EW PERSONS FAMILIAR with the writings of Marx would deny the importance of *The German Ideology*; yet its belated publication and translation has long had the effect of obscuring most of its contents.¹ It has rarely been read in its entirety; the long section Marx devoted to a phrase-by-phrase dissection of Max Stirner’s *Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum*, in particular, has been almost completely ignored.² Because Roy Pascal’s translation of *The German Ideology* omitted Marx’s attack on Stirner, even though this section (“Sankt Max”) comprises fully three-quarters of the book Marx wrote, the erroneous belief seems to have grown up, even among Marxologists, that “Sankt Max” is irrelevant or unimportant. This belief is not supported by an examination of its text. “Sankt Max” is anything but peripheral to the argument of the rest of *The German Ideology*, a work whose most important themes are fully developed only in “Sankt Max.” Without an understanding of Stirner, the significance of *The German Ideology* cannot be fully grasped. Most commentators, regarding Stirner as unworthy of attention, have failed to notice that the Left-Hegelians themselves had a far higher opinion of him.³ Marx, for his part, considered Stirner’s book to be the consummation of Young-Hegelian thought, embodying and exemplifying its worst features to the point of caricature. It is surprising, therefore, that “Sankt Max” has been subjected to no critical analysis, when it is known to be the longest

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section of the major work in which Marx separated himself decisively from the Young-Hegelians. The task remains both to credit Marx's critique of Stirner with the importance it deserves, and to consider this critique in its context. Marx considered the issues Stirner raised to be examples par excellence of the shortcomings of Young-Hegelian thought: "people have only to change their consciousness to make everything in the world all right." Stirner goes even further, "believing Don Quixote's assurances that by a mere moral injunction he can, without further ado, convert the material forces arising from the division of labour into personal forces."4

Stirner also saw revolution in the same light as he saw faith, morality, and legality—as demands upon the individual self, displacing its particularity (Eigenheit) with various conceptions of the "true" self to which the empirical self must aspire. Stirner aimed to undermine all such demands for self-sacrifice by spelling out their implications. What needs to be safeguarded, on this view, is the very Eigenheit on which all known forms of society and state had fed. Only the association (Verein) of egoists, claims Stirner, would not make the individual model himself on, and measure up to, something greater than himself, be it political, social, ideological, or religious. The union of egoists can be legitimized, in this case, only by not usurping the self-defined privileges of the individual, and, indeed, by positively preserving and enlarging his self-assertiveness and untrammeled particularity. Stirner attacked any revolutionary mentality relying on moral postulates or dependent on an "ought" (Sollen) in the belief that evil resided and consisted in the very existence of ideals.

The point here is not that Stirner convinced Marx that what passed for revolutionary enthusiasm among the Young-Hegelians was bogus. Marx by 1845 stood in no need of being convinced of this. Stirner, on the other hand, did raise the question whether in succumbing to revolutionary ideals men were simply trading one form of subjection for another, at the immense cost of their own individuality. This was one of the central questions to which Marx responded at great length and in great detail throughout The German Ideology, where he attempted to demonstrate that communism and individuality, properly understood, are anything but incompatible, despite Stirner's conviction that the two were incommensurate; and that his own critique, far from condemning the present or its Young-Hegelian vindicators in the light of some abstract categories or principles, was embodied in the real movement of history itself. Marx further aimed to demonstrate that history as a rational process transcends all purely philosophical critiques and standards, and that communism transcends the Kantian is-ought distinction that Stirner, in his bizarre way, had resuscitated.
Marx’s argument is a powerful one, and has long been regarded so, but without an adequate understanding of why he made it, and whose points he was meeting. That Marx’s attack on Feuerbach was something of a volte-face in view of his earlier near-adulation of Feuerbach has often been noticed (although the suddenness of the transition has been overemphasized); but it has rarely been recognized that it was none other than Stirner who had impelled Marx into taking this position.

It has rarely even been recognized that Stirner’s Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum itself was an attack upon Feuerbach’s Das Wesen des Christenthums, although the very structure of Stirner’s book—its division into “theological-false” (“Der Mensch”) and “anthropological-true” (“Ich”) parts—mirrors and indicates its target. So does its subject matter. Stirner attempted to meet Feuerbach on Feuerbach’s own terms: both Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum and Das Wesen des Christenthums are concerned with men’s alienated attributes and their reappropriation; both arguments are cast in terms of autonomy. This is not to suggest their agreement. David McLellan has pointed out that Stirner’s “analysis of the modern age is a sort of demonology of the spirits to which humanity has been successively enslaved”;5 Stirner was convinced that the ultimate expression of such oppressive spirituality was Feuerbach’s book.

The weakness in Feuerbach’s argument that Stirner seizes upon is rooted in Feuerbach’s conception of man’s divinity, not as something man had to build or to create, but as something to be regained at the level of consciousness. Once it is regained, man must by implication give way before his new-found divinity. Stirner maintained that “divinity” will be as oppressive and burdensome a taskmaster as any other spirit or collectivity to which individuals, historically, have succumbed. Accordingly, Feuerbach’s self-proclaimed atheism was half-hearted. There is much truth to Stirner’s accusation. “A true atheist,” said Feuerbach, “is one who denies the predicates of the divine being, not the one to whom the subject of these predicates is nothing.” Faith in an eternally present divinity is compatible, on this definition, with true atheism; Feuerbach’s supposed iconoclasm, then, is no more than what Stirner called “a theological insurrection”; the relocated divine, Stirner insisted, is no less divine because of a change of position.6 Stirner went on to claim that Feuerbach’s celebrated reversal of subject and predicate—his substitution of man for God as the agent of divinity—changes nothing; mankind as a collectivity is just as oppressive and sacred as God, because the real individual continues to be related to it in a religious manner. Feuerbach, extending predication into philosophical reasoning, claimed that “we need only make the predicate into the subject in order to arrive at the
unconcealed, pure and naked truth.” Stirner believed that this position obscures the need to transcend all predication, all self-renunciation, before any “higher power.” All that Feuerbach had achieved is an abstract change in the object of self-renunciation. He does not alter its terms, which in effect leaves self-renunciation itself stronger than ever, as its character is reinforced by Feuerbach’s inaccurate but bombastic claims on its behalf. Feuerbach, said Stirner, is just a pious atheist.7 Feuerbach himself, in his reply to Stirner, admitted that in his eyes the statement that there is no God was only the negative form of the “practical and religious, i.e., positive statement” that “Man is the God,” which was precisely Stirner’s point.8

Marx, of course, did not share Stirner’s belief in the oppressive force of Feuerbach’s relocated divinity.9 But this should not blind us to the similarity—limited though this is—between the attacks of Marx and Stirner on Feuerbach. There is no doubt that Marx was influenced by Stirner’s assault on Feuerback’s anthropocentrism as being no more than the abstract love for an abstract “man” at the expense of any concern for real, individual men. Marx’s attacks on Feuerbach in The German Ideology often proceed from a very similar position. Marx maintains there that Feuerbach “only conceives [man] as an object of the senses, not as sensuous activity, because he still remains in the world of theory . . . [and] stops at the abstraction ‘man’ . . . he never manages to conceive the sensuous world as the total, living, sensuous activity of the individuals composing it.”10 Again, in his attack on the “True Socialists,” Marx extends this argument, claiming that by casting their argument in terms of “man” they return to the “realm of ideology” from the “realm of history.”11

Stirner’s accusation that Marx was a follower of Feuerbach, though inaccurate, had enough bite to impel Marx to redefine his own position. Stirner, attacking Feuerbach’s notion of “species-being” (Gattungswesen) which was an expression of empty humanitarianism, singles out Marx’s use of this concept in Zur Judenfrage for particular attention.12 Stirner’s choice of target in this instance was disingenuous. His accusation fails to perceive that Marx’s extension of Feuerbach’s notion of alienation into the political realm is wholly incompatible with Feuerbach’s theory. Once shifted in this way, alienation no longer requires a mere adjustment of consciousness for its rectification. A reality such as the state cannot be abrogated by revealing at the level of consciousness its unsound character—although this is exactly what Stirner believed. Alien politics can be abolished only by actively transforming the real world. The earthly product of alienation, to Hegel as well as to Marx, is no fiction residing in
Feuerbach’s imaginary heaven.\textsuperscript{13} Yet Stirner’s attack on Feuerbach is sufficiently insensitive to portray Marx unthinkingly and inaccurately as a Feuerbachian, and even to pinpoint as evidence of this the very essay in which Marx had signified and proclaimed his liberation from the supine, passive materialism of Feuerbach.

It is apparent that a re-evaluation of Stirner’s argument is in order. Not only does Stirner embody the worst faults of the Young-Hegelians as a whole; Lobkowicz’s point, that it was Stirner who impelled Marx into taking the position he did against Feuerbach, against Stirner himself, and against the entire Left-Hegelian school, is largely borne out by a more detailed examination of the evidence. Marx, rejecting Feuerbachian humanism, had to avoid aligning himself with the extreme individualism Stirner propounded: it was Stirner himself who gave Marx the inescapable opportunity of doing this, enabling Marx to use Stirner as the touchstone of his critique of all the other Young-Hegelians.

This explains much about \textit{The German Ideology} that has hitherto passed unnoticed. The very opening words to the preface are a superbly ironic—but not at all unjust—paraphrase of Stirner’s argument in \textit{Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum}.

Hitherto men have constantly made up for themselves false conceptions about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be. They have arranged their relationships according to their ideas of God, of normal man, etc. The phantoms of their brains have got out of their hands. They, the creators, have bowed down before their creations. Let us liberate them from the chimeras, ideas, dogmas, imaginary beings under the yoke of which they are pining away. Let us revolt against the rule of thoughts.\textsuperscript{14}

Seen as a \textit{précis} of Young-Hegelian ideology in general and of Stirner’s thought in particular, this opening phrase is far from inaccurate. It also tells us what “the German ideology” is and why this phrase was selected as the title of the book.

What distinguishes Stirner both from other anarchists and from other egoists is his typically Young-Hegelian notion of the dominance of consciousness in history, together with its Young-Hegelian corollary that all we need to do to change reality is to master our thoughts.\textsuperscript{15} Far from sharing the psychological determinism of Hobbes or Spinoza, to whom the assertive ego could act only on its own behalf, Stirner despairingly maintained that throughout history men had submitted themselves voluntarily to a sequence of outside beliefs. \textit{Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum} is a diatribe against the effects of these successive \textit{idées fixes}, against what Stirner’s translator calls “wheels in the head,”\textsuperscript{16} beliefs that
have worked successfully to prevent the ego’s acting on its own behalf. The autonomous individual was to Stirner not a descriptive category but a goal of future human endeavor which has now become reality only among the outcasts of bourgeois society—criminals and paupers. What has stood in its way is consciousness, conceived not in the Hegelian but in the Young-Hegelian manner as being “alien.” Without perceiving that Stirner has much more in common with the Young-Hegelians than with other egoists, we are likely to misconstrue his argument (as have many of his later anarchist admirers). Stirner, for instance, did not share Mandeville’s belief that private vices added up to public benefit; he considered any conception of public benefit to be nonsense. Egoism, made operative, on Stirner’s argument, would destroy all known forms of society. Again, Stirner attacked Fichte’s “absolute ego” because it is a goal which might dominate individuals, and because the goal in question concerned the realization of rational universality, a project Stirner regarded as senseless. Stirner’s ego is both individual and factitious and rules out obligation and reciprocity in a manner recalling (if anybody) Spinoza; Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum is an inventory of obstacles to the free play of the ego, obstacles grounded in consciousness, which throughout his argument is awarded typically Young-Hegelian importance.

Stirner had recourse to a muted theory of history, implying that the spirituality he detested had had a progressive function throughout history. The dominance of concepts had made the individual master of his natural environment, though it had done so, not for the benefit of the individual, but for its own sake.17 Although the culmination of the process was to be not the reign of spirit but the supremacy of the assertive ego, Stirner considered the historical process itself to be the autogenesis of man propelled by spirit. Whatever his understanding of Hegel, a broadly Hegelian approach to history had rubbed off on Stirner. The villain of the piece, to Stirner as to Hegel, was Christianity. Disdain for the world and de-valuation of the individual were the idées maîtresses of Christian spirituality, a characteristic expression of which was (according to Stirner) the belief of Descartes that only as mind is man alive. In loving the spiritual alone the Christian can love no particular person; to the extent that he finds himself in spirit, the individual loses himself in reality. “The concern of Christianity . . . is for the divine . . . at the end of heathenism, the divine becomes the extramundane, at the end of Christianity, it becomes the intramundane. . . . Christianity begins with God’s becoming man and carries on its work of conversion and redemption through all time to prepare for God a reception in all men and in everything human, and to penetrate everything with the spirit.”18 The Christian Sollen denigrates
the individual,\textsuperscript{19} and Stirner never disagrees with the Feuerbachian point that Christianity signified man’s enslavement to the categories man has himself created.

Nevertheless Stirner believed that it was Feuerbach himself who had expressed in the most extreme possible form the eminently Christian principle which locates divine spirit within the individual.\textsuperscript{20} If any individual makes \textit{Geist} or \textit{Sollen} the center of his existence, he bifurcates himself, exalting the “better,” spiritual part over the paltrier remainder. Feuerbach’s relocation of human essence is no solution, because human essence, still being brought into opposition to the real individual, continues to split him into “essential” and “nonessential” selves. According to Stirner, Feuerbachian humanism is not the denial but the ultimate expression of spirituality, the \textit{ne plus ultra} of man’s enslavement to the categories he has himself created, and, as such, it acts as a signal for the inevitable advent of the egoists’ \textit{Verein} and for the overcoming of the state and its morality.\textsuperscript{21} As Christianity from its outset had located divine essence within the individual, Feuerbach was no more than another Christian philosopher. Such a criticism of Feuerbach was less unorthodox and fanciful at the time than might initially be supposed. Indeed, it was accepted by many of the Young-Hegelians, to whom the really radical critique of Christianity had proceeded not from Feuerbach but from Hegel himself.\textsuperscript{22}

Stirner believed that if the individual followed the commands of conscience or vocation, thought, determining his actions, dominated the world. In finding himself in spirit, the individual loses himself in reality. This loss of self, however, takes different successive forms at different historical stages, forms which run parallel to the stages of false discovery Stirner outlines in a curious, paradigmatic section of his book, “Ein Menschensleben,” with which he sets the tone of \textit{Der Enzige}.\textsuperscript{23} One particular shift may be singled out as being political as well as religious.

This is the shift to Protestantism. Whereas the Catholic, says Stirner, is content with the carrying-out of an external command, the Protestant is his own \textit{Geistlicher}, using his “internal secret policeman,” conscience, to watch over every motion of his mind, every natural impulse. The individual, \textit{pari passu}, becomes a political protestant in relation to his God, the state.\textsuperscript{24} Liberalism entails the absence of intermediaries in politics, as does Protestantism in religion. Stirner’s section on political liberalism clearly bears the imprint of Marx’s \textit{Zur Judenfrage}; he repeats Marx’s notion that just as religious freedom merely means that religion is free, freedom of conscience that conscience is free, political freedom means that the state is free. But Stirner twists this notion into a quite different
direction; “liberalism,” he says, “simply [introduced] other concepts—human instead of divine, political instead of ecclesiastical, scientific instead of doctrinal, real conflicts instead of crude dogmas and precepts. Now nothing but mind rules the world.”25 Liberalism accentuates and institutionalizes the Christian depreciation of the individual. “The rights of man . . . have the meaning that the man in me entitled me to this and that. I as individual am not entitled but ‘man’ has the right and entitles me.”26 All collectivities, all general concepts and tasks tyrannize the individual to the extent that their liberty is his slavery. With the advent of Burgerthum, said Stirner, “it was not the individual man—and he alone is man—that became free, but the citizen, the citoyen, the political man, who for that very reason is not man.” Although Burgerthum requires an impersonal sachliche authority, the submissiveness resulting from this “protestant” absence of intermediaries is increased rather than diminished.27 Without the denigration of the individual for the sake of an abstract Sollen, the state cannot subsist. The kernel of the state, in Stirner’s view, like the kernel of morality, is the abstraction “man”; each validates only the “man” in the individual.

It is for this reason that Stirner proceeded to pin his hopes, not on political man, but on the man held most in contempt by the citizen—the man despised for having “nothing to lose,” because he “lacks settlement”: the pauper. State and citizen regard him as shiftless and immoral, and as having no ties or guarantees. Although Stirner uses the word prolétarian, his class of paupers has nothing in common with Marx’s proletariat.28 Stirner fails to distinguish the pauper from the proletarian just as he fails to distinguish the citoyen from the bourgeois. He does, however, specify the opposition of these two confused categories, arguing that the bourgeoisie maintain pauperism, which provides them with a justification of their own superior position. This position is defended by the phrase das Gelt gibt Geltung.29 The bourgeoisie uses the state to repress paupers, should these become unruly. By the same token, as the pauper has nothing to lose “he does not need the protection of the state for his nothing. . . .” The principle of the state, on this view, is the denial of individuality (Eigenheit) epitomized not only in the empty moralism which the state relies upon but also in its refusal or inability to alter the condition of the pauper. “Pauperism,” says Stirner, “is the valuelessness of me, the phenomenon that I cannot realize value from myself. For this reason state and pauperism are one and the same. The state does not let me come to my value, and continues in existence only through my valuelessness; it is forever intent upon getting value from me, i.e., exploiting me, turning me to account, using me up, even if the only use it gets from me consists in
my supplying a proles. It wants me to be its creature. To ask the state to abolish pauperism is to ask it to deny its own principle.”

One of the faults of Stirner’s argument at this juncture is that he slides from this proposition to the completely different idea that labour is exploited (ausgebeutet) as a spoil (Kriegsbeute) of the enemy, the possessors, so that “if labour becomes free, the state is lost.” Labor has an egoistic character; the laborer is the egoist. Stirner’s fervent and uncritical belief in the material power of reflective categories frequently led him to suppose that disparate elements of reality are linked because they express some “principle” or other.

Stirner, of course, is also incoherent in other respects. Although Eigenheit, which he distinguished from Freiheit, is said to be man’s essence, it is never regarded as being alien or oppressive in the way that all other “essential” categories are. Stirner shirked the issue by maintaining that every society and every state (which he fails to distinguish clearly) exist at the expense of the individual’s Eigenheit. The individual’s loss of Eigenheit nourishes both state and society, each of which is man’s alienated essence, sacred (heilig) and out of reach. A corollary of Stirner’s ideology of submission is that “my own will is the state’s destroyer”—an anarchist position, to be sure, but one which Stirner himself denied was “revolutionary.” Revolution of the type advocated by Weitling (who can be included with Feuerbach and Proudhon among Stirner’s bêtes noires) in Stirner’s view amounted to just another variant of faith, morality, and domination, to another Sollen displacing the individual’s Eigenheit with its conception of the “true vocation,” of the sacred, of the alien. Any submission to a revolutionary task must rest on men’s belief in the sacredness of a precept, which is precisely what men most need to overcome. Revolutionary organization is an agency of fanaticism, of morality, of de-valuation of the individual. Like the state, it appeals and must appeal to collectivity. In succumbing to revolutionary fervor or ends, men are simply trading one form of submission and self-mutilation for another. It was at this point that Marx took issue with Stirner, no longer scornfully and easily dismissing Stirner’s learning, logic, and argument, but outlining at great length the dangers inherent in such a false view of revolution.

As an unremitting anarchist, Stirner believed that the overcoming of the state had to be taken, self-assertively; if freedom is simply received, it amounts to mere “emancipation.” Yet Stirner believed revolutionary activity to be no more than yet another demand for self-sacrifice. Weitling’s communism and Proudhon’s socialism are as “religious” in this sense as all previous systems demanding sacrifice of the sovereign
individual. Stirner attempted to resolve the tension within this extreme individualist version of anarchism by distinguishing revolution from insurrection, a distinction which Marx regarded as "comic." Revolution, said Stirner, is merely another "human act," a social and political act overturning some established order; insurrection, by contrast, Stirner defined as a rising of individuals without regard to future arrangements. Whereas revolution aims at new arrangements, insurrection on this view aims at our no longer letting ourselves be arranged. Its object is less the overthrow of an established order than the individual's autonomous act of elevation above all established order, including the "union of egoists."

This "union" (Verein) is best defined in contradistinction to the state and its deficiencies. Stirner's anarchism pays tribute to the Hegelian notion of the state as the historical embodiment of morality; by rejecting both the state and morality on the same grounds, Stirner underscores their connection. The state to Stirner at once exercised domination and remained an idée fixe, an "apparition" by which men are "possessed." (Stirner's contradictory view of the state recalls Feuerbach's view of the way Christianity oppresses mankind although—or because—its content is illusory.) Consequently, Stirner's critique of the state is less forceful than that of almost any other anarchist; his Young-Hegelian tendencies led him to play down the coercive force of state repression, which plays little part in his argument. Stirner likewise says very little about forms of the state, beyond the propositions that any state is a despotism even if all men despotize over one another, and that the liberal state reinforces the coercive power of conscience. The liberal state itself is no more than a mechanical compounding; the state machine moves the clockwork of individual minds, the wheels in people's heads, only so long as none of them work autonomously. The assertion of Eigenheit, removing the individual's destitution of will, would destroy the mechanism.

The idea that men obey the state because they are deluded does not lead, however, to the proposition that the state itself is a delusion. Marx in Zur Judenfrage had seen this difference very clearly; but Stirner, who had read and gained much from Marx's article, still believed that the rule of the state was a blatant, paradigmatic case of men's being ruled by their own illusions. His argument is that as man is not by nature a zoon politikon, and as only the political in man is expressed in the state, political life is a fabrication. This leads to the further proposition that law embodies no coercive force—a proposition rightly ridiculed by Marx.35

Another aspect of Stirner's critique of politics is its lack of specificity. The state is presented throughout his argument as an agent of sacredness, of the relocation of the divine; but so is society, so is morality, so is
revolution. There is no clear distinction even between state and society in Stirner. Society—which is man's natural condition, his state of nature—is not an illusion in the same sense as the state is, and, unlike the state, society is never linked with pauperism. Nothing in society is said to correspond to the internalization of the commands of law or to the total surrender of man that the state requires, the taking over, by the Protestant-liberal state, of the whole man, with all of his attributes and faculties.

Marx, on the other hand, had already recognized what Stirner denied—that total debasement of the individual was precisely what alienation in the labor-process involved. It is for this reason that The German Ideology concentrates more on the social division of labor than on alienation in the labor-process. The issue in Stirner's eyes, however, was not society's denial of the liberty of the individual, but the state's denial of his Eigenheit. To Marx, it was evident that Stirner saw things upside down; he even proceeded from the proposition that the state, like all sacred entities, cannot subsist without the subject's limited understanding, to the proposition that whereas society rests content with making the individual the bondsman of another, or of itself, the state can be maintained only if the valueless individual is made the bondsman of himself!36 This again was a point Marx had in effect already answered in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844), emphasizing not the political and moral process of self-bondage but its economic and social process. Its home is not the state, but the labor process.

Of all forms of political organization, if we are to believe Stirner, only his own Verein would exert no moral influence or legal constraint. It alone would not displace the individual's Eigenheit; the individual, indeed, would be and remain more than the Verein. We should aspire, says Stirner, not to the chimera of community but to our own "one-sidedness" and combine with others simply in order to multiply our own powers, and only for the duration of a given task.37 If the state "consumes" the individual, the individual will "consume" the Verein. Small wonder that Marx regarded the Verein as the "ideal copy" of Hegel's civil society.38 Stirner himself portrayed it as a "free-for-all" in which everyone should have as much as he can appropriate. Over and above the reactionary (and rather Proudhonian) connotations of wishing to replace "competition of things" with "competition of persons" (which Marx insisted characterized the beginnings, not the developed form, of competition), Stirner's "egoistical property... is nothing more than ordinary or bourgeois property sanctified."39 Stirner seems to be the theorist par excellence of what C. B. MacPherson was to call "possessive individualism."
In the Verein, Marx goes on, "every relation, whether caused by economic conditions or direct compulsion is regarded as a relation of 'agreement'...[and] all property belonging to others is relinquished to them by us and remains with them only until we have the power to take it from them...in practice the 'Association' reaches agreement with Sancho (Stirner) with the aid of a stick....This 'agreement' is a mere phrase, since everyone knows that the others enter into it with the secret reservation that they will reject it on the first possible occasion." Moreover, Stirner's conception of "unique" property (property not being merely retained in the Verein, but perfected there, in the sense of no longer needing any legal guarantees) leads him into contradiction. Marx paraphrases the egoist thus:

I see in your property something that is not yours but mine; since every ego does likewise, they see in it the universal, by which we arrive at the modern-German philosophical interpretation of ordinary, special, and exclusive private property.40

What little Stirner says about the form of his Verein lends support to Marx's accusation that Stirner in effect "lets the old society continue in existence...[and] strives to retain the present state of affairs," for "Sancho [Stirner] retains in his association the existing form of land-ownership, division of labour and money...[and] with such premises Sancho cannot do without the state...[or] escape the fate of having a special 'peculiarity' (Eigenheit) prescribed for him by the division of labour."41

Not only the Verein stands condemned in this way; Marx was also critical of its basis, Stirner's egoist, who should on Stirner's logic be an imaginary being.42 "The ego of Stirner's, which is the final outcome of the hitherto existing world...is not a 'corporeal individual' but a category constructed on the Hegelian method."43 Nor is this all.

Since every individual is altogether different from every other, it is by no means necessary that what is foreign, holy for one individual should be so for another individual: it even cannot be so....St. Sancho could at most have said: for me, St. Sancho, the state, religion, etc. are the alien, the Holy. Instead of this, he has to make them the absolutely Holy, the Holy for all individuals....How little it occurs to him to make each "unique" the measure of his own uniqueness, how much he uses his own uniqueness as a measure, a moral norm to be applied to other individuals, like a true moralist, forcing them into his Procrustean bed...is already evident.44
Again, as Stirner’s historical stages and conditions are the embodiment of ideas, the success of the egoist can consist only in “overcoming ideas.” Marx insists that “for Stirner, right does not arise from the material conditions of people and the resulting antagonism of people against one another but from their struggle against their own concept which they should ‘get out of their heads’” without ever touching the world itself. This means that Stirner “canonizes history,” transforming historical conditions into ideas, “[seizing] everything by its philosophical tail,” and “taking as literal truth all the illusions of German speculative philosophy; indeed, he has made them still more speculative. . . . For him, there exists only the history of religion and philosophy—and this exists only for him through the medium of Hegel, who with the passage of time has become the universal crib, the reference source for all the latest German speculators about principles and manufacturers of systems.” History is falsified and mystified; “individuals are first of all transformed into ‘consciousness’ and the world into ‘object’ thereby the manifold variety of forms of life and history is reduced to a different attitude of consciousness.” Stirner, “a clumsy copier of Hegel” who “registers ignorance of what he copies,” outlines, in “Ein Menschensleben” and elsewhere, successive stages of consciousness, each of which confronts a ready-made world. Such a picture, to Marx, was quite opposed to Hegel’s approach. Hegel had never confronted any historical period with so simplistic a methodology and never had forced history to conform to his design in this way. Marx’s conception of praxis, indeed, a conception derived from certain aspects of Hegel’s conception of the will, amounts in this light to a transformation of a Hegelian approach against the insensitivity of the Young-Hegelians, particularly Feuerbach and Stirner.

At the stage in Marx’s development indicated by the “Theses on Feuerbach,” consciousness is not something found but something made. His attack in the “Theses on Feuerbach” is directed, by implication, against Stirner as well as Feuerbach, as Stirner too ascribed constitutive power to consciousness. Indeed, for all the bombast and accuracy of his attack of Feuerbach, Stirner himself falls prey to this typically Feuerbachian shortcoming.

Because the holy is something alien, everything alien is transformed into the Holy; and because everything Holy is a bond, a fetter, all bonds and fetters are transformed into the Holy. By this means St. Sancho has already achieved the result that everything alien becomes for him a mere appearance, a mere idea, against which he frees himself merely by protesting against it.
This is precisely the charge Marx made against Feuerbach—that his ersatz notion of alienation, from which Marx had dissociated himself in 1843, invites no more than a contemplative and supine response. Stirner criticized Feuerbach’s dependence upon generalities with no meaning, like “man,” but Marx recognized that Stirner was dependent upon them in much the same way. Stirner, Marx points out,

constantly foists “man” on history as the sole dramatis persona and believes that “man” has made history. Now we shall find the same thing recurring in Feuerbach, whose illusions Stirner faithfully accepts in order to build further on their foundation. . . . If Stirner reproaches Feuerbach for reaching no result because he makes the predicate into the subject and vice versa, he himself is far less capable of arriving at anything, for he faithfully accepts these Feuerbachian predicates, transformed into subjects, as real personalities robbing the world. . . . he actually believes in the domination of the abstract ideas of ideology in the modern world, he believes that in his struggle . . . against conceptions, he is no longer attacking an illusion but the real forces that rule the world. 48

Thus it should not surprise us that Stirner “waxes indignant at the thought of atheism, terrorism, communism, regicide, etc. The object against which St. Sancho rebels is the Holy; therefore rebellion (insurrection) . . . does not need . . . to take the form of . . . action for it is only the ‘sin’ against the ‘holy’ ”49 and can, like Feuerbach’s immanence, be carried forward at the level of ideas.

Again, it should not surprise us that once Stirner moves away from the level of ideas he makes serious mistakes. Marx frontally attacks Stirner’s notion of the egoistic character of labor from a historical point of view. This is why so much of the argument of The German Ideology was concerned to outline capitalism’s fetters upon self-activity. Because the division of labor transforms what were personal powers into material powers, the history of development of the productive forces of individuals cannot be equated with the history of those individuals themselves, let alone their “consciousness.” Only in Germany—which was industrially underdeveloped, and where idéologues inhabited a peculiar world of airy fantasy—would this not be obvious. Labor can become the reappropriated power of the individual, the outgrowth of his individuality, but not under capitalism. “The all-round development of the individual will only cease to be conceived as ideal, as vocation, etc. when the impact of the world which stimulates the real development of the abilities of the individual comes under the control of the individuals themselves, as the communists desire.”50 Marx, in such passages, is not dismissing individuality as a principle but defending it against Stirner’s misconceptions. Whatever the shortcomings of Stirner’s discussion, it did raise the issue of the supposed
threat to individuality posed by the communists, whom Stirner included prominently among the moralists he was attacking. The crucial point here is not only that Stirner had forced this issue on to Marx's attention; it is also that Marx need have framed his rejoinders in the way he did throughout *The German Ideology* only in response to Stirner. To Feuerbach, who cast his arguments in terms of large-scale abstractions ("species," "consciousness"), individualism was not an issue. This, indeed, was true of the Young-Hegelians and "True Socialists" in general (not to mention Hegel himself); but to Stirner—and Marx—it was central.

The significance of Stirner's egoistic anarchism in provoking and shaping a detailed and theoretically important response from Marx has too long been overlooked. The point about Marx's direct response to Stirner is not so much that Marx regarded Stirner as a threat, but that, needing to dissociate his theoretical position and perspective from the Young-Hegelians and their touchstones, Stirner and Feuerbach, Marx fully appreciated the significance of the issue of individualism *vis-à-vis* communism raised by Stirner, to the extent of meeting his presentation point by point. This helps explain why *The German Ideology* aimed to demonstrate that men's social relations and productive potential take on an existence independent of their bearers, men themselves; and that this division is reproduced in microcosm as a division within the individual himself, whose powers are expressed socially as something alien. But the question remains: how are individuals in such a debilitated state to emancipate themselves? Once raised, this query cast doubt on the entire Young-Hegelian perspective; linking Stirner's egoistic anarchism with its Left-Hegelian context in a dramatic way, it enabled Marx to attack Stirner as a surrogate of the Left-Hegelian outlook. The question is the very question that *The German Ideology* sought to answer.

Stirner's critique of communism stands condemned because

the communists do not put egoism against self-sacrifice, nor do they express this contradiction theoretically.... they demonstrate the material basis engendering it, with which it disappears of itself.... The communists do not preach morality at all, such as Stirner preaches so extensively.... [they] by no means want.... to do away with the "private individual" for the sake of the self-sacrificing man....

Stirner argued that labor is egoistic when, in capitalist society, it cannot even be personal, when "the domination of material conditions over individuals and the suppression of individuality by chance has assumed its sharpest and most universal form," when the division of labor entails the most complete dependence of worker upon worker. Labor, far from being egoistic, has "lost all semblance of life-activity and only sustains life by
stunting it...individuals must appropriate the existing totality of productive forces not only to achieve self-activity but also merely to safeguard their very existence. The appropriation of the totality of the instruments of production is, for this very reason, the development of a totality of capacities in the individuals themselves."52 The point Marx proceeds to make against Stirner at this juncture is that private property and the division of labor "can be abolished only on condition of an all-round development of individuals, because the existing character of intercourse and productive forces is an all-round one, and only individuals that are developing in an all-round way can...turn them into free manifestations of their lives."53 The individual can be conceived as being opposed to the collectivity only if he is conceived mystically as "unique" and his history as that of his self-estrangement.

While it is true that Marx's blistering critique of Stirner has its place not only in the history of socialism but also in the history of invective, Marx in his extended and unjustly neglected critique did not rest content with indicating that, because of his Young-Hegelian belief in the material force of reflective categories, Stirner succeeds only in painting himself into a corner. Marx also, within this critique, redefined his own ideas about individuality vis-à-vis Stirner's solipsism. One recent commentator, who regards Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum, "the testament of a dissenting intellectual," as "a sociological document of the first order," ventures the opinion that "Marx, who was well aware that 'revolution begins in the mind of intellectuals', did not accord this credit to Stirner because at this time (1845-6) he was already thinking in terms of classes and not of individuals."54 In fact, Marx, who did not think that revolution begins in the mind of anyone, far from neglecting "the individual" for "the class," was attempting throughout The German Ideology to examine their relationship in capitalist society—thanks in no small measure to Stirner himself.

NOTES

1. During Marx's lifetime only the fourth chapter of the "St. Bruno" section of The German Ideology was published, as the "Obituary to M. Hess" in the Westphälischer Dampfboot, August-September, 1847. Engels had published Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" in 1888, but The German Ideology itself was published in the Soviet Union only in 1932 (in German) and in 1933 (in Russian). Roy Pascal's severely shortened translation of The German Ideology into English, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, and New York: International Publishers, 1938 et seq.), was not succeeded by a complete English translation until 1965: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The German Ideology, ed. S. Ryazanskaya, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1965).
2. Sidney Hook’s *From Hegel to Marx*, (New York and London, 1936), devotes a chapter to Stirner, but fails to explain why Marx devoted the best part of a major work to attacking Stirner. It remained to be shown that there is much more to Stirner’s effect on Marx than his attack on “sickly altruism,” but, of more recent works, R. M. Tucker’s *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), does not mention Stirner, and Shlomo Avineri’s *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, (Cambridge University Press, 1969), does not discuss Stirner. Nicolas Lobkowicz, in *Theory and Praxis: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx*, (Notre Dame, 1967), notes Stirner’s influence on the evolution of Marx’s thought and suggests that it was Stirner who indicated to Marx the pitfalls of Feuerbachian humanism, forcing Marx to define his own position, not only against Feuerbach but also against Stirner himself. This suggestion, as we shall see, is largely accurate. (Cf. also Maximilien Rubel, *Karl Marx: Essai de biographie intellectuelle*, Paris, 1957, p. 226, for a similar view.)

3. The myth that Stirner moved merely “on the fringes of Hegelian circles” (James Joll, *The Anarchists*, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964) badly needs putting to rest; its origin is probably the doggerel written by Engels, slender grounds indeed for such a statement, especially as Marx had very different opinions about Stirner from those of Engels. Engels, in a letter to Marx (November 19th) in 1844, compares *Der Einzige* to Bentham’s egoism and argues that it must “gleich in Kommunismus umschlagen”; only a few trivialities, Engels continues, need to be stressed against Stirner, “but what is true in his principles we have to accept.” (Marx-Engels, *Werke*, Berlin: Dietz, XXVII, p. 11; cf. *MEGA III*1, pp. 6-7.) Marx’s reply has not been preserved, but in a later letter (January 20, 1845) Engels comes round to Marx’s viewpoint on Stirner and says that Hess had also. The dates of Engels’ letters suggest that both he and Marx, who was in Paris, read Stirner in manuscript. For further details cf. R.W.K. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 101-125, for an excellent and balanced discussion.


9. Marx never disagreed with Feuerbach’s compensatory theory of Christianity, if his otherwise remarkable silence on this issue suggests agreement with Feuerbach’s main point that the attributes of man are projected onto the figure of the divinity, so that what man lacks in fact he achieves in fancy, that the vacuity of the real world and the plentitude of God are one and the same, that only indigent man needs an
opulent God, who emerges and is defined by man’s real exigency. See Nathan Rotenstreich, Basic Problems in Marx’s Philosophy, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 14. Marx, however, taking his cue from the early (pre-1843) writings of Bruno Bauer, never believed that all men had to do, par conséquent, was to reclaim their “essence” at the level of consciousness, as any such consciousness must itself be as distorted, dissonant, and subhuman as the image of God projected. Feuerbach’s God by contrast was harmonious and superhuman. The basic point that an act of consciousness will change nothing unless consciousness itself undergoes a change underlies Marx’s extension of Feuerbach in Zur Judenfrage—a basic point that (to name but one recent commentator) Althusser in For Marx, (New York: Vintage, 1970), completely fails to see.

10. The German Ideology, op. cit., pp. 58-59. This led Marx to separate himself sharply from Feuerbachian humanism and naturalism. (Cf. The German Ideology, ibid., pp. 520-530.) “Feuerbach,” said Marx, “... never speaks of the world of man, but always takes refuge in external nature, and moreover in nature which has not yet been subdued by men. But every new invention made by industry detaches another piece from this domain, so that the ground that produces such Feuerbachian propositions is steadily shrinking.” (Ibid., p. 55.) Feuerbach idolized natural man to the extent, as Marx realized, of criticizing anything unnatural as alien. Marx’s own position was very different; for an excellent discussion of it, cf. Alfred Schmidt, The Concept of Nature in Marx, trans. Ben Fowkes, (London: New Left Books, 1971), passim.

13. This entails that the “change of elements” to which Althusser refers, “the abandonment of the philosophical problematic whose recalcitrant prisoner Feuerbach remained,” (For Marx, p. 48), takes place not in 1845 but in 1843, when Marx wrote Zur Judenfrage. Althusser overlooks completely the significance of Marx’s shift in 1843; the state was in 1843 seen as alienation become reality and objectivity Gegenständlichkeit). Althusser recognizes the terms of the distinction, but never draws the obvious conclusion. (Cf. ibid., p. 46.)

14. The German Ideology, p. 23. It is evident that in The German Ideology Marx was already seeking to discredit false ideas of alienation; but it is frequently overlooked that it was these false ideas of alienation that Marx was to castigate in the Manifesto of the Communist Party (III, c) as the “alienation of Humanity.” Marx in this passage of the Manifesto was not turning against or abandoning his own theory of alienation, as some have supposed; attention to the text in question reveals that he was criticizing the use of the term “alienation” as a catch-all category. This is not the way Marx himself had used the term in the Manuscripts of 1844.

15. The German Ideology, op. cit., p. 63.
16. Stirner’s own term was “die Sparren.”
17. “I receive with thanks what the centuries of culture have acquired for me; I am not willing to give up anything of it; I have not lived in vain. The experience that I have power over my nature and need not be the slave of my appetites need not be lost upon me; the experience that I can subdue the world by culture’s means is too dearly bought for me to be able to forget it. But I want still more.” (Der Einzige, p. 344.) One of the few recent commentators to deal with Stirner is quite wrong in saying that “Stirner was very weak on history, as he had no room to allow for a historical development, whether of world-spirit, self-consciousness, or class struggle.”


19. Marx of course never disagreed with this. “The social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-contempt, debasement, subjugation, humility, in short, all the properties of the *canaille*, and the proletariat, which does not want to be treated as *canaille*, needs its courage, its consciousness of self, its pride and its independence far more than its bread.” (Marx-Engels, *Werke*, Berlin: Dietz, 1956, Vol. IV, p. 200.) Stirner thought that only the *canaille* could be free of these adverse effects of Christianity.


21. Although Stirner proclaimed that the coming of egoism was a historical necessity, he was a critic of teleology, particularly Aristotelian teleology, which, he believed, split existence from calling and the individual as he is from the individual as he should be. That men believe in various vocations and tasks is a part of their alienation. Any “end,” externalized or self-imposed, is an alien and oppressive *Sollen* to which men have enslaved themselves. Men are not “true men” when they fulfill themselves or perfect themselves. They are true men from the start. Marx, on the other hand, to whom certain individuals had very definite material tasks, and mankind a definite end, saw Stirner's attack on vocation, framed in terms of consciousness in a world dominated by the division of labor, as both false and conservative. Attacking the idea of vocation as “holy,” says Marx, “is merely an apology for the vocation forced on every individual . . . the all-round development of the individual will only cease to be conceived as . . . vocation . . . when the impact of the world which stimulates the real development of the abilities of the individual comes under the control of individuals themselves, as the communists desire.” (*The German Ideology*, pp. 315-316, cf. p. 65.)

22. Engels’ *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* implies that the publication of *The Essence of Christianity* in 1841 introduced the Young-Hegelians to a radical critique of religion, but this is simply untrue. The critique of religion was regarded as part of the inheritance and the transmission of Hegelian philosophy, not just by the Young-Hegelians but also by the Prussian government, as is attested by the activity of its censors and the fate of Bruno Bauer after he publicly broke with Christianity, using Hegel to justify this step. What really distinguishes Feuerbach is that he was the only Young-Hegelian to discuss religion without discussing the state. That Engels' account of the supposedly dramatic impact of Feuerbach was “completely at variance with the facts,” (David McLellan, op. cit., pp. 93-94), is borne out by the teachings of Hegel, who believed that “religion is principally sought and recommended for times of public calamity, disorder and oppression. . . . people are referred to it as a solace in face of wrong or as hope in compensation for loss. . . . religion may take a form leading to the harshest bondage.” (*Philosophy of Right*, Section 270; Knox translation, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 165.)

23. McLellan, (op. cit., p. 119), is again quite mistaken in saying that “at the beginning of *Der Einzige* . . . we are offered two entirely different schemata of history,” as Stirner propounded them as different perspectives on the same process.

26. Ibid., p. 325.
27. Ibid., pp. 112-114.
28. Stirner included criminals and free-wheeling intellectuals among his so-called *proletariat* which, in Marx’s words, “consists of ruined bourgeois and impoverished proletarians, of a collection of ragamuffins, who have existed in every epoch. . . Our saint (Stirner) has exactly the same notion of the proletariat as the ‘good comfortable burghers’,” (*The German Ideology*, pp. 216-217), i.e., that they are simply *canaille*.
29. McLellan is once again clearly wrong in drawing a parallel between this utterance of Stirner’s and what Marx believed. As is evident from his critique of Proudhon—the “French Feuerbach”—to Stirner it meant that the bourgeoisie, like the property which defines it, rests on a legal title given by the state. To Marx, the state rested on a legal title given by the bourgeoisie.
31. Ibid., pp. 119, 128.
32. “Freiheit ist die Lehre des Christenthums,” (Ibid., pp. 160-161). *Eigenheit* is rendered as “ownness” by Stirner’s translator, “peculiarity,” by Marx’s. Neither is really adequate to express Stirner’s meaning, which was closer to “individuality.”
33. “Der eigene Wille meiner ist der Verderberer des Staats.” Stirner’s celebrated defense of crime, which follows from this, emphasizes not the acquisition of goods or pleasures exterior to the self, but the assertion of the self against any moral code, in this case the legal code of the state. This makes sense only if we assume with Stirner, and without Marx, that the law has binding force as *a matter of fact* simply because men believe it to be binding. Paul Eltzbacher points out that Stirner’s constant preoccupation was to undermine such beliefs by spelling out their implications, (*Anarchism*, trans. S. T. Byington, London: Fifield, 1908, p. 100), but he constantly ignores Stirner’s own Young-Hegelian belief in the material power of thought. Henri Arvon, who is well aware of Stirner’s Young-Hegelian context, believes that ordinary criminality, undertaken in ignorance of the need to assert individuality against a moral code, is not necessarily covered by Stirner’s defense of crime, (Henri Arvon, *Aux Sources de l’Existentialisme: Max Stirner*, Paris: P.U.F., 1950, p. 108). Nowhere, however, does Stirner disapprove of any crime undertaken for *any* reason.
34. Marx was not quite right in saying that Stirner “takes as communism the idea of a few liberals tending towards communism.” (*The German Ideology*, p. 222). Proudhon was anything but liberal.
35. It is not difficult, however, to find contemporary echoes of Stirner, whose ridiculous argument on the state recently has been trotted out again. “In every institution in our society,” says David Cooper, “people must be helped to realize that the power of the ruling elite and its bureaucracy is *nothing*, nothing but their refusal and externalized power. Then it is a matter of recuperation of this power, and the recuperative strategy is quite simple; act against the rules, and the act itself converts the illusory power in them into real power in us.” (*The Death of the Family*, New York: Pantheon, 1970, p. 78.)
37. Ibid., p. 318, p. 322.
39. Ibid., p. 409; p. 400.
40. Ibid., p. 445. Cf. p. 224: “Stirner foists on to communism the conception of need held by the present-day bourgeois in his demand to have as much as he is capable of appropriating.” The same conception informs the *Verein*. 
41. Ibid., pp. 437, 439.
42. Ibid., p. 127. See pp. 310-315.
43. Ibid., p. 205. This is revealed in the opening paragraph of Der Einzige where Stirner maintained that just as God is said to be his own cause, the individual should be his own cause. "...we see," said Marx, "what holy motives guide St. Max (Stirner) in his transition to egoism...if (he) had looked a little more closely at these various 'causes' and the 'owners' of the causes, e.g., God, mankind, truth, he would have arrived at the opposite conclusion; that egoism, based on the egoistic mode of action of these persons, must be just as imaginary as those persons themselves." Ibid., p. 123.)
44. Ibid., p. 307.
45. Ibid., p. 345; p. 296; pp. 182, 196.
46. Ibid., p. 180; p. 132; see Marx's discussion, ibid., pp. 183-187.
47. Ibid., p. 304.
48. Ibid., pp. 255-256.
49. Ibid., p. 325.
50. Ibid., pp. 315-316.
51. Ibid., p. 482; McLellan, (op. cit., p. 135), following Sidney Hook, thinks that Marx's attacks on anything based on morality or love was due to Stirner's ruthless criticisms of such notions. Throughout The German Ideology, however, Marx criticized Stirner himself for being an arch-moralist: Stirner's constant sideswipes at Proudhon's "moralism" are for this reason vitiated and disingenuous. Marx's own "Anti-Proudhon" The Poverty of Philosophy, was by contrast to be self-consciously "scientific."
52. The German Ideology, p. 83.
53. Ibid., p. 483 (emphasis mine). McLellan, misunderstanding this, asserts that Marx's well-known passage describing how in communist society the individual can "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner" (The German Ideology, pp. 44-45) was a parody of Stirner! In fact, Marx took this idea with the utmost seriousness, opposing the fixation of congealed social activity into an occupational rôle that becomes a material force oppressing its individual occupant. This is an idée maîtresse of The German Ideology where Marx was advocating what modern sociologists (with a certain lack of grace) call "rôle-congruence"; more specifically, Marx was propounding rôle-congruence that he had actually observed among working-men revolutionaries. (Cf. Shlomo Avineri, The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, Cambridge University Press, 1970, pp. 140-141.) "...with a communist organization of society, there disappears the subordination of the artist to local and national narrowness, which arises entirely from division of labour, and also the subordination of the artist to some definite art, thanks to which he is exclusively painter, sculptor, etc., the very name of his activity adequately expressing the narrowness of his professional development and his dependence on division of labour. In a communist society there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other activities." (The German Ideology, pp. 431-432.)