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ary program. For Stirner: "The man who is set free is nothing but a freed man, a libertinus, a dog dragging a piece of chain with him: he is an unfree man in the garment of freedom, like the ass in the lion's skin."[58] There is no universal idea of freedom – there is only someone's particular idea of freedom which the individual is forced to conform to. So freedom, apart from being an ideological spectre, also always entails further domination. Ownness, on the other hand, is a strategy undertaken by the individual to renegotiate his position within ideological networks in order to resist and limit their domination. In other words, it allows us to work at the limits of ideology, looking for the cracks and points of dislocation in its edifice, and contesting the way we have been interpellated by ideology.

Stirner provides, then, a way out of the quandary of both rationalism and structuralism through a spectral reconfiguration of the ideological subject. While the subject is constructed by ideology, there is also a constitutive openness in its structure. The subject is actually constituted by the spectral excess which, while produced by ideological symbolisation, exceeds it, and, in doing so, exposes the very limits of ideology. This allows us to theorise, as I have argued, a non-essentialist extra-ideological point of departure necessary for a contemporary critique of ideology. Stirner explores, then, in an unprecedented way, the subtle connections between ideology, subjectivity, desire and power, seeing essence not as an undistorted place outside ideology, but rather at the heart of ideological distortion. He achieves an 'epistemological break' with both humanism and structuralism, presenting a post-humanist, post-Marxist, and indeed, 'post-structuralist', critique of ideological structures. Stirner occupies a crucial point of intervention and rupture in the critique of ideology, breathing new life into the concept, and advancing our understanding of contemporary politico-ideological operations.

[58] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 152 (168).

Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx explored the logic of spectrality that haunted Marx. Marx was shown to be engaged in a 'ghost hunt' for the spectre of idealism. Max Stirner was the crucial target for Marx, as Stirner had exposed the remnants of idealism still haunting Marx's work. This paper will explore the question of spectrality in Stirner. I will argue that the logic of spectrality is crucial for his critique of ideology, allowing him to go beyond both essentialist and structuralist understandings of ideological mechanisms. The essentialist account of ideology, where ideology is seen to be an irrational distortion of the subject's essential interests, and the structuralist account, where the subject is seen to be actually determined by ideological mechanisms, have both lead, I argue, to the premature demise of ideology as a concept. Stirner's intervention allows us to breathe new life into the concept of ideology by advancing beyond the limits of these problematics. As one of the first theorists of ideology, Stirner may be read in a contemporary, 'poststructuralist' light, in his critique of humanism and essentialist identities. Unlike other 'poststructuralist' accounts however, Stirner does not discount the problematic of ideology: on the contrary he shows the way in which the notion of ideological domination may be retained while rejecting the idea that there is a human essence whose real interests are misrepresented by ideological mechanisms. He inverts the humanist rationalist paradigm by showing that human essence is itself an ideological spectre, whose links with power must be unmasked. However, he goes beyond this by theorising a spectral excess, which escapes this ideological determination, and acts as a non-essentialist point of departure from which a critique of ideology may be constructed.

Stirner has been interpreted in many different ways. He has been seen as a nihilist, an existentialist, an anarchist, and a libertarian. Marx saw him as a petit-bourgeois ideologue, and as an idealist thinker trapped in the world of his own illusions.

However Stirner's importance as a theorist of ideology has been largely overlooked by contemporary critiques. His work is a demonology of ideological mechanisms – the 'fixed ideas' of Enlightenment-humanism, like human essence, rational truth, morality. He engages in an iconoclastic project of unmasking the ideas that we take for granted, exposing the power relations and the antagonism behind their serenely rational, humanist visage. For Stirner 'fixed ideas' are ideas that have been essentialised and made 'sacred'. They have become discursively closed systems, removed from the grasp of the individual and held over him, as an abrogation of his power. There is an element of religious subjugation and oppression in these ideological mechanisms. This religious logic that Stirner unmasks will be discussed later, however it is important to note that Stirner was one of the first to systematically analyse ideological systems in their own right. In doing this he went beyond materialist accounts of ideology that reduced it to an epiphenomenon of bourgeois social relations. 'Fixed ideas', according to Stirner, have their own internal logic, beyond the workings of the capitalist economy.

Marx's Critique of Idealism

This emerged as the crucial difference between Stirner and Marx, and, as we shall see later on, Marx's central charge against Stirner was that he ignored the real, material basis of ideology. Marx and Engels, in The German Ideology, develop two different, and in some respects, contradictory, theories of ideology. Firstly, it is a critique of German Idealism, which Marx and Engels saw as prevalent in Young Hegelian philosophers, such as Feuerbach, Bauer and Stirner. These philosophers, they argue, are ideologists because they abstract ideas and consciousness from their basis in the real, material world, turning them into otherworldly, metaphysical spectres.

Therefore the subject of resistance – the ego - is a process, a continuous flow of self-creating flux, which eludes essence.[56] Because, as Stirner has shown, ideology functions through the imposition of a fixed, essential identity, the ego is the counter-ideological spectre that escapes this subjectification through its resistance to symbolisation, its constitutive openness.

This escape from ideology is, of course, only temporary and finite – there is no final place beyond ideology that the subject can pass into. There is no ultimate state of freedom from ideology. Indeed freedom, according to Stirner, is only a negative concept that is still tied to essentialist humanist discourses – it always posits 'freedom from' something, and to strive for this is to show how much we are still enslaved to the concept we seek to free ourselves from. Freedom is therefore, for Stirner, an ideological spectre: "I cannot create it: I can only wish it and - aspire toward it, for it remains an ideal, a spook."[57] According to this formulation, then, to seek a perpetual state of freedom from ideology is, paradoxically, our ultimate enslavement to it – it is an ideological aspiration. We would fall into the Habermasian trap of envisioning a world of perfect communication, free from ideological distortion – which is of course the supreme ideological gesture. On the contrary, to effectively contest ideological domination, we must acknowledge that, to some extent, ideology will always be with us. We must, as Stirner suggests, continually work on ourselves to resist ideological subjectification, and renegotiate our position in ideology, seeking 'lines of flight' from it. Stirner calls this strategy of permanent resistance and renegotiation, 'ownness'. Ownness is a form of positive freedom, in which the individual renegotiates his subjectivity, creating his own forms of freedom, rather than it being handed to him as part of a revolution-

[56] See K. Ferguson, 'Saint Max Revisited: A Reconsideration of Max Stirner', Idealistic Studies, 12(3), pp. 276-292, p. 279.

[57] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 143 (157).

is abolished, and rather exhorts the subject to reconstruct his identity as he chooses, beyond the limitations of essence. Insurrection, in other words, is not about becoming what one 'is' - but about becoming what one 'is not'. This idea of rejecting one's essential identity and exploring new subjectivities is of course a feature of various poststructuralist strategies.[54] The emphasis is on the process of becoming and flux, rather than on the achievement of a stable identity that will become colonised by power.

Stirner's notion of resistance to ideological domination involves, then, a strategy of flux and becoming: 'consuming' or destroying one's identity, and reinventing one's self anew. The ego for Stirner is the basic unit of dislocation - it is not an essence, a defined set of characteristics, but rather an emptiness, a 'creative nothing', and it is up to the individual to create something out of this and not be limited by essences. For Stirner the self exists only to be consumed:

> I on my part start from a presupposition in presupposing myself; but my presupposition does not struggle for its perfection like 'Man struggling for his perfection', but only serves me to enjoy it and consume it… I do not presuppose myself, because I am every moment just positing or creating myself…[55]

[54] As Foucault suggests, "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover who we are, but to refuse who we are… The political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to liberate the individual from the State and its institutions, but to liberate ourselves from the State and the type of individualisation linked to it." See M. Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, H.L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 216.

[55] M. Stirner, op. cit., Ref. 5, p. 150.

For Marx and Engels, the 'German Ideologists' have inverted the real state of things, seeing the material world as being determined by the Idea, when, in actual fact, the Idea is determined by the material world and concrete social practices. They say, then:

> In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here it is a matter of ascending from earth to heaven. That is to say, not of setting out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh; but setting out from real active men, and on the basis of their real life-process demonstrating the development of their ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process.

In other words, ideas and consciousness are a reflection of material life, of the concrete activities and processes that people engage in. It is these material processes that determine consciousness, rather than being determined by it. To invert this relationship, to hide the material basis of ideas and to see ideas as abstract, autonomous entities which determining the material world, as Marx and Engels accuse the idealist philosophers of doing, is an ideological gesture. Ideology, in other words, is the distortion of the real relationship between life and ideas, the disguising of the real, material basis of consciousness.

The second understanding of ideology found in The German Ideology, is political, where the first one may be said to be epistemological. For Marx and Engels, ideology may be explained as the reflection of class domination. He says: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas…. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of dominant

material relations."[1] Ideology, then, is always the expression of the dominance of an economic class. Members of the ruling class are also producers of ideas – ideas which legitimise and perpetuate their rule. Ruling ideas, moreover, produce the illusion of universality – so that the interests of the ruling class are always presented as the common interest. Each new ruling class, Marx and Engels argue, "has to give its ideas the form of universality, and present them as the only rational, universally valid ones."[2] Ideology thus involves a certain illusion or deception – it presents the particular interests of a class, as the common, universal interests of all. It is a sort of camera obscura which performs an inversion of the particular and the universal, masking particular interests by giving them the appearance of universality and rationality, thus legitimising them. Each new ruling class that takes the place of the old, effects this ideological inversion. For instance, the real interests of the bourgeoisie – to economically exploit the proletariat – are disguised as the universal interests of humanity. In this way, the proletariat is deceived through this ideological misrepresentation into identifying its interests with those of the bourgeoisie. Ideology prevents the proletariat from identifying its true, real interests – which would be to overthrow bourgeois social relations – and thus perpetuates these exploitative and oppressive relations. Ideology thus involves, in Marx's theory, a distortion – it has the function of obscuring bourgeois relations of domination and exploitation, and blinding the proletariat to its own, essential interests. The proletariat, according to Engels, suffers from 'false consciousness', where it is deceived as to its own real interests by ideological mechanisms which paint the illusory picture of the universality, rationality, and inevitably of bourgeois social relations.

[1] Karl Marx and Freidrich Engels, 'The German Ideology', in Collected Works, Vol. 5, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976, p. 59.

[2] Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology', p. 60.

Strategies of Resistance

How is this act of resistance to ideology conceptualised? Stirner sees this subject of resistance emerging through what he calls 'the insurrection'. Insurrection, unlike revolutions of the past, which have only ended up reaffirming the power they sought to overthrow, does not aim overthrowing political institutions. It is precisely because ideology and power operate at the level of the subject – his desires, thoughts, ideas - rather than the institution, and that the subject is often a site of ideological domination, that Stirner argues that any resistance to domination must also start at the level of the subject. Therefore the insurrection is not a rebellion of the subject against political institutions, but a rebellion of the subject against himself, against his subjectified, ideologically constructed identity. It starts, as Stirner says, "from men's discontent with themselves".[52] It is a rejection of essence, an escape from essential subjectivities, which leads, nevertheless, to a dislocation of politico-ideological mechanisms:

> The revolution aimed at new arrangements; insurrection leads us no longer to let ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves, and sets no glittering hopes on 'institutions'. It is not a fight against the established, since, if it prospers, the established collapses of itself; it is only a working forth of me out of the established.[53]

Unlike the Marxist revolution, for instance, in which the subject throws off the shackles of ideology and is allowed to develop according to his essence, Stirner's insurrection is a revolt against precisely this essence. It abandons the idea of an essential subjectivity that can only be expressed once ideology

[52] M. Stirner, op. cit., p. 280.

[53] M. Stirner, op. cit., p. 280 (316).

we know, the individual is faced with a series of signifiers that are supposed to represent him. However, there is always an excess of meaning that escapes this signification.[51]

As an excess which escapes symbolisation, the 'un-man' may be seen as a point beyond ideology, and a figure of resistance against it. It is something that dislocates the identity of the essential human subject by transgressing its narrow boundaries and unmasking the arbitrary and contingent nature of this ideological spectre. It is important, moreover, to see that the 'un-man' is not an essence of some sort. It does not pre-exist in the individual prior to ideological interpellation. Rather the 'un-man' is a spectral excess produced through the process of interpellation – it only comes into being once an 'essential' identity is constructed for the individual. In this sense, then, the 'un-man', rather than being an essence, is the very failure of this essence – the limits of ideological symbolisation. It is the point at which ideology breaks down and the contingent nature of its operation is exposed. In this way, the 'un-man', as the limit of ideological symbolisation, may provide the non-essentialist, extra-ideological point of departure, from which a critique of ideology may be constructed. It satisfies the two conditions mentioned above for a contemporary critique of ideology: that it dispenses with the essentialist human subject; and that it allows, nevertheless, a critical point of departure. In this way, Stirner's notion of the 'un-man' as a non-essentialist 'place' of resistance to ideology, goes both rationalist and structuralist understandings of ideology and provides the foundations of a contemporary critique.

[51] J. Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), p. 306.

The two understandings of ideology presented here are quite different. The first notion of ideology sees it as the abstraction of ideas from their basis in real, material life – an epistemological distortion. The second sees ideology in a more directly political sense as a series of ideas produced by the ruling class, which mask its particularity in the guise of universality, thus inducing a state of 'false consciousness'. There is a central contradiction here. Is ideology that which disguises the fact that ideas do not have a determining effect on material and social life? Or is ideology a series of ideas that plays an active role in supporting and maintaining a certain system of social relations? Is ideology that which abstracts ideas from the real world? Or is it an active weapon in real political and social struggles? In other words the first theory sees ideology as the abstraction of ideas from material and social life, whereas the second locates ideology in the actual ideas themselves and the role they play in very real, material struggles. The latter version perhaps allows ideology a more internal role in material life than the former, which sees it purely as the abstraction from material life.[3]

However, I would argue that despite these differences, the two versions of ideology propounded by Marx and Engels, are united in one crucial sense: they both see ideology as pertaining to a fundamental illusion – a distortion and mystification of reality. The first notion of ideology sees it as a disguising of material and social basis of ideas. The second sees ideology as creating an illusion of universality, masking the particularity of bourgeois interests, and thus deceiving the proletariat as to its own, essential interests. Ideology, in both senses then, implies an illusion, a ruse or deception – a fundamental distortion of reality. This notion of ideology obeys a rationalist logic, in which rational truth is counterpoised to obfuscating ideological mechanisms that distort this truth. Ideology in the first sense, as we

[3] See Terry Eagleton, Ideology: an Introduction, London: Verso, 1991.

have seen, distorts the real relationship between material life and ideas, and in the second sense, disguises the reality of class rule and the real, rational interests of the proletariat. The proletariat cannot perceive the truth of its real interests because it is deceived in this regard by ideological mechanisms. Ideology as deception, in other words, implies a rational truth or a notion of real interests that is being distorted. Ideology is therefore inherently irrational.

Paradigms of Ideology: Rationalism and Structuralism

This approach to ideology has its roots in the rationalism of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment claimed to bring the bright light of reason to the dark, murky waters of superstition and religious mystification. Scientific and rational thought was seen as a tool that would liberate man from obscurantism and tyranny. If rule by divine right could be exposed as irrational, then it would be overthrown. It is interesting, as Terry Eagleton remarks, that these Enlightenment thinkers who sought to develop rational systems of ideas and bring reason to bear on obscurantism, were themselves first known as ideologists, or 'ideologues'.[4] With Marx, however, as we have seen, the term 'ideology' itself became associated with the mystification and distortion of rational truth. In any case it is clear that, despite the inversion of terms, the theory of ideology for Marx and Engels subscribes to the rationalist logic of the Enlightenment, in which rational and scientific knowledge is seen as an antidote to obfuscating and illusory ideas. In Marx and Engels's case, materialism, or historical materialism, is precisely this scientific antidote to ideological mystification. More importantly, with Marx and Engels, there is a notion of the real, essential interests of the proletariat, which have been misperceived due

[4] See Eagleton, Ideology, p. 67.

termined by it, as it is in structuralist and indeed poststructuralist accounts. For Stirner, there is always the possibility of the subject resisting his subjectification, resisting the way he has been constructed. The identity of the ideological subject is never complete. There is always a 'lack' in symbolisation that undermines the fullness of this identity. In other words, ideological interpellation never fully accounts for the individual: "no concept expresses me, nothing that is designated my essence exhausts me…"[48] There is always a left-over, a spectral remainder that is produced by ideological symbolisation, yet which escapes it and provides a point of resistance against it. There is a flaw in ideological mirroring – the point at which the ideological subject does not entirely reflect the ideological symbols and images, but rather exceeds these. It may be seen, in other words, as a distortion of ideology, a distortion of distortion. This excess is what Stirner terms 'the un-man', the other of man, the other of humanism. It is a spectre that 'returns', in the Lacanian sense, to disrupt the imposition of fixed identities and essence. "But the un-man (Unmensch) who is somewhere in every individual, how is he blocked? … by the side of man stands always the un-man… State, society, humanity do not master this devil."[49] This is the other of man, a force that cannot be contained, both a creation of man and a threat to it. It is an excess produced by ideological interpellation, which refuses to conform to human essence, to the ideal of man. The 'un-man' 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."[50] Perhaps it may be considered in the Lacanian sense as the 'Real' of symbolisation: an excess of meaning produced by its inability to be inscribed within meaning, by its inability to be signified. For Lacan, as

[48] Stirner, op. cit., p. 324 (366)
[49] Stirner, The Ego and Its Own, p. 125 (140).
[50] Stirner, The Ego and Its Own, p.159 (177).

He exposed a problem that radical theorists of his day had not quite counted on – that subjects can quite easily desire their own domination, just as they desire freedom. This was a theme that was later to be pursued by poststructuralist thinkers, particularly Deleuze and Guattari.[47]

The 'Un-Man'

However if the individual, for Stirner, is subjectified in this way – as a site of his own domination – how can we theorise resistance to the systems of politico-ideological domination that Stirner unmasks? If there is no autonomous human essence, if the subject himself is constructed by the very humanist ideological systems that dominate him, upon what basis can we critically engage with these mechanisms? In Stirner's theory of ideology, is there any critical, extra-ideological standpoint, from which we can formulate strategies of resistance? This was the problem, as I have argued, and indeed poststructuralism – the problem of the uncontaminated point of departure. Because Stirner has rejected the idea of the autonomous, essential subject – seeing him rather as an ideological artefact – has he also denied himself any critical point of departure? I would argue, however, that Stirner does theorise a critical point of departure beyond ideology – one that does not rely on essentialist categories. In doing so he goes beyond both the Enlightenment humanist and structuralist accounts of ideology, and satisfying the two opposed requirements for a critique of ideology outlined above. This extra-ideological 'place' of resistance is made possible through his radical formulation of the ideological subject.

The chief advantage of Stirner's notion of subjectivity is that the subject, while constituted by ideology, is never fully de-

[47] See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 116.

to the operation of bourgeois ideology, and can only be correctly and rationally perceived through the scientific study of real, historical conditions. In other words, there is an essential and rational truth about society, and a core of essential interests within the subjectivity of the proletariat as a class, that is hidden under layers of ideological mystification and false consciousness, and is waiting to be discovered.

This essentialism is central to the logic of Enlightenment rationalism: there is an essentially rational and moral subject, who has only to grasp this inherent rationality and morality to liberate himself from the metaphysical obscurantism, and political authoritarianism, that keeps him in chains. This was the language of Enlightenment humanist political philosophies, from liberalism to anarchism: man was enslaved by his own ignorance, and if only he could develop his innate rational and moral faculties, he could free himself from political oppression. In other words, there is an essential identity whose rational realisation is distorted or denied by ideology. One has to remove these ideological obstacles, to exorcise these mystifying spectres with scientific and rational discourses, in order to allow human essence to be realised. Here we may say, then, that there is a point of departure, in the form of an essential human subjectivity and rational scientific discourse, that is uncontaminated by ideology. In the language of Enlightenment rationality there is always a non-ideological standpoint – an essentially rational subject and discourse that can step outside ideological mechanisms and reflect on them critically. Rational science is the antidote to ideological distortion. The anarchist Bakunin, for instance, heralds rational science as a "science that has rid itself of all the phantoms of metaphysics and religion…"[5] For Marx, too, this extra-ideological rational discourse is historical materialism. In other words, although

[5] Mikhail Bakunin, Political Philosophy, ed. G. P. Maximoff, London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964, p. 70.

the subject's perception of his true interests is distorted by ideology, these interests themselves remain outside ideology and can be grasped rationally and scientifically. If ideology involves distortion, there must be a rational truth or essence that is distorted, and this provides a critical point of departure beyond ideology. It is precisely from this standpoint outside ideological mechanisms – this uncontaminated point of departure – that ideology can be criticised as an irrational distortion. The rationalist Enlightenment understanding of ideology therefore contends that we can step outside ideology, that we can see through its distortions from a certain epistemological viewpoint. For Marx and Engels, an understanding of the logic of history would allow the proletariat to shed the scales of 'false consciousness' and finally grasp its true interests, thus becoming 'class conscious'. Of course this epistemologically-privileged could only be attained by a certain strata of the proletariat, who, in Marx's words "have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march".[6]

However, can we step outside ideology in this way? Can we engage in a rational critique of ideology from a safe distance, from an uncontaminated point of departure outside it? A 'structuralist' account of ideology would contend that this uncontaminated, extra-ideological position does not exist, and that we cannot step outside ideological mechanisms. Indeed to posit a vantage point outside ideology, from which we can supposedly rationally reflect on ideology, is itself an ideological gesture. In other words, according to this account, there is no gap between ideology and the subject – there is no division between ideological distortion and rational thought. This gap is itself an ideological distortion. Ideology has colonised this place, and to think that we can step outside ideology merely affirms our position squarely within it. Let me

[6] Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," 484.

effect on the bourgeoisie and class relations.[44] On the other hand, Marx is claiming that Stirner is ignoring the political reality of the state by seeing it as an ideological illusion. In other words, on the one hand, according to Marx, Stirner is attributing too much importance and reality to the state, and on the other hand, he is not allowing it enough.[45]

Stirner believes that the state must be overcome as an idea before it can be overcome in reality. This is the only way to ensure that a new state does not spring up in the place of the old. What must be attacked is the desire for authority. The state does not repress desire - rather it channels it to itself: 'The state exerts itself to tame the desirous man; in other words, it seeks to direct his desire to it alone, and to content that desire with what it offers.'[46] It is this desire for authority, this love of the state, which perpetuates its power. People are dominated, Stirner suggests, because they desire it. Stirner was one of the first thinkers to explore the links between desire and power.

[44] See Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology', p. 361.

[45] It is generally agreed that Stirner's critique of the idealism had a resounding effect on Marx, forcing him to take account of the idealism within his own notions of human essence which he derived, to some extent, from Feuerbach. The Ego and His Own inspired criticism of Marx's latent humanism from many quarters. Arnold Ruge and Gustav Julius for instance, who were both influenced by Stirner, accused Marx of being indebted to the same Feuerbachian humanism and idealism that Stirner had linked to religious alienation. Following Stirner's critique of socialism, Julius saw the socialist as a modern day version of the Christian possessed with a religious fervour. It is suggested that Stirner's work shocked Marx into a break with humanism and the notion of a moral or humanistic basis for socialism. Marx was quite clearly disconcerted by Stirner's suggestion that socialism was tainted with the same idealism as Christianity and that it was full of superstitious ideas like morality and justice. This is manifested in a relentless, vitriolic and sarcastic attack on Stirner to which the largest part of The German Ideology is devoted. The German Ideology represents a cathartic attempt by Marx to tarnish Stirner with the same brush that Marx himself had been tarnished with - that of idealism - while, at the same time, to exorcise this spectre from his own thought.

[46] M. Stirner, op. cit., p. 276 (Rebel 312)

a figure who, like the knight in Don Quixote, fights imaginary battles with imaginary foes. For Marx, Stirner's analysis of the state as an ideological spectre – an illusion that rests more on the beliefs of its subjects than on its own power, ignores the economic and class relations that form the material basis of the state. According to Marx, Stirner's 'idealism' absurdly allows the state to be 'willed' out of existence, rather than undermined through concrete political and social activity: "It is the old illusion that changing existing relations depends only on the good will of the people, and that existing relations are ideas."[43]

However, this is a serious and deliberate misreading of Stirner. Rather than dismissing the reality of political power, Stirner actually sees it as the predominant force in society - more so even than economic power. It may be argued, on the contrary, that it is Marx, whose thinking is trapped within the narrow confines of materialism, who neglected the importance of political power by reducing it to economic and class relations. In this sense it would be Marx who has made the state into a spectre – an illusory reflection of bourgeois relations. Stirner merely argues that the state is based on illusory, ideological premises, like morality, which he intends to unmask. For Stirner, the state only exists in so far that we let it exist. Is it not undeniable that any kind of rule depends on our willingness to let it rule us? Political power cannot rest solely on coercion; it needs our help, our willingness to obey. If only one realised, Stirner argues, that the state's power depends on our power, then this power would disintegrate. This is what he means when he says that the state's power is nothing: on the one hand it is very real, but on the other hand it is only so because we allow it to be so. So Marx attacks Stirner's theory of the state on two contradictory fronts. On the one hand, he is arguing that Stirner attributes too much importance to the state by seeing it as having a determining

[43] Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology', p. 379.

explain this structuralist account with reference to Althusser. For Althusser, there is no human essence beyond the grasp of ideology, as rationalist Enlightenment thinkers supposed. Indeed Althusser's theory of ideology is a radical break with humanist forms of Marxism. Rather the human subject is constructed, or interpellated by ideological mechanisms. Althusser here inverts the paradigm in which the subject constitutes ideology: "the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects."[7] Ideological structures, or what Althusser calls 'ideological State apparatuses (ISA's)' produce the subject through the misrecognition and distortion that is at the heart of social reproduction. There is no 'false consciousness' in this account. The subject is not deceived as to his true, essential interests, because these interests do not exist, or rather they are constructed by these ideological apparatuses. There can be no essential, rational point of departure beyond ideology – ideology is all around us, existing as the very basis of social existence. In other words, ideology is eternal for Althusser – there is no going beyond this ideological interpellation.

We have, then, two radically opposed accounts of ideology: the rational Enlightenment account, in which ideology is seen as an irrational distortion of the subject's essential, rational interests; and the structuralist account, in which the notion of essential interests is dismissed, and the subject itself is constituted by ideological structures. I have argued that the first understanding of ideology provides an uncontaminated point of departure outside ideology, from which one can rationally reflect upon it, while the second position allows no such privileged vantage point. There is no gap here between ideology

[7] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, trans. Ben Brewster, New York: Monthly Review Press, 127-186, p. 171.

and the subject. The question of ideology is skewed on these two opposing poles.

The End of Ideology?

Moreover, it may be argued that these radically different positions have led to the theoretical stagnation of ideology as a concept. The rational Enlightenment account, in order to see ideology as an irrational distortion of reality, had to presuppose an essential subjectivity outside ideology. It relied, as I have argued, on an uncontaminated point of departure from which ideology can be resisted. However, as structuralists have argued, this concept of a privileged viewpoint outside ideology can no longer be sustained. It relies on dubious essentialist and metaphysical notions of subjectivity. Rather, ideology has colonised the subject, and to posit a gap between ideology and the subject is the ultimate ideological gesture. The structuralist critique of the Enlightenment humanist position, however, presents us with a number of problems and throws the concept of ideology into crisis. Firstly, without some kind of point of departure outside ideology, how can ideology be analysed and resisted? If the subject is already determined by ideology, how can there be any conception of a political critique of the ideological structures which, for instance, keep repressive regimes in power, or support exploitative and environmentally destructive practices? Secondly, if there is no point outside ideology, if ideology has colonised this non-ideological gap whereby ideology was seen as a distortion or illusion, then how can we continue to define a concept of ideology? How do we distinguish it from other practices? The concept of ideology has, in Zizek's words grown "too strong", and it has become consequently meaningless: "it begins to embrace everything, inclusive of the very neutral, extra-ideological ground supposed to provide the standard by means of which one can measure ide-

ideological apparatuses are not only concerned with economic or political questions – they are also rooted in psychological needs. The dominance of the state, Stirner argues, depends on our willingness to let it dominate us, on our complicit desire for our own repression:

> The state is not thinkable without lordship (Herrschaft) and servitude (Knechtschaft) (subjection) …He who, to hold his own, must count on the absence of will in others is a thing made by these others, as a master is a thing made by the servant. If submissiveness ceased, it would be all over with lordship.[40]

Stirner argues that the state itself is an ideological abstraction, much like God; and it only exists because we allow it to exist, because we abdicate to it our own authority in the same way that we create God by abdicating our authority and placing it outside ourselves. What is more important than the institution of the state is the 'ruling principle' - it is the idea of the state that dominates us.[41] The state's unity and dominance exist mostly in the minds of its subjects. The state's power is really based on our power. It is only because the individual has not recognised this power, because he humbles himself before authority, that the state continues to exist.[42] Marx argues that this is a prime example of Stirner's idealism. For Marx, Stirner is a thinker who lives in the world of his own illusions, mistaking them for reality. We must remember that Marx and Engels's The German Ideology was a critique of what they saw as the idealist tendency to see ideas and consciousness as having a determining effect on the real world, thus ignoring the real, material basis of ideas. Stirner is condemned here as 'Saint Sancho',

[40] M. Stirner, op. cit., pp. 174-175.
[41] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 200.
[42] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 252.

> 'essence'. Moreover, morality is linked directly with state domination: "this popular rage for the moral protects the police institution more than the government could in any way protect it."[37]

Stirner exposes here a new ideological operation that eluded nineteenth-century theory – the links between human essence as an ideological spectre, and political power. Rather than the state directly oppressing man, as was the case in the classical political paradigm, Stirner shows that state power functions through man, constructing him as a site of his own oppression. In other words ideology interpellates the individual as a subject of the state. Man is constructed as a site of power, a political unit through which the state dominates the individual: "The kernel of the state is simply 'man', this unreality, and it itself is only a 'society of men'."[38] The state demands that the individual be human and conform to certain ideological norms, so that he can be made part of state society and dominated in this way: 'So the state betrays its enmity to me by demanding that I be a man …it imposes being a man upon me as a duty'.[39] Stirner in this way describes a process of subjectification in which power functions, not by repressing man, but by constructing him as a political subject.

Perhaps the most important point about Stirner's analysis of ideology is this process of subjectification. As subjects we are constructed in such a way that we voluntarily submit our authority to the state. As Stirner correctly surmised, the state cannot function only through top-down repression, because this would expose its power in all its nakedness and brutality. Rather the state relies on us allowing it to dominate us. Stirner is not so much interested in power itself, but in the reasons why we allow ourselves to be dominated. Stirner wants to show that

[37] Stirner, The Ego and Its Own, p. 215.

[38] Stirner, The Ego and Its Own, 161.

[39] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 161.

ological distortion."[8] The gap that separated ideology from a rational understanding of it, functioned as a constitutive gap which allowed ideology to be defined in opposition to something. Once this gap or point of departure was removed, then ideology became impossible to define. In other words, if ideology is everything, then it is nothing. The question of ideology is, therefore, caught in a quandary: if it retains the notion of ideology as a distortion of rational truth, then it can retain an uncontaminated point of departure outside ideology, yet it has to rely on spurious essentialist claims. Alternatively, if it abandons these essentialist categories, then it loses this extra-ideological standpoint, and falls into the trap of expanding the concept of ideology to the point where it loses any theoretical value. This over-inflation of the concept of ideology is, as Zizek argues, "one of the main reasons for progressive abandonment of the notion of ideology."[9]

What forms has this abandonment of ideology taken? The two main responses to the crisis of ideology are logical extensions of the two radically opposed accounts of ideology outlined above. The rational Enlightenment account of ideology finds its logical conclusion, it would seem, in Habermas's rationalist abandonment of the ideology thesis. Habermas presents a theory of rational, non-coercive communication in which ideology has no place. For Habermas there is always the possibility of undistorted communication between subjects, and this presupposes an universal intersubjective understanding: "Yet these participants in communicative action must reach an understanding about something in the world if they hope to carry out their action plans on a consensual basis."[10] Thus, subjects can reach a rational understanding about the world through speech acts referring to this context, without the distorting ef-

[8] Slavoj Zizek, 'The Spectre of Ideology', The Zizek Reader, 55-86, p. 69.

[9] Zizek, 'The Spectre of Ideology', p. 69.

[10] Jurgen Habermas, Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action, trans. C. Lenhardt (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 1990), 136.

fects of ideology. Habermas notion of communicative action subscribes to an Enlightenment rationalist understanding of the world. Ideology is still seen as a distortion of understanding and communication. However in this world of perfect communication, the concept of ideology simply has no place – its distorting effects can simply be bypassed by rational consensus achieved through an 'ideal speech situation'. In the Habermasian universe, then, ideology has become obsolete – it ceases to have any theoretical or political relevance.

However is not Habermas, in attempting to bypass ideological distortion through the 'ideal speech situation', open to the same charge that in trying to go beyond ideology one merely reaffirms one's place within it? As I have suggested before, this non-ideological place, whether it takes the form of human essence, or an intersubjectively achieved rational consensus, is itself ideological. To try to step outside ideology is the ultimate ideological gesture. It is perhaps the circularity of this argument, the 'ideology is everywhere' thesis which leads to the impoverishment of ideology as a concept, that has prompted the second version of the abandonment of ideology – 'poststructuralism'. The poststructuralist dismissal of the idea of ideology may be seen to be the logical conclusion of the structuralist position. Structuralism, as argued above, rejected the idea of an essential human subjectivity – rather the subject was produced by ideological apparatuses, and consequently, there was no uncontaminated place of departure outside ideology. This led, however, to the chief problem that if the concept of ideology is expanded to encompass everything, then it loses meaning. Why not just do away with ideology altogether? Does it continue to have any value conceptually or politically? Is it not more relevant and effective to see the world in terms of discourses, practices and strategies of power? This is precisely what Foucault does. For Foucault, it is no longer valuable to think in terms of ideological distortion, because this implies that there is some rational truth whose representation is be-

Ideology and Power

For Stirner humanism is an ideological worldview in which we have become trapped. Humanism as an ideology claims to free individuals from all sorts of institutional oppressions, while at the same time entailing an intensification of the oppression over ourselves – through human essence – and denying us the power to resist this self-subjection. Here the individual has only pseudo-sovereignty. Within the humanist language of rights and freedoms there is a trap: rights and freedoms are granted to the individual in return for the relinquishment of power over oneself. Humanist ideology constitutes, in Stirner's words, "a new feudalism under the suzerainty of 'man'".[34] An important site of this humanist ideological domination is morality. Stirner believes that morality is not only a fiction derived from Christian idealism, but also a discourse that oppresses the individual. Morality is merely the leftover of Christianity, only in a new humanist garb, and as Stirner argues: 'Moral faith is as fanatical as religious faith!'[35] What Stirner objects to is not morality itself, but the fact that it has becomes a sacred law. Morality has become the new religion - a secular religion – through which individuals are subjectified. Moral ideas rule over the conscience, denying the sensuous freedom of the individual and enforcing a sense of shame and guilt. Stirner exposes the will to power, the cruelty and domination behind moral ideas: 'Moral influence takes its start where humiliation begins; yes, it is nothing else than this humiliation itself, the breaking and bending of the temper (Mutes) down to humility (Demut)'.[36] Morality mutilates the individual:

> the individual must conform to prevailing moral codes, otherwise he becomes alienated from his

[34] Stirner, p. 278 (314)
[35] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 45.
[36] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 75.

sees it as another abstraction, another ideological illusion, like God and human essence, that the individual is sacrificed to: "Society, from which we have everything, is a new master, a new spook…".[32] The individual, according to Stirner, is not an essential part of society as Marx believed.

So for Stirner, socialism is just another extension of liberalism: both are systems which rely on an essence which is deemed sacred - the state and law for political liberalism; society for social liberalism. Stirner then examines the third and final form of liberalism in this dialectic: 'humane liberalism', or humanism. Humane liberalism is based on a critique of both political and social liberalism. For the humanist, these two liberalisms are still too egoistic - one should act for selfless reasons, purely on behalf of humanity and one's fellow man. However as we have seen, humanism is based on a notion of human essence that Stirner argues is ideological and illusory. Humanism contends that everyone has within them an essential kernel of humanity that they must live up to. If they transgress this essence they are deemed 'inhuman'. Stirner, on the other hand, wants to assert the individual's right to be to not be part of humanity, to reject human essence and recreate oneself as one chooses. For Stirner, humanism is the final stage in both the liberation of man and enslavement of the individual ego. The more man frees himself from the objective conditions that bind him, such as the state and society, the more individual ego, the 'self will', is dominated. This is because man and human essence have conquered the last bastion of the individual – his thoughts or 'opinions'. Personal opinion becomes 'general human opinion', and individual autonomy is thus effaced.[33] The Enlightenment humanist fantasy of man's liberation, now fulfilled, is therefore concomitant with the complete domination of the individual.

[32] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 111.

[33] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 116.

ing distorted, and it is precisely this idea of absolute truth that Foucault questions. So, for Foucault, what is in doubt is not the representation of truth, but the ontological and epistemological status of truth itself: "the political question… is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness or ideology; it is truth itself."[11] In other words, if the status of truth itself is in doubt, then questions of the ideological distortion of truth are no longer relevant. What is more important here are the power relationships and practices embroiled in the discourse of truth. Moreover, for Foucault, there is no essential human subjectivity that is denied or deceived by ideology - the subject is a product, a fabrication. However, rather than the subject being constituted by ideology, as Althusser contended, it is produced by power and discourse. This is distinctly non-ideological because there is no distortion here, even a constitutive distortion, as there was with Althusser. Foucault looks at the material practices and strategies that go into constructing subjectivity – for instance, the way that the prisoner is produced as marginalised subjectivity through the techniques of surveillance and incarceration that operate in the prison.[12] There is no ideological deception here – rather a series of practices, techniques, and strategies of power that produce the subject. With Foucault power has usurped ideology as the analytical focus – power is dispersed throughout the social network at all levels, and is involved in our everyday actions and relationships, our most minute practices: "power is everywhere because it comes from everywhere."[13]

There is however a problem here. If power, for Foucault, is all-pervasive in this way, then, like ideology, it becomes too indefinable and loses its conceptual value. Power has become

[11] Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power' in Power/Knowledge, p. 133.

[12] See Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sherida, London: Penguin Books, 1991.

[13] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality v1: Introduction, trans. R. Hunter, New York: Vintage Books, 1978, p. 93.

too broad a concept, in the same way that ideology as a concept was expanded to the point of meaninglessness. There must also be a constitutive gap between power and the subject, just as there needed to be a gap between ideology and the subject. This is the point that Ernesto Laclau and Lilian Zac make. They argue that power cannot be 'everywhere', as Foucault contended, because if it is, it loses its identity as 'power'.[14] For power to exist as a concept there needs to be a constitutive 'lack' that limits it definitionally. This lack is abolished in Foucault's formulation of power, and therefore the identity of power itself becomes meaningless. Foucault has, in a sense, replaced ideology with power, and has similarly over-expanded the concept. So we might say, just as we did with ideology, that if power is everything, then it is nothing. Moreover, if power is all-pervasive in the sense that Foucault suggests, then it is difficult to theorise resistance to power. This was a problem that Foucault grappled with and was never able to satisfactorily resolve.

There is another, more interesting problem with this 'poststructuralist', discursive abandonment of ideology. It represents a further attempt to step outside ideology, this time, not from the perspective of an autonomous, essential subject, but paradoxically, from the very rejection of this essential identity. In other words, it is an attempt to go beyond the problematic of ideology by dismissing it in place of discourses and practices that constitute the subject. While this positing of all-pervasive networks of power and discourse is supposed to deny the possibility of any critical, standpoint outside these networks, and, in an ironical way, deny the 'poststructuralist' thinker himself any such objective vantage point, this is, in itself, an ideological gesture. As Zizek argues, this is the 'last trap' of ideology: we have seen the way that the rationalist

[14] Ernesto Laclau and Lilian Zac, 'Minding the Gap: the Subject of Politics', in The Making of Political Identities, ed. Ernesto Laclau, London: Verso, 1996, p. 18.

in this discourse. I shall argue, however, that Stirner goes beyond the 'poststructuralist' argument by theorising a point of departure beyond ideology/power, from which resistance to these humanist discourses can take place – something that Foucault was not able to adequately formulate.

Stirner's politico-ideological critique of humanism and human essence is developed in a counter-dialectic. While the Hegelian dialectic culminates in the freedom of humanity, this counter-dialectic, which charts the development of humanity in relation to the political institutions that correspond to it, ends with the ideological domination of the individual. The analysis starts with liberalism, or what Stirner calls 'political liberalism'. As Stirner shows, political liberty merely means that the state is free, in the same way that religious liberty means that religion is free: 'It does not mean my liberty, but the liberty of a power that rules and subjugates me'.[28] In other words the liberties entailed by liberalism are restricted to a certain subjectivity and political discourse regulated by the state – it always involves a further domination. The second stage of the counter-dialectic is 'social liberalism', or socialism. Social liberalism comes about as a rejection of political liberalism, which is perceived as too egoistic.[29] For Stirner, on the other hand, political liberalism was characterised not by too much egoism, but by too little, and he sees the enforced equality of socialism - equality of poverty - as a further oppression of the individual. Instead of the 'property' of the individual being possessed by the state, it is now possessed by society.[30]Once again, according to Stirner, the individual has been subordinated to an abstract power outside him. This is one of the points on which Stirner and Marx conflict.[31] Stirner, in contrast to Marx, does not believe in society: he

[28] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 97.
[29] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 97.
[30] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 106.
[31] See Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology', p. 213.

essence has become the new norm by which individuals are judged and punished: "I set up what 'man' is and what acting in a 'truly human' way is, and I demand of every one that this law become norm and ideal to him; otherwise he will expose himself as a 'sinner and criminal'."[26] In other words, because a certain identity has been constructed as 'essential' it creates an ideological standard according to which individuals are expected to live up to. Thus human essence is the new machine of punishment and domination: a new norm that condemns difference.

Foucault has also looked at the way that the notion of what constitutes the 'human' has become the new norm of punishment and marginalisation, particularly in the prison and in psychiatric discourse. Humanism's treatment of crime as a disease to be cured is an example of the way that this punitive discourse functions. As Stirner argues:

> Curative means or healing is only the reverse side of punishment, the theory of cure runs parallel with the theory of punishment; if the latter sees in action a sin against right, the former takes it for a sin of the man against himself, as a falling away from his health.[27]

This is precisely Foucault's argument about the modern formula of punishment in Discipline and Punish: a formula in which medical and psychiatric norms are only the old morality in a new guise. For Stirner, as well as for Foucault, punishment is only made possible by making something sacred, something that can be transgressed. There is a certain homology here between Stirner and Foucault that has not been explored. Both thinkers present a critique of humanism, unmasking the practices of domination and marginalisation involved

[26] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 182..
[27] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 213.

attempt to separate ideology from reality and to posit an uncontaminated point of departure outside ideology, was itself ideological. However to respond to this by completely dismissing the notion of an extra-ideological reality and to see the world in solely terms of discursive fabrications – in other words – to give up completely on the possibility of a critical standpoint from which to reflect on ideology – is itself ideological. For Zizek, "such a quick, slick 'postmodern' solution, however, is ideology par excellence."[15] In other words, the 'postructuralist' position is somewhat disingenuous – in humbly denying itself a neutral standpoint, by seeing its own voice as merely one discourse amongst many, it is paradoxically assuming an 'objective' gaze above this endless plurality o discourse and power, and this is, of course, ideological. 'Poststructuralism', then, in holding that we must abandon the whole problematic of ideology because it presupposes a non-ideological essence that does not exist, is performing two contradictory operations simultaneously. It is attempting to step outside ideology while, at the same time, denying us a place outside. What this amounts to is a reaffirmation of ideology despite or, more precisely through, one's attempts to elude it. In the words of Zizek, "the stepping out of ideology is the very form of our enslavement to it."[16] Ideology continues to pop up obstinately in the very places where we think we have eschewed it. Maybe this also reaffirms or conceptual 'enslavement', or should we say indebtedness, to ideology.

So it seems that we are back to where we started. I have shown that the radically opposed rational Enlightenment and structuralist accounts of ideology have led to the stagnation and progressive abandonment of ideology as a project. I have also shown that this abandonment of ideology has taken two radically opposed forms, the Habermasian approach, which

[15] Zizek, 'The Spectre of Ideology', p. 70.
[16] Zizek, 'The Spectre of Ideology', p. 60.

is concomitant with the rational Enlightenment position, and the Foucauldian 'poststructuralist' approach which is an extension of the structuralist account of ideology. Moreover, I have shown the way in which these two rejections of ideology as a concept have ultimately failed and, in their very attempts to dispense with ideology, have both led to its reaffirmation. So it would seem then that there is no getting away from ideology. However the discussion thus far has yielded some interesting conclusions. It is clear, firstly, that ideology can no longer be theorised as a distortion of human essence. The structuralist, and indeed poststructuralist, discussions have shown that the subject is a product of ideology, and that to posit an uncontaminated point of departure outside ideology, is itself ideological. Secondly, and paradoxically, it is also immanently clear that we cannot present a critique of ideology, or indeed have any meaningful notion if ideology at all, without this point of departure, without this critical, radical standpoint outside ideological structures. We must have some extra-ideological 'space' with which to reflect on the mechanisms of ideology, otherwise the critique of ideology cannot proceed any further and the 'end of ideology', as many have already heralded, will be well and truly with us. It would seem that these are two contradictory requirements: that the theory of ideology must reject essentialist identity, thus denying the extra-ideological standpoint of rationalist Enlightenment thought, and, at the same time, must retain this extra-ideological point of departure for there to be any critical theory of ideology at all.

Stirner's Intervention: Towards a Spectral Critique of Ideology

Stirner's theorisation of ideology, I shall argue, provides a possible way out of this quandary. His critique of ideology goes

interpellated by this spectre – his subjectivity is constructed around an essence that is illusory. This spectre of God/Man, the spectre of humanism, haunts Stirner throughout his work.

We can see here how radical Stirner's inversion of the Enlightenment humanist understanding of ideology actually is. While Stirner retains the idea of ideology as distortion, he abandons the idea of a human essence that is distorted. Rather human essence is itself the ideological distortion, the mechanism of oppression and alienation. In Stirner's formulation, then, there is no autonomous, essential human subject that is deceived by ideology. On the contrary, this essential subjectivity has itself been constructed by ideological mechanisms. The very idea of essence, that grand secret of humanist discourse that was to one day realise itself, is, for Stirner, an ideological spectre – an illusion. We can see also the way in which Stirner's logic of spectrality goes beyond classical theories of ideology. On the first sense, spectrality is applied to ideology in the classical sense – we are haunted by illusions, 'fixed ideas' or 'spooks' that deceive us. In the second sense, however, man himself has become a spectre, an ideological illusion created by the humanist 'inversion' of religion. Man is, in a sense, haunted and alienated by himself, by the spectre of 'essence' inside him: "Henceforth man no longer, in typical cases, shudders at ghosts outside him, but at himself; he is terrified at himself."[24] In Stirner's theorisation, then, there is no essentialist point of departure outside ideological systems – this essence is itself ideological.

For Stirner, this ideological spectre of human essence is fundamentally oppressive and linked to political domination. Just as God was a power that subjugated the individual, now it is man and, as Stirner says, "'Man' is the God of today, and fear of man has taken the place of the old fear of God".[25] Human

[24] Stirner, The Ego and Its Own, p. 41.
[25] M. Stirner, op. cit., p. 165.

> self, it remains quite immaterial whether we see it outside him and view it as 'God', or find it in him and call it 'essence of man' or 'man'. I am neither God nor man, neither the supreme essence nor my essence, and therefore it is all one in the main whether I think of the essence as in me or outside me.[21]

Stirner means that by seeking the sacred in 'human essence', by positing an essential man and attributing to him certain qualities that had hitherto been attributed to God, Feuerbach has merely reintroduced religious alienation. By making certain characteristics and qualities essential to man, Feuerbach has alienated those in whom these qualities are not found. And so man becomes like God, and just as man was debased under God, so the individual is debased beneath this perfect being, man. Feuerbach's 'insurrection' has not overthrown the category of religious authority - it has merely installed man within it, reversing the order of subject and predicate. For Stirner, man is just as oppressive, if not more so, than God: "Feuerbach thinks, that if he humanises the divine, he has found truth. No, if God has given us pain, 'man' is capable of pinching us still more torturingly".[22] Man becomes the substitute for the Christian illusion. Feuerbach, Stirner argues, is the high priest of a new religion - humanism: 'The human religion is only the last metamorphosis of the Christian religion'.[23] Humanist man is a new ideological mechanism, a new oppressive, illusory distortion. It is a mutilating, alienating idea - a 'spook', or a 'fixed idea', as Stirner calls it. It is an ideological spectre that desecrates individual uniqueness and difference, by comparing the individual to an ideal which is not of his own creation. In this way the individual becomes

[21] M. Stirner, The Ego and Its Own, p. 34.
[22] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 156.
[23] M. Stirner, ibid., p. 158.

beyond both rational Enlightenment and structuralist accounts of ideology, and satisfies the two seemingly contradictory theoretical conditions that I have outlined – that a theory of ideology retain a point of departure outside ideology, yet reject the notion of an autonomous, essential subject. He does this, as I shall show, through a radical reformulation of the ideological subject. The rest of the discussion, then, will be devoted to exploring Stirner's theory of ideology, and developing his logic of spectrality, which will provide vital clues to a contemporary re-theorisation of ideology.

It would seem, from the problematic outlined above, that ideology is an impossible spectre. It is an apparition that both comes to haunt us, despite our most ardent attempts to exorcise it, and vanishes once again when we try to approach it. However, it is perhaps by acknowledging this inaccessibility, this spectrality of ideology, that we can begin to understand it. Stirner had no doubts that ideology was a spectre – a spectre that bedevilled and haunted modern man:

> Look out near or far, a ghostly world surrounds you everywhere; you are always having 'apparitions (Erscheinungen)' or visions. Everything that appears to you is only the phantasm of an indwelling spirit, is a ghostly "apparition"; the world is to you only a 'world of appearances (Erscheinungswelt)', behind which the spirit walks.[17]

These apparitions are 'fixed ideas' - ideological abstractions like essence, rational truth, morality, which have been raised to the absolute level of 'the sacred'. A 'fixed idea' is a construct that governs thought - a discursively closed absolute that mutilates the difference and plurality of existence. Ideological sys-

[17] Max Stirner, The Ego and Its Own, ed., David Leopold, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 36.

tems contain oppressive ideas that haunt the individual by confronting him with an impossible standard. As Stirner declares: "Man, your head is haunted… You imagine great things, and depict to yourself a whole world of gods that has an existence for you, a spirit-realm to which you suppose yourself to be called, an ideal that beckons to you."[18] Ideology is a series of illusory ideas, goals and promises that interpellate the individual, creating impossible ideals and dreams that he futilely pursues. It is evident here that ideology is seen as an illusion or distortion which alienates the individual.

If this was all there was to Stirner's theory of ideology, then it would merely be an extension of the rationalist Enlightenment understanding, in which, as explained above, ideology is seen as a distorting system of ideas that alienates the individual from his essential interests – from his human essence. However if we look more closely, we see that Stirner represents a paradigmatic break with Enlightenment humanism and constructs a radically different, non-essentialist theory of ideology.

Critique of Humanism

This 'epistemological break' with essentialist humanism may be seen in his radical critique of Feuerbach. In the Essence of Christianity Ludwig Feuerbach applied the notion of alienation to religion.[19] Religion was alienating, according to Feuerbach, because it required that man abdicate his own qualities and powers by projecting them onto an abstract God beyond the grasp of humanity. In doing so man displaces his essential self, leaving him alienated and debased. Man's good qualities become abstracted from him and he is left an empty

[18] Stirner, The Ego and Its Own, p. 43.

[19] See L. Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity (New York: Harper, 1957).

vessel of sinfulness, prostrated before an omnipotent and all-loving God: "Thus in religion Man denies his reason… his own knowledge, his own thoughts, that he may place them in God. Man gives up his personality… he denies human dignity, the human ego."[20] For Feuerbach the predicates of God were really only the predicates of man as a species being. God was an illusion, a hypostatisation of man. While man should be the single criterion for truth, love and virtue, these characteristics are now the property of an abstract being who becomes the sole criterion for them. In other words God was a reification of human essence, of the essential qualities of man.

According to Stirner, however, in claiming that the qualities which we have attributed to God or to the Absolute are really the essential qualities of man, Feuerbach has made man into an almighty being himself. Feuerbach sees will, love and thought as essential qualities in man, wanting to restore to him these abstracted qualities. Man becomes, in Feuerbach's eyes, the ultimate expression of love, knowledge, will and goodness. He becomes almighty, sacred, perfect, infinite - in short, man becomes God. Feuerbach embodies the Enlightenment humanist project of restoring man to his rightful place at the centre of the universe, of making the human the divine, the finite the infinite. Man has now usurped God. He has captured for himself the category of the infinite.

Stirner starts by accepting Feuerbach's critique of Christianity: the infinite is an illusion, being merely the representation of human consciousness. The Christian religion is based on the divided, alienated self; the religious man seeks after his alter ego that cannot be attained because it has been abstracted onto the figure of God. In doing so he denies his concrete, sensual self. However Stirner responds to this:

> The supreme being is indeed the essence of man, but, just because it is his essence and not he him-

[20] Feuerbach, ibid., pp. 27-28.