

THE “ASSOCIATION” OF THE EGOISTS



The passage clearly exemplifies the close connection between Stirner's social ideas and their philosophical foundation. Individuals are individuals because they stand on "nothing." And for the same reason "decisive opposition" and its "complete disappearance" arise simultaneously between individuals entirely separated.

This is the "association" of the egoists: because they are entirely separated, they are a firm unity. "Only with the ultimate separation does separation itself come to an end and turn into unity" .

Moreover, there are no bonds to a third party and therefore no community existing independently of the individuals, so that relationships in terms of rights and legalities disappear. This idea of Stirner's might seem no more than a trick of logic. But insofar as only the "ego" has the attribute of being absolutely unique, it cannot be a specimen of something

universal. For this very reason, it is possible to conceive of "nothing" at the ground of the ego. If such egos are, moreover, to associate with each other, there is a sense in which Stirner's understanding of their mode of association grasps something that even Kant and Hegel were unable to appreciate . It

would seem that he has hit on something totally familiar and yet deeply hidden concerning our association with others.

Stirner's view appears at first glance to be close to Fichte's standpoint of pure ego, but he repeatedly emphasizes the difference between them. According to Stirner, Fichte's ego is the generalization of an "I" that ultimately exists outside of me . "I am not, however, one I alongside other I's, but the one and only I . . . " .

Here, a general person in any sense, even an "I" in general, must be negated. In spite of the abyss of nihilism this leaves us with, or rather because of it, I am a bodily ego. Stirner repeatedly emphasizes the fact of embodiment: "there does not exist anything higher above the bodily human being" . This bodily human being, as I said earlier, is understood as something that has gone through Hegel's absolute spirit and passed beyond it. Similarly, Stirner emphasizes the self's finitude:

When Fichte says, "The I is everything," this appears to be in perfect harmony with my own expositions. But it is not that the I is everything, but rather the I destroys everything, and only the I that dissolves itself, that never "is," the -finite

I, is

*really 1. Fichte speaks of the "absolute" I, whereas I speak
of*

me, the perishing

The background to the finitude of which Stirner speaks lies in the dissolution of the self and the destruction of everything. Feuerbach's "humanity" is not a "perishing and individual self," insofar as the individual is said to raise itself beyond the limit of individuality, and enter into the unity of love between one human being and another. Even here the individual is seen as unable to go beyond the various laws governing this unity, "the positive and essential determinations of the [human] species." Stirner counters:

*But the species is nothing, and if the individual raises
himself*

*beyond the boundaries of his individuality, this is rather
precisely he himself as an individual; he is only insofar as
he*

*ra i ses himself, he is only insofar as he does not remain
what*

he is; otherwise he would be finished, dead.

Stirner is saying that "the human species" is merely a conceptualized ideal . This negation of the "species" is the standpoint of nihilism without any kind of general person, and in this standpoint "going beyond the boundaries of individuality" has an entirely different significance . It is not that one enters into communal relationships with others at the standpoint of the species as Feuerbach would have it, but rather that the life of the individual overflows, so to speak, the limits of the self. With this, the individual becomes for the first time the living individual . This is the meaning of the terms "dissolving the self," "perishing," or not remaining in the mode of fixed "being ."

On this standpoint, everything that the self touches fuses with the self. This is also, I think, what Stirner means by saying that it is not that the ego is everything but that it destroys everything. Thus what he means by the perishing and finite ego is a continual overflowing of the self, where everything is melted into the self's vitality, and "enjoyed." This flow of nihilism, Stirner's "creative nothing, " represents a fundamental unity of creative nihilism and finitude.

Nietzsche, it will be recalled, also emphasized the bodily aspect of human being: "the awakened one, the one who knows, says: I am entirely body and nothing besides; and soul is only a word for something about the body. The body is a great reason . . ." (Za 1,4). Moreover, he holds fixed "being" to be an illusion, based on the "perishing" of becoming, and affirms a Dionysian life that makes this perishing one's own "ceaseless creation." He, too, subscribed to the fundamental unity of creative nihilism and finitude, which he expressed by speaking of "this life-this eternal life ."

Here Stirner, breaking with Feuerbach, and Nietzsche, breaking with Schopenhauer, meet at a deep level, even though their points of departure, their concerns, their perspectives, and also the character, scale, and profundity of their philosophies are somewhat different.

Marx's satirical critique entitled "Saint Max" does not show a very profound understanding of Stirner's enterprise. It rather gives the impression that the materialistic view of history does not have the wherewithal for understanding Stirner. For example, where Stirner writes: "I am not nothing in the sense of a void but creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything," Marx turns the words around by saying: "The Holy Father [Stirner] could have expressed this as follows: I am everything in the void of nonsense but the null creator, the all from which I myself as creator create nothing.,,Stirner could well have responded to this as follows: "You have said something wise by mistake in saying that Stirner creates nothing from everything.

My standpoint is exactly as you say, but its meaning is entirely different from what you think."

For both Stirner and Nietzsche their nihilism was their existence, and, as a self-interpretation of their existence, their philosophy. Philosophy in turn was a stimulus toward Existence, but not yet scientific in the original sense.

From the viewpoint of the human way of being, both criticized the scientific standpoint. This accounts for their negative attitude toward traditional metaphysics .

But can a standpoint of the fundamental unity of creative nihilism and finitude lead to a scientific philosophy? Can the inquiry into nihilism as the self-interpretation of existence yield a thinking in the form of scientific philosophy?

Or to put it the other way round, can the thinking of scientific philosophy constitute a standpoint of Existence as the self-interpretation of existence? It is not until Heidegger that we have an existential philosophy in this sense, where the standpoint of scientific philosophy for the first time appears on the ground of nihilism. His attempt to reconnect with the tradition of metaphysics by "deconstructing" it opened up a new and expansive phase in the development of nihilism .