

The Ego and It's Own

The Owner

Max Stirner

1844

II. The Owner

I — do I come to myself and mine through liberalism? Whom does the liberal look upon as his equal? Man! Be only man — and that you are anyway — and the liberal calls you his brother. He asks very little about your private opinions and private follies, if only he can espy “Man” in you.

But, as he takes little heed of what you are *privatim* — nay, in a strict following out of his principle sets no value at all on it — he sees in you only what you are *generatim*. In other words, he sees in you, not you, but the *species*; not Tom or Jim, but Man; not the real or unique one, [*Einzigem*] but your essence or your concept; not the bodily man, but the *spirit*.

As Tom you would not be his equal, because he is Jim, therefore not Tom; as man you are the same that he is. And, since as Tom you virtually do not exist at all for him (so far, to wit, as he is a liberal and not unconsciously an egoist), he has really made “brother-love” very easy for himself: he loves in you not Tom, of whom he knows nothing and wants to know nothing, but Man.

To see in you and me nothing further than “men,” that is running the Christian way of looking at things, according to which one is for the other nothing but a *concept* (e.g. a man called to salvation, etc.), into the ground.

Christianity properly so called gathers us under a less utterly general concept: there we are “sons of God” and “led by the Spirit of God.”¹ Yet not all can boast of being God’s sons, but “the same Spirit which witnesses to our spirit that we are sons of God reveals also who are the sons of the devil.”² Consequently, to be a son of God one must not be a son of the devil; the sonship of God excluded certain men. To be *sons of men* — *i. e.*, men — on the contrary, we need nothing but to belong to the human *species*, need only to be specimens of the same species. What I am as this I is no concern of yours as a good liberal, but is my *private affair* alone; enough that we are both sons of one and the same mother, to wit, the human species: as “a son of man” I am your equal.

What am I now to you? Perhaps this *bodily* I as I walk and stand? Anything but that. This bodily I, with its thoughts, decisions, and passions, is in your eyes a “private affair” which is no concern of yours: it is an “affair by itself.” As an “affair for you” there exists only my concept, my generic concept, only *the Man*, who, as he is called Tom,

¹Rom 8. 14.

²Cf. John 3. 10. with Rom. 8. 16.

could just as well be Joe or Dick. You see in me not me, the bodily man, but an unreal thing, the spook, *i.e.* a *Man*.

In the course of the Christian centuries we declared the most various persons to be “our equals,” but each time in the measure of that *spirit* which we expected from them — *e.g.* each one in whom the spirit of the need of redemption may be assumed, then later each one who has the spirit of integrity, finally each one who shows a human spirit and a human face. Thus the fundamental principle of “equality” varied.

Equality being now conceived as equality of the *human spirit*, there has certainly been discovered an equality that includes *all* men; for who could deny that we men have a human spirit, *i. e.*, no other than a human!

But are we on that account further on now than in the beginning of Christianity? Then we were to have a *divine spirit*, now a *human*; but, if the divine did not exhaust us, how should the human wholly express what *we* are? Feuerbach *e.g.* thinks, that if he humanizes the divine, he has found the truth. No, if God has given us pain, “Man” is capable of pinching us still more torturingly. The long and the short of it is this: that we are men is the slightest thing about us, and has significance only in so far as it is one of our *qualities*, [*Eigenschaften*] *i. e.* our property. [*Eigentum*] I am indeed among other things a man, as I am *e.g.* a living being, therefore an animal, or a European, a Berliner, etc.; but he who chose to have regard for me only as a man, or as a Berliner, would pay me a regard that would be very unimportant to me. And wherefore? Because he would have regard only for one of my *qualities*, not for *me*.

It is just so with the *spirit too*. A Christian spirit, an upright spirit, etc. may well be my acquired quality, my property, but I am not this spirit: it is mine, not I its.

Hence we have in liberalism only the continuation of the old Christian depreciation of the I, the bodily Tom. Instead of taking me as I am, one looks solely at my property, my qualities, and enters into marriage bonds with me only for the sake of my — possessions; one marries, as it were, what I have, not what I am. The Christian takes hold of my spirit, the liberal of my humanity.

But, if the spirit, which is not regarded as the *property* of the bodily ego but as the proper ego itself, is a ghost, then the Man too, who is not recognized as my quality but as the proper I, is nothing but a spook, a thought, a concept.

Therefore the liberal too revolves in the same circle as the Christian. Because the spirit of mankind, *i.e.* Man, dwells in you, you are a man, as when the spirit of Christ dwells in you are a Christian; but, because it dwells in you only as a second ego, even though it be as your proper or “better” ego, it remains otherworldly to you, and you have to strive to become wholly man. A striving just as fruitless as the Christian’s to become wholly a blessed spirit!

One can now, after liberalism has proclaimed Man, declare openly that herewith was only completed the consistent carrying out of Christianity, and that in truth Christianity set itself no other task from the start than to realize “man,” the “true man.” Hence, then, the illusion that Christianity ascribes an infinite value to the ego (as *e.g.* in the doctrine of immortality, in the cure of souls, etc.) comes to light. No, it

assigns this value to *Man* alone. Only *Man* is immortal, and only because I am Man and I too immortal. In fact, Christianity had to teach that no one is lost, just as liberalism too puts all on an equality as men; but that eternity, like this equality, applied only to the *Man* in me, not to me. Only as the bearer and harborer of Man do I not die, as notoriously “the king never dies.” Louis dies, but the king remains; I die, but my spirit, Man, remains. To identify me now entirely with Man the demand has been invented, and stated, that I must become a “real generic being.”³

The HUMAN *religion* is only the last metamorphosis of the Christian religion. For liberalism is a religion because it separates my essence from me and sets it above me, because it exalts “Man” to the same extent as any other religion does its God or idol, because it makes what is mine into something otherworldly, because in general it makes out of what is mine, out of my qualities and my property, something alien — to wit, an “essence”; in short, because it sets me beneath Man, and thereby creates for me a “vocation.” But liberalism declares itself a religion in form too when it demands for this supreme being, Man, a zeal of faith, “a faith that some day will at last prove its fiery zeal too, a zeal that will be invincible.”⁴ But, as liberalism is a human religion, its professor takes a *tolerant* attitude toward the professor of any other (Catholic, Jewish, etc.), as Frederick the Great did toward every one who performed his duties as a subject, whatever fashion of becoming blest he might be inclined toward. This religion is now to be raised to the rank of the generally customary one, and separated from the others as mere “private follies,” toward which, besides, one takes a highly *liberal* attitude on account of their unessentialness.

One may call it the *State-religion*, the religion of the “free State,” not in the sense hitherto current that it is the one favored or privileged by the State, but as that religion which the “free State” not only has the right, but is compelled, to demand from each of those who belong to it, let him be *privatim* a Jew, a Christian, or anything else. For it does the same service to the State as filial piety to the family. If the family is to be recognized and maintained, in its existing condition, by each one of those who belong to it, then to him the tie of blood must be sacred, and his feeling for it must be that of piety, of respect for the ties of blood, by which every blood-relation becomes to him a consecrated person. So also to every member of the State-community this community must be sacred, and the concept which is the highest to the State must likewise be the highest to him.

But what concept is the highest to the State? Doubtless that of being a really human society, a society in which every one who is really a man, *i. e.*, *not an un-man*, can obtain admission as a member. Let a State’s tolerance go ever so far, toward an un-man and toward what is inhuman it ceases. And yet this “un-man” is a man, yet the “inhuman” itself is something human, yes, possible only to a man, not to any beast; it is, in fact, something “possible to man.” But, although every un-man is a man, yet

³Karl Marx, in the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbucher*, p. 197.

⁴Br. Bauer, *Judenfrage*, p. 61.

the State excludes him; *i.e.* it locks him up, or transforms him from a fellow of the State into a fellow of the prison (fellow of the lunatic asylum or hospital, according to Communism).

To say in blunt words what an un-man is not particularly hard: it is a man who does not correspond to the *concept* man, as the inhuman is something human which is not conformed to the concept of the human. Logic calls this a “self-contradictory judgment.” Would it be permissible for one to pronounce this judgment, that one can be a man without being a man, if he did not admit the hypothesis that the concept of man can be separated from the existence, the essence from the appearance? They say, he *appears* indeed as a man, but *is* not a man.

Men have passed this “self-contradictory judgment” through a long line of centuries! Nay, what is still more, in this long time there were only — *un-men*. What individual can have corresponded to his concept? Christianity knows only one Man, and this one — Christ — is at once an un-man again in the reverse sense, to wit, a superhuman man, a “God.” Only the — un-man is a *real* man.

Men that are not men, what should they be but *ghosts*? Every real man, because he does not correspond to the concept “man,” or because he is not a “generic man,” is a spook. But do I still remain an un-man even if I bring Man (who towered above me and remained otherworldly to me only as my ideal, my task, my essence or concept) down to be my *quality*, my own and inherent in me; so that Man is nothing else than my humanity, my human existence, and everything that I do is human precisely because *I* do it, but not because it corresponds to the *concept* “man”? *I* am really Man and the un-man in one; for I am a man and at the same time more than a man; *i.e.* I am the ego of this my mere quality.

It had to come to this at last, that it was no longer merely demanded of us to be Christians, but to become men; for, though we could never really become even Christians, but always remained “poor sinners” (for the Christian was an unattainable ideal too), yet in this the contradictoriness did not come before our consciousness so, and the illusion was easier than now when of us, who are men act humanly (yes, cannot do otherwise than be such and act so), the demand is made that we are to be men, “real men.”

Our States of today, because they still have all sorts of things sticking to them, left from their churchly mother, do indeed load those who belong to them with various obligations (*e.g.* churchly religiousness) which properly do not a bit concern them, the States; yet on the whole they do not deny their significance, since they want to be looked upon as *human societies*, in which man as man can be a member, even if he is less privileged than other members; most of them admit adherence of every religious sect, and receive people without distinction of race or nation: Jews, Turks, Moors, etc., can become French citizens. In the act of reception, therefore, the State looks only to see whether one is a *man*. The Church, as a society of believers, could not receive every man into her bosom; the State, as a society of men, can. But, when the State has carried its principle clear through, of presupposing in its constituents nothing but

that they are men (even the North Americans still presuppose in theirs that they have religion, at least the religion of integrity, of responsibility), then it has dug its grave. While it will fancy that those whom it possesses are without exception men, these have meanwhile become without exception *egoists*, each of whom utilizes it according to his egoistic powers and ends. Against the egoists “human society” is wrecked; for they no longer have to do with each other as *men*, but appear egoistically as an *I* against a *You* altogether different from me and in opposition to me.

If the State must count on our humanity, it is the same if one says it must count on our *morality*. Seeing Man in each other, and acting as men toward each other, is called moral behavior. This is every whit the “spiritual love” of Christianity. For, if I see Man in you, as in myself I see Man and nothing but Man, then I care for you as I would care for myself; for we represent, you see, nothing but the mathematical proposition: $A = C$ and $B = C$, consequently $A = B$ — *i.e.* I nothing but man and you nothing but man, consequently I and you the same. Morality is incompatible with egoism, because the former does not allow validity to *me*, but only to the Man in me. But, if the State is a *society of men*, not a union of egos each of whom has only himself before his eyes, then it cannot last without morality, and must insist on morality.

Therefore we two, the State and I, are enemies. I, the egoist, have not at heart the welfare of this “human society,” I sacrifice nothing to it, I only utilize it; but to be able to utilize it completely I transform it rather into my property and my creature; *i. e.*, I annihilate it, and form in its place the *Union of Egoists*.

So the State betrays its enmity to me by demanding that I be a man, which presupposes that I may also not be a man, but rank for it as an “un- man”; it imposes being a man upon me as a *duty*. Further, it desires me to do nothing along with which *it* cannot last; so *its permanence* is to be sacred for me. Then I am not to be an egoist, but a “respectable, upright,” *i.e.* moral, man. Enough: before it and its permanence I am to be impotent and respectful.

This State, not a present one indeed, but still in need of being first created, is the ideal of advancing liberalism. There is to come into existence a true “society of men,” in which every “man” finds room. Liberalism means to realize “Man,” *i.e.* create a world for him; and this should be the *human* world or the general (Communitic) society of men. It was said, “The Church could regard only the spirit, the State is to regard the whole man.”⁵ But is not “Man” “spirit”? The kernel of the State is simply “Man,” this unreality, and it itself is only a “society of men.” The world which the believer (believing spirit) creates is called Church, the world which the man (human or humane spirit) creates is called State. But that is not *my* world. I never execute anything *human* in the abstract, but always my *own* things; *my* human act is diverse from every other human act, and only by this diversity is it a real act belonging to me. The human in it is an abstraction, and, as such, spirit, *i.e.* abstracted essence.

⁵Hess, *Triarchie*, p. 76.

Bruno Bauer states (*e.g. Judenfrage*, p. 84) that the truth of criticism is the final truth, and in fact the truth sought for by Christianity itself — to wit, “Man.” He says, “The history of the Christian world is the history of the supreme fight for truth, for in it — and in it only! — the thing at issue is the discovery of the final or the primal truth — man and freedom.”

All right, let us accept this gain, and let us take *man* as the ultimately found result of Christian history and of the religious or ideal efforts of man in general. Now, who is Man? *I* am! *Man*, the end and outcome of Christianity, is, as *I*, the beginning and raw material of the new history, a history of enjoyment after the history of sacrifices, a history not of man or humanity, but of — *me*. *Man* ranks as the general. Now then, *I* and the egoistic are the really general, since every one is an egoist and of paramount importance to himself. The Jewish is not the purely egoistic, because the Jew still devotes *himself* to Jehovah; the Christian is not, because the Christian lives on the grace of God and subjects *himself* to him. As Jew and as Christian alike a man satisfies only certain of his wants, only a certain need, not *himself*: a half-egoism, because the egoism of a half-man, who is half he, half Jew, or half his own proprietor, half a slave. Therefore, too, Jew and Christian always half-way exclude each other; *i.e.* as men they recognize each other, as slaves they exclude each other, because they are servants of two different masters. If they could be complete egoists, they would exclude each other *wholly* and hold together so much the more firmly. Their ignominy is not that they exclude each other, but that this is done only *half-way*. Bruno Bauer, on the contrary, thinks Jews and Christians cannot regard and treat each other as “men” till they give up the separate essence which parts them and obligates them to eternal separation, recognize the general essence of “Man,” and regard this as their “true essence.”

According to his representation the defect of the Jews and the Christians alike lies in their wanting to be and have something “particular” instead of only being men and endeavoring after what is human — to wit, the “general rights of man.” He thinks their fundamental error consists in the belief that they are “privileged,” possess “prerogatives”; in general, in the belief in *prerogative*. [*Vorrecht*, literally “precedent right”] In opposition to this he holds up to them the general rights of man. The rights of man!

Man is man in general, and in so far every one who is a man. Now every one is to have the eternal rights of man, and, according to the opinion of Communism, enjoy them in the complete “democracy,” or, as it ought more correctly to be called — anthropocracy. But it is *I* alone who have everything that *I* — procure for myself; as man *I* have nothing. People would like to give every man an affluence of all good, merely because he has the title “man.” But *I* put the accent on *me*, not on my being *man*.

Man is something only as *my* quality [*Eigenschaft*] (property [*Eigentum*]), like masculinity or femininity. The ancients found the ideal in one’s being *male* in the full sense; their virtue is *virtus* and *arete* — *i.e.* manliness. What is one to think of a woman who should want only to be perfectly “woman?” That is not given to all, and many a one would therein be fixing for herself an unattainable goal. *Feminine*, on the

other hand, she is anyhow, by nature; femininity is her quality, and she does not need “true femininity.” I am a man just as the earth is a star. As ridiculous as it would be to set the earth the task of being a “thorough star,” so ridiculous it is to burden me with the call to be a “thorough man.”

When Fichte says, “The ego is all,” this seems to harmonize perfectly with my thesis. But it is not that the ego *is* all, but the ego *destroys* all, and only the self-dissolving ego, the never-being ego, the — *finite* ego is really I. Fichte speaks of the “absolute” ego, but I speak of me, the transitory ego.

How natural is the supposition that *man* and *ego* mean the same! And yet one sees, *e.g.*, by Feuerbach, that the expression “man” is to designate the absolute ego, the *species*, not the transitory, individual ego. Egoism and humanity (humaneness) ought to mean the same, but according to Feuerbach the individual can “only lift himself above the limits of his individuality, but not above the laws, the positive ordinances, of his species.”⁶ But the species is nothing, and, if the individual lifts himself above the limits of his individuality, this is rather his very self as an individual; he exists only in raising himself, he exists only in not remaining what he is; otherwise he would be done, dead. Man with the great M is only an ideal, the species only something thought of. To be a man is not to realize the ideal of *Man*, but to present *oneself*, the individual. It is not how I realize the *generally human* that needs to be my task, but how I satisfy myself. I am my species, am without norm, without law, without model, etc. It is possible that I can make very little out of myself; but this little is everything, and is better than what I allow to be made out of me by the might of others, by the training of custom, religion, the laws, the State. Better — if the talk is to be of better at all — better an unmannerly child than an old head on young shoulders, better a mulish man than a man compliant in everything. The unmannerly and mulish fellow is still on the way to form himself according to his own will; the prematurely knowing and compliant one is determined by the “species,” the general demands — the species is law to him. He is *determined*[*bestimmt*] by it; for what else is the species to him but his “destiny,”[*Bestimmung*] his “calling”? Whether I look to “humanity,” the species, in order to strive toward this ideal, or to God and Christ with like endeavor, where is the essential dissimilarity? At most the former is more washed-out than the latter. As the individual is the whole of nature, so he is the whole of the species too.

Everything that I do, think — in short, my expression or manifestation — is indeed *conditioned* by what I am. The Jew *e.g.* can will only thus or thus, can “present himself” only thus; the Christian can present and manifest himself only Christianly, etc. If it were possible that you could be a Jew or Christian, you would indeed bring out only what was Jewish or Christian; but it is not possible; in the most rigorous conduct you yet remain an *egoist*, a sinner against that concept — *i.e.*, *you* are not the precise equivalent of Jew. Now, because the egoistic always keeps peeping through, people have inquired for a more perfect concept which should really wholly express what you

⁶*Essence of Christianity*, 2nd ed., p. 401

are, and which, because it is your true nature, should contain all the laws of your activity. The most perfect thing of the kind has been attained in “Man.” As a Jew you are too little, and the Jewish is not your task; to be a Greek, a German, does not suffice. But be a — man, then you have everything; look upon the human as your calling.

Now I know what is expected of me, and the new catechism can be written. The subject is again subjected to the predicate, the individual to something general; the dominion is again secured to an *idea*, and the foundation laid for a new *religion*. This is a *step forward* in the domain of religion, and in particular of Christianity; not a step out beyond it.

To step out beyond it leads into the *unspeakable*. For me paltry language has no word, and “the Word,” the Logos, is to me a “mere word.”

My *essence* is sought for. If not the Jew, the German, etc., then at any rate it is — the man. “Man is my essence.”

I am repulsive or repugnant to myself; I have a horror and loathing of myself, I am a horror to myself, or, I am never enough for myself and never do enough to satisfy myself. From such feelings springs self-dissolution or self-criticism. Religiousness begins with self-renunciation, ends with completed criticism.

I am possessed, and want to get rid of the “evil spirit.” How do I set about it? I fearlessly commit the sin that seems to the Christian the most dire, the sin and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. “He who blasphemes the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness forever, but is liable to the eternal judgment!”⁷ I want no forgiveness, and am not afraid of the judgment.

Man is the last evil *spirit* or spook, the most deceptive or most intimate, the craftiest liar with honest mien, the father of lies.

The egoist, turning against the demands and concepts of the present, executes pitilessly the most measureless — *desecration*. Nothing is holy to him!

It would be foolish to assert that there is no power above mine. Only the attitude that I take toward it will be quite another than that of the religious age: I shall be the *enemy* of — every higher power, while religion teaches us to make it our friend and be humble toward it.

The *desecrator* puts forth his strength against every *fear of God*, for fear of God would determine him in everything that he left standing as sacred. Whether it is the God or the Man that exercises the hallowing power in the God-man — whether, therefore, anything is held sacred for God’s sake or for Man’s (Humanity’s) — this does not change the fear of God, since Man is revered as “supreme essence,” as much as on the specifically religious standpoint God as “supreme essence” calls for our fear and reverence; both overawe us.

The fear of God in the proper sense was shaken long ago, and a more or less conscious “atheism,” externally recognizable by a wide-spread “unchurchliness,” has involuntarily

⁷Mark 3. 29.

become the mode. But what was taken from God has been superadded to Man, and the power of humanity grew greater in just the degree that of piety lost weight: “Man” is the God of today, and fear of Man has taken the place of the old fear of God.

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

Our atheists are pious people.

If in the so-called feudal times we held everything as a fief from God, in the liberal period the same feudal relation exists with Man. God was the Lord, now Man is the Lord; God was the Mediator, now Man is; God was the Spirit, now Man is. In this three fold regard the feudal relation has experienced a transformation. For now, firstly, we hold as a fief from all-powerful Man our *power*, which, because it comes from a higher, is not called power or might, but “right” — the “rights of man”; we further hold as a fief from him our position in the world, for he, the mediator, mediates our *intercourse* with others, which therefore may not be otherwise than “human”; finally, we hold as a fief from him ourselves — to wit, our own value, or all that we are worth — inasmuch as we are worth nothing when *he* does not dwell in us, and when or where we are not “human.” The power is Man’s, the world is Man’s, I am Man’s.

But am I not still unrestrained from declaring *myself* the entitler, the mediator, and the own self? Then it runs thus:

My power is *my* property.

My power *gives* me property.

My power *am* I myself, and through it am I my property.

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