and another's power, that which restricts him.

It's as simple as that. You use a ruler to measure short distances around you, you take up liberty likewise as a tool to measure the extent of your own power.

Michael Muir-Harmony

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3 Max Stirner: sein Leben und sein Werk, Berlin-Treptow, 1910, p.21.

4 Messer, p.4.

5 Moderne Philosophen, Munich, 1899, p.182.

6 Cf. M. Kurtschinsky, Der Apostel des Egoismus. Max