

# Mutual Utilization: Relationship and Revolt in Max Stirner

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In the panorama of studies of Stirner there are many silences — silences that, as often happens, communicate more than words. One such silence surrounds Stirner’s reflections on the theme of interpersonal relationships, reflections that form a genuine theory of life together. As is known, his considerations on relationships are contained in that section of *The Unique and Its Property* entitled “My Intercourse.” Stirner attributed great importance to the description of the relations that the Unique maintains with others, as the vast amount of space he dedicates to the topic shows (it is in fact the largest section in the book). Nonetheless, “My Intercourse” has been and is perhaps the least explored part of Stirner’s work. In any case, it is the least understood; a misunderstanding that Stirner himself already emphasized in the response to the critiques that Szeliga, Feuerbach and Hess had made of *The Unique and Its Property*.<sup>1</sup>

In my opinion, a deep examination of the question of relationships in Stirner means not only studying what may be the most important part of his thought, but also confronting Stirner’s most significant themes from an anarchist point of view (a point of view that obviously doesn’t exhaust their complexity). “My Intercourse” contains his description of property (thus the critiques of the state, of Proudhon and of the communists), associative proposal of the union<sup>2</sup> of egoists (thus the judgment of the party, society and, more generally, hierarchical order),

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<sup>1</sup> Max Stirner, *Stirner’s Critics*

<sup>2</sup> It’s important to not that both the Italian word “unione,” which Passamani uses, and the German word “Verein,” which Stirner uses have no connection whatsoever to labor unions. — *Translator’s note.*

and the distinction between rebellion and revolution (thus the difference between demolition and the reformation of *what exists*).

For the same sort of reasons, it would be useful to spend some time on some of the more important and recurrent criticisms of Stirner's conception of relationships. In fact, though Stirner's thought is the object of such criticisms, much of their content could be referred more generally to any conception that radically affirms the centrality of the individual.

In Stirner, the awareness is clear that an extreme defense of individuality itself, before being a way of life, is way of understanding. When Stirner, drawing off Protagoras' motto, maintains that "the individual is the measure of all things," he means precisely that. One cannot understand his way of thinking about relationships between Uniques, if one doesn't first understand his way of conceiving the world of the Unique. In the same way, one cannot understand the coming together of individual owners — the union of egoists — if one doesn't first understand what Stirner means by individual owner. "Everyone is the center of his own world. World is only what he himself is not, but what belongs to him, is in a relationship with him, exists for him.

"Everything turns around you; you are the center of the outer world and of the thought world. Your world extends as far as your capacity, and what you grasp is your own simply because you grasp it. You, the Unique, are 'the Unique' *only together with 'your property.'*"<sup>3</sup>

In my opinion, this passage summarizes *The Unique and Its Property* as a whole. Stirner's way of understanding relationships between individuals, meaning mutual utilization, is only its logical and necessary consequence. Affirming that everyone is the center of his own world means denying any sort of authority and hierarchy, insofar as they claim to impose their centrality, and imposing a perspective different and opposed to that of the individual, despoil him of his *property*.

Emphasizing the universality of uniqueness (in the sense that everyone is unique), Stirner does not set himself as *the* center, but as *a* center. Thus, uniqueness is closely connected to mutuality.

When Stirner speaks of a world, he means the collection of relationships that the Unique maintains with those other than himself, be they things or persons. The centrality with respect to the world is therefore centrality with respect to his relationships, and these latter being the "mutuality, action, *commercium* among individuals,"<sup>4</sup> we see once again how centrality and mutuality presuppose each other.

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<sup>3</sup> Stirner, *op.cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Max Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*, in "My Intercourse."

If everyone is “unique” only together with his “property,” then everyone is “unique” only together with his relationships (with his world). The term uniqueness therefore excludes absoluteness, in that absolute — *ab-solutum* — means precisely the lack of relationships, of connections. Thus the critique made against Stirner that he transformed the I of Fichte into an equally absolute individual collapses. In fact, the Fichtean I, like Feuerbach’s human being, is an essence outside of the particular individual, not the flesh and blood individual, “transient and mortal.” It is a transcendent being that presupposes perfect community among human beings, whereas Stirner speaks of a Unique whose community with others is only thinkable, not real. In reality, we, as Uniques, are irreducibly different. We come to be equal only if we pose a “third,” external and transcendent — like Humanity, God or the State — that mediates relationships between us. And hierarchy consists precisely of this “third”; I no longer value the other for what my relationship with him is, meaning what he is for me, but rather in relation to an entity that contains us and links us together.<sup>5</sup>

If everyone, as unique, is exclusive and exclusivist, his existence cannot incline toward community, but rather toward *one-sidedness*. No longer having anything that unites us, we no longer have anything that separates us or makes us enemies. In fact, “the opposition disappears in complete — separateness or uniqueness.”<sup>6</sup> It is precisely the awareness of our one-sidedness (of having our own perspective) that allows us to rise up against hierarchy, against the order of dependence on which every state is based, and to lay the foundations for a new associative form — the union — based on radically different presuppositions. “Let’s not seek the most comprehensive community, ‘human society,’ but let’s seek in others only means and organs that we use as our property!”<sup>7</sup>

In the “reduction” of the other to means, some have wanted to see a defense of exploitation<sup>8</sup>, the negation of every form of non-conflictual relationship, the legitimation of a war that opens the way to “collective suicide.”<sup>9</sup> If one instead inserts it into Stirner’s conception of the world, one realizes that it is the only form of relationship that doesn’t deny the centrality of the individual and that is based on real mutuality.

The typical form of religious alienation consists in attributing value to a person or a thing in the absolute sense, meaning independently of our relationship to it. The belief in a being that has value in itself and for itself, thus, worthy of our “en-

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<sup>5</sup> It’s no accident that Stirner emphasized the mediating nature of the state seen as one of the greatest expressions of hierarchy.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., in “My Power.”

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., in “My Intercourse.”

<sup>8</sup> M. Hess, *The Last Philosophers*.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Camus, *The Rebel*.

thusiasm,” absolutely interesting (i.e., an interesting object without and interested subject), presupposes the ideological “fixed idea” of a hierarchical order. In fact, I can consider a person absolutely deserving of love, respect, etc., only if I don’t consider her for herself, but place her in relation (and thus subordinate her) to a higher being — let’s say God, the state, or society — and consider as “part” of it. Thence, it is not the particular individual in its unrepeatable uniqueness with whom I enter into relationship, but rather the christian, the citizen, the *member* of society.

Contrarily, seeking the value of every thing and every person within and not outside myself, I affirm my centrality in relation to the world, to my world. In this way, “If I cherish and care for you, because I love you, because my heart finds nourishment in you and my desire finds satisfaction in you, this is not for the sake of some higher being,... but out of egoistic pleasure: you yourself with *your own* being have value to me, because your essence is not a higher being, is not higher or more general than you, is unique as you yourself, because you are it.”<sup>10</sup>

The awareness of one’s egoism, thus of one’s use of the other, comes to be the only way of recognizing and appreciating his value, those properties of his that, even though they don’t exhaust his uniqueness, communicate something — however non-essential — about him to me. And being, as I said, mutual use, each individual, each Unique, is the beginning and end of his relational activity.

Precisely because, even from a biological point of view, I cannot take as a reference anything different from myself; what is other than me, I can only think of (and for Stirner, thought in its universality cannot grasp the peculiarity of the bodily and momentary I) as subject, but in the very moment that it crosses my path, it exists for me, and all that I seem to owe to it, I owe only to myself. Saying therefore that “For me you are nothing but my food, even as I too am fed upon and consumed by you,”<sup>11</sup> is not the expression of a paranoid desire to crush (a relationship between “ruminants” as Kuno Fischer described it), but rather a calm affirmation of our centrality and our one-sidedness.

It is important to note how Stirner, when he states that “we have have a single relationship with one another, that of *usability*, utility, use,” he emphasizes again and again the mutuality inherent in such relationships (as opposed to the hierarchical relationship that, posing absolute values, negates it).

If I consider the other as “an *object* for which I may feel something or also nothing, a usable or non-usable subject,” with which to get on and reach an agreement “so as to increase *my power* through this alliance and be able to succeed, by uniting

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<sup>10</sup> Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*, in “The Possessed.”

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, in “My Intercourse.”

our forces, where one alone would fail,” I realize that it is not only a matter of a mutual utilization, but also of a utilizable mutuality.<sup>12</sup>

The deliberate stress that Stirner places on the usability of the relationships that the Unique maintains with the other only aims to emphasize how in the relationship between individual owners there is a mutual interest in the person and not, as morality and religion claim, a mutual renunciation. Real love, as opposed to idealized love, is a self-interested emotion and not an act of self-denial. In fact, “we want to love because we feel love, because love is pleasant to our heart and our senses, and in love for the other person we feel a higher enjoyment of ourselves.”<sup>13</sup> It is the same love for the other that leads me to “joyfully sacrifice for him innumerable pleasures of mine,” to “give up innumerable things to see his smile blossom again,” and to “put at risk for him the thing that, if he were not there, would be the dearest thing in the world to me: my life or my well-being or my freedom. Or rather my pleasure and my happiness consist precisely in the enjoyment of his happiness and pleasure.” “But,” Stirner emphasizes, “there is something that I don’t sacrifice to him: *myself*; I remain an egoist and enjoy him.”<sup>14</sup>

The charge Stirner makes against all those improvers of humanity — like Baron von Stein<sup>15</sup> — who preach the principle of love is significant: “You love human beings, so you torment the individual human being, the egoist: your love of humanity is cruelty to human beings.”<sup>16</sup>

If “every religion is a cult of society, this principle, by which the social (civilized) human being is dominated,”<sup>17</sup> the awareness of egoism and the refusal of self-renunciation can only lead Stirner to elucidate a new form of associative relation, the union of egoists.

Once the state and society are negated as historical forms of mediated life together that transcend the individual and are therefore alienated, associative relationships have to have completely different characteristics.

The main element is that the individual associates for her own individual interests and not for a hierarchical and extortionist “common good.” For Stirner, society is only an additional product of individuals whose interests are unique. Thinking of society — as Proudhon himself does — as a collective subject, as an “ethical person,” means condemning the particular individual, in the name of a religious general interest, to one of the worst forms of despotism.<sup>18</sup> The Unique doesn’t want to be

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<sup>12</sup> The preceding passages are all to be found in “My Intercourse” in Stirner’s book.

<sup>13</sup> Stirner, *The Philosophical Reactionaries*

<sup>14</sup> *The Unique and Its Property*, in “My Intercourse.”

<sup>15</sup> The liberal at who Stirner takes aim in his essay “Some Preliminary Notes on the Love-State.”

<sup>16</sup> *The Unique and Its Property*, in “My Intercourse.”

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, in “My Intercourse.”

<sup>18</sup> Before Stirner, the American anarchist, Josiah Warren, summarized his thought using the

made the object of collective ends, becoming a tool of society, but rather considers society as one of his means. As B. R. Tucker rightly maintained: “Society is not a person nor a thing, but a relation; and a relation can have no rights,”<sup>19</sup> nor — I would add — can it impose duties. But since, for Stirner, established society cannot block the individual from making value of herself, nor can the future societies promised by socialists and communists expropriate him of his property, the separation from the social order must be so complete and decisive as to “bring about the end of separation itself” and be overturned in federation,<sup>20</sup> in union. In fact, “as the Unique, you can assert yourself only in the union, because the union doesn’t possess you, but rather you possess it or make use of it.” Property only gets recognized in it, because I no longer hold what is my own as a fief from any being,<sup>21</sup> but I myself am to be its source and its self-guarantee. Private “property,” on the other hand, is only a state concession, a fief that transforms the individual “owner” into a vassal; it is the political form of pauperism and vassalage. Only once the “war of all against all” — which isn’t a form of expanded domination, but the calm acceptance of the conflict of interests — is declared, the union will be able to be born as the “multiplier” of individual powers, as a tool, as a “sword” for increasing one’s capacities and thus, since everyone is unique only together with his property, and thus reinforce the feeling of uniqueness.

The choice of association must be voluntary, just as the breaking of the associative agreement must be free and voluntary. By associating, the particular individual doesn’t renounce his own individuality, as occurs in society, but on the contrary, affirms it in all its fullness.

When an individual needs to unite with others to achieve a specific objective (a need that is not at all contradictory, or better, paradoxical with regards to one’s being unique), what may appear to be a sacrifice — as a limitation of his freedom

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formula of “individual sovereignty” as opposed to the liberal formula of “popular sovereignty,” the foundation of the 1776 declaration of independence. Not randomly. The ideological appearance of domination always revolves around an abstract collective being; thus, the only way to eliminate archism in all its forms is to bring the notions of liberty, autonomy, independence back to the particular individual. The basis of all modern dictatorship is represented by Rousseau’s “general will.” It could only be something concrete if it was the product of all the individual wills. But for Rousseau, the general will is not the will of everyone, but rather something transcendent, right and infallible, independent of individual wills. Appropriately, Rucker described it as a form of political Providence. The Jacobin, marxist and Nazi dictatorships are merely different methods for using the same instrument of power: the cult of the general good. The usefulness of Stirner’s thought for demystifying the hierarchical blackmail of the democratic system seems obvious.

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin Tucker, *Individual Liberty*.

<sup>20</sup> Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*. In the same way, Warren maintained that the sole terrain on which acratik relations can be established is that of “disassociation, disunion, individualization.”

<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.*, in “My Intercourse.”

would appear — is only a deployment of his powers. In fact, not being able to meet all of her needs by herself, by associating he only sacrifices what he does not possess, i.e., she “doesn’t sacrifice a goddamn thing.” To put it another way: not having the freedom “to do it by himself,” it’s not possible to maintain that he sacrifices it by uniting (and obviously coming to an agreement) with others. In each instance, if one wants to speak of limitations as such, what is reduced in the union is freedom (but it’s a case of mutual restrictions not determined by authority and the *sacred* as happens in the state and the church), not one’s individuality. For Stirner, “the ideal of ‘absolute freedom’ expresses the absurdity of every absolute.” Only one who thinks — religiously — of freedom as an absolute could fail to perceive the differences between a form of relationship that guarantees to everyone the expression of their exclusivity (and doesn’t limit their freedom except with those rules that are inherent to the relationship itself)<sup>22</sup> and a communitarian order which — as something sacred — is based on subjection and the lack of individual self-valorization.

Since the union, unlike society, the state or the church has no existence autonomous from the particular individuals who compose it, its duration is determined by the interests of the “participants.” It is therefore a “unceasing coming-back-together” as opposed to the “already-being-together” typical of (and foundational to) every hierarchical relationship. A “*taking-part*” in a game to which one contributes to establishing the *rules*, as opposed to a “*being-part*” of a social order that presents itself as authority and imposes its *laws*.

The union is not only an alternative to society, but also a tool for rising up, for rebelling against hierarchy, authority, the state (a word which Stirner often uses to indicate the *entire existing order*). Considered both as a relational form and as a counter-association, the union is closely connected to rebellion.

If “my egoism has an interest in liberating the world so that it becomes — my property,”<sup>23</sup> the demolition of what exists, the overturning of given conditions, while being inevitable consequences of rebellion, don’t exhaust my incentive for insurrection, which is the only way to affirm my centrality in the world, and thus in my relations. Without insurrection I cannot create relations that are not mediated, by God or by the state, “mutual relationships such that everyone..., in these relationships, can be truly what he is.”<sup>24</sup> Equally, without my egoistic will to rise up, the union against authority and hierarchy ceases to be my tool and ends up becoming — “just as from a thought a fixed idea arises” — a higher being, a party. Only a form of relationship that affirms the uniqueness of the particular individual

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<sup>22</sup> The limits consist in relational, not moral, obligations, methodological obligations, not duties.

<sup>23</sup> *The Unique and Its Property*, in “My Intercourse.”

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

is able to avoid reproducing the order of dependence within itself. The Unique cannot oppose hierarchy through a means — the party — that is only “a state within the state,” “a ready-made society” for which he is supposed to renounce his own individuality.

This battle can also take place with “millions of people together”<sup>25</sup>; what matters is that the multitude is not transformed into the subject, into that “all” which preserves the traits of transcendence and, thus, of mediation. What opposes mutuality — the *Mann gegen Mann*<sup>26</sup> relationship that, alone, can confirm uniqueness — to hierarchy is not the number, either positively or negatively. In fact, and I think this is very important, a “collective” dimension (in the sense of I+I+I...) with an individualistic character can be created, just like an individual dimension with a collectivist and alienating character can be created. What distinguishes the defense of individual autonomy from the formation of domination is the associative *method*. But Stirner, when he speaks of the relationship, of the union of Uniques, refers only to the “form” of such relations: a form that is able to guarantee the centrality of each one. “For Stirner, going beyond the ‘formal’ moment means going back to creating spooks, legitimizing domination, making space for the magic circle,”<sup>27</sup> meaning that moment of alienation that gets created in the dichotomy between being and having-to-be, between existence and essence. Precisely by not creating a new *heaven*, a new mission, Stirner holds that the contents of the union, the rules of play, will be the exclusive property of the Uniques. If Stirner’s “political” dimension can seem like a utopia, it remains, as the relational world of the Unique, thence of a “who” that cannot be described, an “empty” utopia.

The one-sidedness, the separateness of each Unique still remains (or rather, only becomes complete) in the union. Thus, one cannot make uniqueness correspond with isolation. The individual who associates is no less an egoist than the one who prefers to “stand alone”; what changes is the object of her egoism.<sup>28</sup> If one unites with others, it is because he finds in their company a reason for interest, for enjoyment. If one prefers to isolate himself, it means that human beings no longer have anything to offer her. “Remaining is no less egoistic than isolating oneself.”<sup>29</sup> The distinction is therefore not between egoism and non-egoism, but, if you will,

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<sup>25</sup> So much so that there have been those who, by jerking his thought around quite a bit, have made of Stirner a precursor of revolutionary syndicalism.

<sup>26</sup> In German in the original. Literally “man against man.” — *Translator’s note*.

<sup>27</sup> So writes R. Escobar in *Il cerchio magico. Max Stirner: la politica dalla gerarchia alla reciprocità* (The Magic Circle, Max Stirner: Politics from Hierarchy to Mutuality), ed. Franco Angeli, Milano, Italy, 1986, page 15. My considerations in this writing are freely inspired by Escobar’s study.

<sup>28</sup> Isolating oneself and associating are only different forms of relationships. Even solitude — Ortega y Gasset maintained — is a relationship, in which one participates in the form of absence.

<sup>29</sup> Stirner, *Stirner’s Critics*

between a “poor” egoism and a “rich” egoism. “One who loves a human being,” Stirner says, “through this same love is richer than another who doesn’t love anyone,” since she has one more “property.” Stirner’s egoism is thus full participation in life, in relationships with others.

Alongside the charge that he wanted to “atomize” individuals, the charge that Stirner, with his union of egoists, limits himself to proposing only a variant in terminology of capitalist society, a mirror image, however extreme, of the bourgeois order,<sup>30</sup> also shows all its inconsistencies. Stirner, after showing the ideological “glue” of capitalist society is humanistic morality (an internal “sanctimonious priest” who preaches sacrifice), maintains that if one had a more aware egoism, one would take into account that “cooperation is *more useful* than isolation” and that the abandonment of “competition” — that hidden conflict, as mediated by the state — is nothing but a response to a higher feeling of our uniqueness.

In the union of egoists, exploitation (“assertion at the expense of others”) is eliminated as soon as the co-associates, equally aware egoists, “no longer want to be such fools as to let anyone live at their expense.”<sup>31</sup>

In a careful reading of Stirner’s thought, it also seems obvious that one cannot associate the interests of the Unique with liberal utilitarianism.<sup>32</sup> Bentham’s arithmetic of pleasures still consists of a belief in a thing that is interesting in the absolute sense, meaning a belief in a “sacred” thing. And we know how for Stirner, any behavior toward something as interesting in itself and for itself is always religious behavior.<sup>33</sup> For Stirner, self-interest is not a principle, it is “a mere name, a concept empty of content, utterly lacking any conceptual development.”<sup>34</sup> In the eyes of our philosopher, “the moral system of self-interest condemns the real self-interest of particular individuals, in much the same way as the supposed universality of reason forces ‘private reason’ to submit.”<sup>35</sup>

From this obviously incomplete picture I’ve drawn of relationship and association as found in Stirner one can, I think, understand how it isn’t possible to transform the union of egoists into a *bellum omnium contra omnes* that does nothing but again propose the domination of human being over human being as the sole form of life together.

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<sup>30</sup> This is Moses Hess’ thesis, taken back up by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*, and later repeated by (almost) all marxist scholars who are interested in Stirner.

<sup>31</sup> Stirner, *Stirner’s Critics*

<sup>32</sup> Marx and Engels portrayed Stirner’s thought as the final, degenerated landing-place of liberal utilitarianism. See *The German Ideology*.

<sup>33</sup> Stirner, *Stirner’s Critics*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> F. Andolfi, “*Egoismo e solidarietà sociale: riflessioni su Stirner*” (“Egoism and Social Solidarity: Reflections on Stirner”), in *Nietzsche-Stirner*, pg. 163.

The Unique of whom Stirner speaks is not moved in her relations with others by the “pleasure of being rude” that characterizes Dostoevsky’s character from the underground. What drives her is not at all the need for the impossible of that inexorable *appétit d’être* that leads Camus’ Caligula to state that “One is always free at someone else’s expense.” Also foreign to Stirner is that fear of death which, in Canetti’s account, the sultan of Delhi is striving to defeat when he decides to raze the city to the ground in order to enjoy an instant of that “solitary *uniqueness*” that comes from the “feeling of having survived all men.”<sup>36</sup>

Stirner “doesn’t defend the power of the individual to dominate others.”<sup>37</sup> since he shows in an extremely significant way that the exercise of domination is a strongly de-individualizing practice. And since “whoever has to count on the lack of will in others in order to exist, is a shoddy product of these others, as the master is a shoddy product of the slave,”<sup>38</sup> domination comes to be a form of individual disempowerment. And this disempowerment is also accompanied by a process of alienation in that the force of the individual gets subordinated to the proof of the inferiority of others. The desire to dominate<sup>39</sup> consists of the pleasure of prevailing over others, i.e., the effort of escaping a condition that one perceives as *equality*. If, instead, one is aware of one’s own exclusivity, of one’s being irreducibly different from every one else, one can only reject the craving for “superiority” as a homogenizing principle. The power of which Stirner speaks is the capacity to place oneself before others as an individual, without having recourse to the “convenient bulwark of authority.” In fact, one is quite weak (and incomplete) if one must summon (or needs to be) an authority.<sup>40</sup> Only in the negation of authority can the individual reject the alienated life of the docile, usable citizen, the ruler’s subject who leads an existence that moves to the rhythms of *service*.

There’s no need to emphasize how many similarities there are between Stirner’s union and anti-authoritarian associational conceptions. It’s no accident that the an-

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<sup>36</sup> See Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*; Camus, *Caligula*; Canetti, *Power and Survival*. Stirner’s influence on Dostoevsky’s characters, as well as on Camus’ *The Rebel* and *Caligula*, have been pointed out by other authors. For the Dostoevsky-Stirner connection, see R. Calasso, “The Artificial Barbarian” in *The Ruin of Kasch*; J. Carroll *Breakout from the Crystal Palace: The Anarcho-psychological Critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky*; F. Andolfi, *op.cit.* For the Camus-Stirner connection, see F. Andolfi; G. Penzo, *Max Stirner: la rivolta esistenziale* (Max Stirner: The Existentialist Revolt); R. Escobar, *op.cit.* But it seems to me that no one has pointed out Canetti’s references to Stirner. And yet in his way of presenting the figure of the sultan, it seems to me that there is a clear reference to Stirner.

<sup>37</sup> J. Carroll, *op.cit.*

<sup>38</sup> Max Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*, in “My Power.”

<sup>39</sup> According to Camus, a “*désir de domination*” is what drives Stirner (see *The Rebel*)

<sup>40</sup> Stirner’s refusal of the principle of authority is contained in the essay *The False Principle of Our Education or Humanism or Realism*.

archist thinkers<sup>41</sup> who have most consistently harked back to Stirner are the ones who have perhaps contributed the most to the description of acratia contractualism. The notion — for example — of “the method of equal liberty” recalls much that is close to Stirner’s thesis of the equal inequality in the relations between Uniques.

Drawing on a theme already developed by E. de La Boetie, that of voluntary servitude, Stirner affirms that “When subservience ceases to be, it will be all over rulership as well!” and after proposing insurrection as the sole solution to the “social question,” he adds in reproach: “If the rich exist, it is the fault of the poor.” A few years later, the anarchist Bellagarigue wrote: “Have you believed that up to today there have been tyrants? Well, you are still wrong, because there are only slaves: where no one obeys, no one commands.”<sup>42</sup>

Stirner notes how domination and hierarchy, along with (or perhaps before) being a structuring of inter-individual power, are forms of intra-individual alienation, the process of internalizing the “sacred.” It is in social customs, seen as forms of the “compulsion to repeat,” that he identifies the continuous reproduction of alienation.

Thus, between individual owners who refuse subordination before any social order — with its customs, its models of behavior — the only possible relationships are those based on the — contrived, precarious, and always changeable — balance between the egoisms of individuals. Associative relations cannot be based on the imposition of a fictitious equality, nor can a higher synthesis be created between the individual powers. Stirner radically negates any theory of the identification of the individual with the collectivity, of the supersession of the individual in the social. Every individual conscious of his uniqueness will always be ready to rise up against any attempt to *settle*, through whatever form of authoritarian “*fixed idea*,” the antagonism between individuals.<sup>43</sup> Rebellion, then, is not just a transitional phase from society to the union, but rather an attitude of constant insurrection against every power, against every *heaven*, that debases one’s inalienable exclusivity. Without a continuous, extremist of one’s autonomy, there could certainly be a *revolution*, but it would still just be a *reform* of the existent.

At the basis of Stirner’s ideas on relationships, there is the clear awareness of the irreconcilability between the conception of those who hold that only the establishment of order can guarantee liberty and those who instead affirm that from liberty alone can order be born.

It is a matter, if you will, of the eternal conflict between synthesis and balance, between authority and liberty. And there should be no more doubt about where to place Stirner in this conflict.

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<sup>41</sup> I am referring specifically to Benjamin Tucker, Stephen Byington and Emile Armand.

<sup>42</sup> Anselme Bellegarrigue, (*The World’s First Anarchist Manifesto*).

<sup>43</sup> It seems to me that the distinction between the balance of antagonisms and order based on imposition recalls, if I am allowed to hazard a comparison, the difference between the harmony of

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opposing tensions of Heraclitus and Empedocles' harmony, a unity based on the cyclic predominance of one element over the other, of *philia* (love) over *neikos* (strife) and vice versa.

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All quotes from Stirner are my own translation. I have completed an English translation of *Stirner's Critics* and *The Philosophical Reactionaries*, though neither has yet been published in book form, and I am working on a translation of *Der Einzige und Sein Eigenthum*, under the title (used here) of *The Unique and Its Property*. — W.L., translator

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