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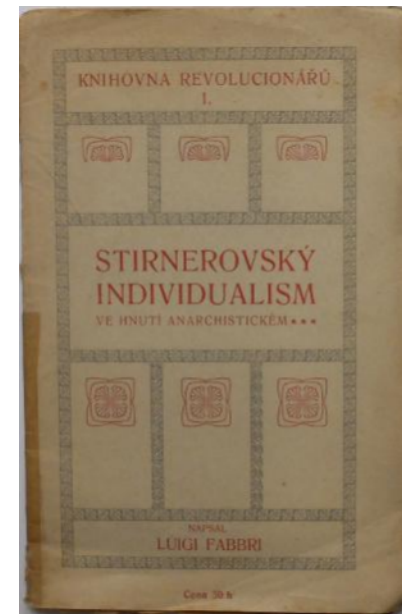
## Stirnerian Individualism in the Anarchist Movement

Luigi Fabbri

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1903

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Originally published as a series of three articles in *Il Pensiero* (October-December 1903), this work was also published as a booklet, at least in Praga in 1904, as “*Stirnerovský Individualism ve Hnutí Anarchistickém*” ([aukro.cz](http://aukro.cz)). One more article was appended here that is actually a text by Jean Grave followed by a few considerations by Fabbri, such as was published in *Il Pensiero* following *Stirnerian Individualism In The Anarchist Movement*.

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in Italy, where it was possible to say all the imaginable nonsense and mean things about anarchism and anarchists, from those of Cesare Lombroso to the others of the *quondam* delegate Sernicoli.

Moreover, both in one and the other, the evident concern to demolish and discredit “the deadly and murderous ideas, the nefarious propaganda, the brutal empiricism and the very sad doctrine” of the anarchists, the complete lack of serenity, the absence of documentation, or a superficial and completely fanciful documentation, take away any positive and scientific character from their statements. Max Stirner in their hands is an inept weapon of accusation, not to say slander; and it is not in their few pages, interested and full of malevolence, that the scholar can go looking for serious documents of the hypothetical link between the theory of the Bayreuth philosopher and that of today’s anarchists.

LUIGI FABBRI.

## I

One thing that proves the seriousness and strength of a doctrine is that other doctrines, more or less perfect, more or less lasting, appear beside it, or come off its trunk, that have in common with the former the recognition of a truth or a given starting point from which one and the other draw different deductions and conclusions.

Especially doctrines that address the multitudes, and have a social, political or religious purpose, raise the heretics around them, and almost always against them; whom can be either the reformers and perfectors of the mother doctrine or their corrupters. It almost always happens that, in the first case, heresy overcomes doctrine and replaces it, becoming doctrine by its turn; while in the second case, either the new branch atrophies and quickly dries up, or maintains a poor life beside the stem it derives from, which continues to grow and live on its own.

Something similar happened with anarchism, which today has around itself many filiations of its theories; deviations and ramifications attached to it in what constitutes the main and necessary characteristic of all anarchic doctrines: negation of the principle of authority, that is, of all violent coercion of man over man. According to the different interpretation that each theory makes of this negative principle, authority is more or less negated, and the method of combat of each varies, as well as the ideas added to the mother idea. But the latter remains the common starting point, either for the theoretical arguments or the practical action that followers make derive from it.

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Anarchy historically — and, as it is accepted by most anarchists, also ideologically — is a school of socialism.

Socialism, after the embryonic period of its formation, which comprises the entire cycle of aprioristic and utopian socialists

(Babeuf, Fourier, Saint-Simon, Owen), becomes positivistic, finds its way through Proudhon's attempts, takes scientific shape and language with Karl Marx, until, in the midst of the political revolutions of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and after the Paris Commune, it reached its maturity, and split into the two tendencies that it contained within itself since the beginnings: the authoritarian and the libertarian.

Anarchist socialism is in some way linked to Fourier, as is authoritarian socialism to Saint-Simon. However, the two trends did not manifest themselves while socialism did not reach a certain degree of expansion and did not undergo the necessary elaboration. The economic question kept them united and prevented them from manifesting, due to the imperative and absorbing need to affirm with unanimous intentions what was certainly the most important social achievement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the principle of socialization of property, that is, the assertion of proletarian right before the bourgeoisie, the entry into life of a new revolution on the exhaustion of that of 1789.

The *International Workers' Association* made this declaration of war in 1864; the Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels, written as early as 1848, was its interpreter. The Paris Commune of 1871 was the heroic vulgarization — sublime propaganda by the deed — of the socialist idea.

After 1871, at the heart of the *International*, which had already won for socialism the right of citizenship among the economic and social sciences, in the memorable congresses that were true laboratories of ideas, the problem of freedom was more strongly felt, and the split took place, since it had now become incompatible to maintain within the same shell the two tendencies, already adult and opposite. Mikhail Bakunin and Karl Marx, two colossi, synthesized the contention of ideas and methods between authoritarian socialism and libertarian or anarchist socialism.

Since then, the two socialisms have walked separately, each on their own way, sometimes helping each other as allies, more often

on a bit longer, as it contains a very interesting and pressing problem in contemporary social life, that of the relationship between individual freedom and the need to sociability.

Georgi Plekhanov and Ettore Zoccoli,<sup>7</sup> among other well-known authors in Italy, wrote about Max Stirner and the relationship between his theories and anarchism. And I speak of them to caution those who, too hasty in listening to the least substantiated statements, wanted to rely on their opinion to disprove what I said.

Georgi Plekhanov, whose good faith is very debatable (it doesn't fit here to demonstrate his bad faith, which is known to many of his own Russian companions) deals with Stirner in a dozen pages of his libel, published in Italy first as a series in Turati's *Critica Sociale*, and then in a hundred-page booklet, under the title *Anarchism and Socialism*. Plekhanov intends to demonstrate that anarchists are not socialists, but enemies of socialism; it suits him to make Stirner an anarchist and a precursor of the anarchist movement. This, however, he affirms without any attempt at demonstration. He claims that Stirner is an anarchist, then demonstrates (easily, as it is an indisputable truth) that Stirner is not a socialist, and from there he concludes that anarchists are not socialists, and ... it's done. We leave it to the reader to judge about his seriousness.

Professor Ettore Zoccoli, a young publicist to whom Italians owe some studies on Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, as well as the translation of Stirner's *Unique*, also dealt with the relationship between Stirner and the anarchist movement, but with such a complete and astonishing ignorance about this movement that is only excusable

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<sup>7</sup> As *Il Pensiero* begins to print, I read in the last issue of *Rivista di filosofia e scienze affini* from Bologna a long article on Stirner by dr. Paolo Orano. Catilina [Fabbri's pseudonym] will take care of it in an upcoming issue, in section *Rivista delle Riviste*. I do, however, notice that, despite Orano's ignorance of anarchists in the United States as well and... elsewhere, he confirms what I have tried to demonstrate; and, at a certain point, says precisely like this: «*If there is an anarchism in the UNIQUE, it is an anarchism deprived of means... etc.*» Note that Orano in this article makes the apology for Max Stirner. (Fabbri)

I made a point of translating for *Il Pensiero*, from a French revolutionary almanac, this brief mention — on the same subject to which I have already dedicated a series of three articles — by the well-known Parisian anarchist Jean Grave, the editor of *Temps Nouveaux*, writer of several books of libertarian vulgarization, who rightfully can be considered the most authoritative — forgive me these words, when it comes to anarchists — interpreter of French anarchism, precisely that anarchism that, above all, has strong individualistic tendencies and shades; thus providing one more evidence of what I wanted to demonstrate in the preceding articles: there is no relationship between the anarchist movement and the Stirnerian individualism so-called anarchist, neither historical nor theoretical, beyond some contact point that even the most contradictory ideas often have among them.

These days I have received some responses, although not very courteous, to my *articolesse*;<sup>(2)</sup> one of them will be published by *Il Pensiero* in one of the next issues, and I will deal with it in due time. Here I must reaffirm once again, also in accordance with more or less benevolent critics, this: that anarchy, as a theory and as a social and revolutionary movement, has a historical origin completely different from the various individualist schools of today, and doesn't date back to Max Stirner at all; and that the current anarchist movement, which by this name is known everywhere, is by no means individualist in the sense given to the word by the most well-known individualist Stirnerians. This is an indisputable truth, when it comes to facts and not abstract ideas. As for abstract ideas, I also tried to demonstrate that the Stirnerian concept is not anarchist; but, however this opinion of mine is shared by most anarchists, it is but an opinion and, as such, certainly debatable. If necessary, we will discuss it again, or rather, we will let it be discussed; and readers will not complain much if this question goes

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<sup>(2)</sup> Plural for *articolesse*, an Italian archaic term to mean an excessively long and boring article. (Translator)

fighting harshly, each claiming for themselves the possession of the truth and the secret of social revolution.

It does not fit here to examine who was most right.

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Thus, as it came into the world for the first time, anarchy was therefore socialist. Even Proudhon, who, one may say, maintained one foot in utopian socialism and the other in the socialism that today is usually called scientific, never disengaged his anarchist concept of social organization from the socialist concept of negation of individual property. *Property is theft!* — this truth in the form of paradox, already launched by Brissot during the storm of French revolution, it was he, Proudhon, who repeated it on his own and made it popular.

Mikhail Bakunin, who does not have Proudhon's incoherencies, and who first presents anarchist theory as an organic whole, was first of all socialist. It is due to him, and to his followers, the vulgarization of socialism in southern Europe. Even more resolutely and more radically than Marx, he preached the socialization of property, to which he attached the greatest importance. In his pamphlets, books and articles it is above all socialism that is spoken of, collective property; and in fact the word anarchy is rarely mentioned. Socialist in economics to the point of being somewhat Marxist, with Marxists he disagreed on the form of political organization of the future socialist society, and meanwhile also on the form of organization of socialist forces in struggle, on the methods.

For a long time in Latin Europe, while the Social Democratic Party did not appear, the anarchists who made themselves known in their propaganda called themselves simply socialists. Carlo Cafiero, an anarchist, was the first to popularize Marx's *Capital* in Italy. A booklet by Errico Malatesta, *Fra Contadini* [Between Peasants], the best booklet of anarchist propaganda ever written, came out for the first time with the subtitle *Socialist Propaganda*,

and it is nothing but a criticism of the individualist organization of property — so socialist that Camillo Prampolini edited it, purging it of the too anarchistic and revolutionary phrases, for the use of social-democratic propaganda.

Moreover, all anarchist sociology until recently was impregnated with Marxism, its errors as well as its truths; and perhaps there were no Marxists more coherent with the doctrine of the master than anarchists, who owe some more catastrophic concepts — today abandoned by the majority — precisely to Karl Marx's catastrophic ideas.

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The idea of the individual freedom, of the autonomy of individuals, groups, associations and communes in the international federation of peoples, has never been disengaged, in the doctrine of anarchist militants, from the principle of *solidarity, mutual aid, cooperation* (as in any case say the very words “groups, associations, federations, etc.”), and it always retained the eminently socialist meaning that Bakunin attributed to it, when in opposition to the centralization of powers wanted by Marx he spoke of federalism.

Mikhail Bakunin was indeed — with due differences — for socialism what in Italy was Carlo Cattaneo for republicanism. Just as unitarians cannot deny that the federalist Cattaneo was a republican, so authoritarian socialists cannot deny (and neither can individualists) that the anarchist Bakunin was a socialist.

Mikhail Bakunin's anarchism has evolved over time. It was better elaborated and became more and more rational and scientific. But it has never lost its socialist character. In fact, it has perfected itself, so to speak, by becoming even more socialist, moving from collectivist to communist. It was at the last congresses of the *International* that Piotr Kropotkin, Carlo Cafiero, Élisée Reclus, etc., spoke of anarchist communism and that anarchism was accepted under this new name. Social democrats themselves admit that commu-

tions that the generations passed on, discussing them after having blindly followed them, and of which, from progress to progress, he constituted today's scientific, artistic and literary background. The man who would completely isolate himself from his fellow men, would return to the state of a brute animal, if the better armed species had not killed him before.

So, here the problem gets complicated. Due to the needs of their bodies, and due to the limited space in which they are enclosed, which necessarily limits their field of evolution, it is no longer enough for individuals to assert their rights; above all, they need to look for the conditions in which they will be able to exercise them, without harm to themselves and without harm to others, which could bring in reprisals and limit the rights that are too brutally asserted.

And from the moment when the individual cannot live and develop except in society, he has only two ways to assert his freedom: — acting at the mercy of his will, if he is strong enough to impose himself on others, without worrying about their complaints when he harms them, or making them believe, by trickery, that he acts in their interest... and then there is no need to claim for a social transformation, because we have the bourgeois society that provides us with a wide range of such methods and their different combinations; — or else individuals will get along to find a social organization that, while bringing them maximum welfare in exchange for minimum efforts, allows them to evolve without getting in the way of each other, preserving, through reciprocal concessions or a perfect adaptation and combination of aptitudes, the greatest amount of freedom possible... that is to say, by an intelligent practice of solidarity.

JEAN GRAVE.

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And so a little anarchy was fabricated that tended to nothing less than to elevate a new aristocracy: the intellectual aristocracy, who, like the others, deeply despised the rest of the mass, seeing in it nothing but a herd of slaves, good to produce and toil for the “intellectual”, who could thus develop and grow in strength, intelligence and beauty!

This conception of the individual, of the intellectual, flattered too much the vanity of some losers, so that they had to become their resolute champions. It is a theory too comfortable to justify the most contradictory acts, so that we had to be given this new school.

The most complete freedom for the individual, his right to full satisfaction of all his needs, are absolutely legitimate claims, and there was no need to go out to dig up Nietzsche and Stirner to give them some consecration. That’s what man has been seeking since he was in the world, it is this primordial instinct that made him try the different revolutions, even the most political ones, that he carried out along the way. And that’s what communist anarchists never ceased to claim.

Only, there you have it, communist anarchists, who are not satisfied with words and abstractions, partisans of the scientific method that requires us to rely on facts, were not content with doing metaphysics. They studied the conditions of existence of the individual, and without bragging about having made an astonishing discovery — because it is so obvious — they saw that the individual was not a single entity, living in the clouds of dialectics, but a being of flesh and blood, with a circulation of about two billion copies, and that what was true for one, was equally true for each of those two billion.

Moreover, the need to live in society is not to be discussed. It was because he grouped together with his fellows that man acquired the faculty of language, and that of expressing his ideas; it was in the exchange of ideas with his companions that he managed to modify and broaden his first impressions, making them tradi-

nism is a more evolved form of socialism than collectivism. Wasn’t Karl Marx a communist?

I think that anarchists were, in fact, a little too dogmatic in their defense of communism, while they should have held that the important thing was to ensure for the proletariat the *freedom* to organize property in its own way in the aftermath of revolution, after having pulled it out from capitalist monopoly. I am a communist, but I do not think that one should be too exclusivist in this theory about how we will organize property, how to *socialize* it. The important thing is to be able to *socialize it* (and this is socialism), and to socialize it *in our own way* (and that’s anarchy).

That is why many anarchists today, being communists, like to call themselves *anarchist-socialists*.

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Until about 1890 there was no anarchist who conceived of anarchy differently from a special structure of socialist organization. *The freedom of a citizen begins where the freedom of another citizen ends*, reaffirmed Piotr Kropotkin in the Lyon process of 1882. And the Rabelaisian *do what you will*, it was always understood in the sense of ego-altruism, of the freedom of one’s own completed by the freedom of others, of the well-being of others necessary to one’s own, in a word, in the sense of *solidarity*.

Only after 1891 did individualism appear in the anarchist world, infiltrating it, I would say, almost surreptitiously, but never managing to conquer more than a few isolated individuals, and in no way being able to be accepted either by sociological science or by the no longer neglectable nor obtuse intelligence of the masses.

Max Stirner was dug up from the dusty libraries; and this paradoxical philosopher came back to light and obtained the honors of the greatest geniuses, about fifty years later, mainly by merit of artists and literati who found in him the interpretation of rebellion against the old dogmas and the tyranny of present society, a

society of geese and snakes, in which their aspirations fall apart or encounter obstacles, and which therefore raises in them, more than the human desire to transform and convert it, the individualistic and egoistic desire to neglect and despise it from the height of their literary and artistic fantasies.

Who knows if in this contempt there is also a sleeping and unconscious twinge of desire for domination and privilege, a tendency to substitute the tyranny of the State, the priest and the boss for the tyranny of the “intellectuals!”

The utmost concern of the *ego*, which is not accompanied by the feeling of solidarity, makes socialist anarchists suspicious, we who are the masses, and who do not want any tyranny over us.

Whether our distrust is justified or not, meanwhile we see this: until yesterday, Stirnerian individualism was even ignored among anarchists. That this disproves Max Stirner’s paternity over the contemporary anarchist movement — affirmed but not demonstrated by Georgi Plekhanov, Ettore Zoccoli and others — is crystal clear.

And now let us examine what Max Stirner’s influence is today within anarchism, an influence posthumously achieved; and so we can see even better the error made (in good or bad faith, it does not matter) by those who see anarchy as nothing but the triumph of individualism, the exaggeration, to say it with Filippo Turati, “of bourgeois individualism”.

And let us also see what connection the Stirnerian theory has with that which informs the anarchist movement; because in many parts one seems to combine with the other, while on the contrary they are extremely contradictory — and let us see how.

## II

Anarchists, in the full meaning of the word, all who fight namely the triple manifestation of coercive authority in the person of the priest, the boss and the carabinieri, often find beside them many

exist only in name, and are lacking in facts. That is why they do not fight society, as individualists do, but seek a balance between it and the individual.

A true society will not exist as long as the individual is not autonomous within it, and the individual’s autonomy in society will only be possible when it is coordinated according to the vital principle, without which the human world would be extinct, and that no authoritarian pretension could ever along the centuries suffocate, *the principle of solidarity*; natural law like that of universal gravitation, which not a single atom could escape without causing the universe to enter legendary chaos.

Roma, December 1903

LUIGI FABBRI.

## Appendix

### Other polemical notes on individualism<sup>(1)</sup>

Years ago, some litterateurs realized that they had discovered Nietzsche, Stirner and even Schopenhauer. Once they followed their trail, behold, they learned that there was an individual in the world — the Individual! — that this individual took precedence over everything, that he had the right to live, to enjoy, to develop in his entirety, according to his faculties and aptitudes, without having to take into account any hindrance, any obstacle, except to break them if they get in the way, or subdue them if they could be of use.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Under this very title (as “*Altri cenni polemici sull’individualismo*”), a short article by Jean Grave (translated by Fabbri into Italian) was published, followed by a few considerations by Fabbri, in *Il Pensiero* 11–13 December 1903, just as follows below. As Grave’s article, originally published as “*Individualisme et Solidarité*” in the *Almanach illustré de la Revolution pour 1904* [Illustrated Almanac of the Revolution for 1904], we opted for the direct translation from French original in theanarchistlibrary.org (Translator)

of the many and of one, of the individual and of the people. It is the abolition of authority in all its coercive and violent manifestations, the authority of the government over the subject, of the boss over the servant, the priest over the believer, and, more abstractly, of the written law over the consociates who did not want or did not approve it.

But abolishing authority in the sense of coercion of the will and actions of others, does not mean abolishing society, abolishing co-operation, abolishing solidarity, abolishing love, in a word, abolishing life.

That is why anarchists are not limited to each one denying the authority of which they are a victim, and want all together to ensure each other the exercise of maximum possible freedom, and this through a reciprocal pact of mutual support, without laws nor carabinieri — tomorrow against the possible arrogance of one, a few or many; today in the struggle against oligarchies, which prevail through the supine ignorance of the majority.

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Philosophy of history, science, the study of social institutions, have shown them where evil is, and for that reason they fight authority in its most varied forms. They fight the institute of individual property, of the capitalist monopoly, because it is an *authority* (the most harmful for most men, in my opinion), they fight the governmental institute, absolute or democratic, they fight religions, moral prejudices, etc., etc.; but as to demolish is not enough, and it is necessary in this world to live on bread and not only on philosophy, and life is not possible for any isolated man in a world apart, so the anarchists thought about the way of living in society, also after the elimination of all *archias*, of all authoritarian pretensions.

And by studying, they realized that there is a society not because there is authority, but despite it; and that a true society — the loyal *societas* of equals — does not yet exist because freedom and equality

allies who, while not approving the whole negative concept of anarchism, find in it a great weapon to defend themselves — and the defense quickly becomes attack — against the manifestation of the authority that offend them most.

Thus in France, during the Dreyfus affair, the anticlericals found a formidable help in anarchists, which decided the victory in the fight against the priests; and so the anti-militarists against militarism. In the task of workers' organization and resistance against capitalism, anarchists often find themselves side by side with socialists; just as, when it comes to fighting governmental arbitrariness and to obtain greater political freedom, they find themselves, out of necessity, having to make a certain path together not only with socialists but also with republicans. And all of this not by a pre-established agreement, but by the very force of events, just as one of us could happen to find himself tomorrow in the same carriage with a person with whom he does not sympathize and does not agree, and both could help each other in case they got mugged or hit any obstacle along the way.

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The anarchist rebellion, which seeks to demolish in their foundations the social institutions that society today is based on, logically also attacks, in the intellectual, artistic and moral fields, without any respect, all those *sacred principles* that are formed around the bourgeois and authoritarian institutions, and that are deposited like a crust in their defense.

In this struggle, mainly of a moral nature, in its demolishing part and not in the reconstructive one, anarchists have as allies the Stirnerian individualists.<sup>1</sup> And they are, shall we say, formidable allies with an iron fist, and it is perhaps their ideological ardor of demolition that makes them pass as authentic anarchists, especially

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<sup>1</sup> I say *Stirnerian individualists*, but here I also include those who claim to be followers of Nietzsche and other minor authors of the same school. (Fabbri)

in the eyes of those who in the anarchist see rather the nihilist, the destroyer — violent or not — and does not glimpse the idealist, the reconstructor.

The Stirnerian is not concerned with reconstruction. He feels oppressed, dejected under a lot of hateful institutions, an avalanche of prejudices, conventions, customs, and wants to get rid of it; and he proclaims the individual's right not to be sacrificed to the community, which today especially constitutes the *means* by which general oppression is imposed; he wants to have the right to exercise his own thinking, his faculties, and enjoy life with all the strength of his brain and his muscles.

Thus, with audacious criticism he combats every institution that hinders any of his rights. And so far we are in agreement, since we anarchists also claim the same rights for the individual and therefore we fight the same institutions.

But the individualist stops here, he does not go beyond the consideration of his "I", and at most he says: every man for himself, and when everyone does as I do, everyone will be free. He wants to free himself, but he does not care about others, except insofar as they may limit his right. That is why three quarters of the social problem escapes his attention, and it turns out that, from such limited premises, one can extract the most diverse and contradictory consequences, the most revolutionary and also the most conservative; often more the latter than the former.

Émile Henry, in the name of the individual's sovereignty, and to assert his right against bourgeois oppression, drops a bomb in a café (it is true, however, that under the cover of individualism there was a soul that felt a lot of solidarity); but in the name of individual sovereignty, Nero could once again set fire to Rome, to give his "self" the satisfaction of enjoying the immense spectacle of a city on fire from the top of a tower. Nor is my comparison too excessive; there is a *litterateur* of pronounced individualistic tendencies who tried to make Nero sympathetic from this point of view.

The anarchist idea emanates from the diverse and multiple works of its thinkers, from the multiform action of its militants, from the international libertarian and revolutionary movement, here predominantly theoretical, there practical, in some environments more intellectual, in others of a more working-class nature, giving rise to sublime as well as obscure heroisms, and also great mistakes (*errare humano est*), sometimes moving a collectivity, sometimes only a few, with diverse tones and accents — but always everywhere, in the general lines, with the same characteristic in economics, politics and morals.

The anarchists' book has not yet been written, and probably will never be, precisely because of the vastness and complexity of the idea, which manifests in a thousand elusive ways; but if that book had been written, it could never be Stirner's *Unique*.

Deep down the Stirnerian theory is reactionary; there is rebellion in it, but it is more rebellion against the people than against the tyrant, more against the rights of the crowd than against the privilege of one, and although it fights privilege, it is not to abolish it, but rather to replace it with other privileges and other privileged people. At least this is, in the final analysis, the logical consequence to be arrived at from individualist premises, whether those who have established them want it or not.<sup>6</sup>

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Anarchy is, instead, the negation of all *archies* (it is Diotallevi who Italianizes this Greek word) for all, both from the point of view

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<sup>6</sup> Dealing with my two preceding articles, in order to refute them, Giovanni Diotallevi in *Patria* of December 3<sup>rd</sup> confirms my idea of the reactionary meaning that Stirnerians, many of them at least, give to the word anarchy: «For me — he says — a fat bourgeois, who aspires for a law of privilege for himself and exploits the sweat of others, is more legitimately an anarchist than a libertarian socialist who would want to see the carabinieri abolished and to some extent (totally, and not to some extent, I.f.) also the civil code, but think of sharing the bread with his brothers.» (Fabbri)

What can these individualists have in common with revolutionary anarchist socialists, who on the contrary are constantly thinking towards a social palingenesis, a revolution — not that pseudo-scientific one of Enrico Ferri — without which they do not believe it is possible to solve the problem of bread and freedom?

I repeat: in regard to criticism of present society, many of their pages can also be ours, as so can pages of critique of religions by Molescott, Büchner, Ferrari, those of critique of individual property by Marx and all authoritarian socialists, those of critique of the state by Spencer and many of the most audacious liberalists, those criticizing the current moral prejudices by a whole phalanx of thinkers with Nietzsche at the head — in short, in regard to demolition.

But demolition alone is not enough to bring together two different schools, since what forms the structure of an ideological building is the *principle*, the motive of demolition, the goal to which demolition tends, the concept of successive reconstruction.

Anarchists, by way of example, would gladly overthrow the Italian government, and so would the clerics who want to return Rome to the pope; is this a reason to say that there is an affinity between the two?

The comparison is certainly a bit too paradoxical, but it does serve to explain what I mean.

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The anarchist idea as a whole is already a formed, adult, complete theory. It has ethical principles deduced from the facts and the lived reality it departs from; it has a critique of all social institutions; it has an end in economics, politics and morality.

It is a collective idea, because many (I would even say crowds) contributed to it, and it did not flow from the brilliant brain of one. Bakunin, Reclus, Malatesta, Kropotkin, Grave, they have said a lot, but none of them said everything.

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The anarchist is an individualist insofar as he is concerned with his own individual freedom as well as that of the others, seeing in the freedom of others a guarantee and an aid for his own.

And here, in my view, lies the illogical character of Stirnerians, who in vain think of their liberation if they do not want to think of that of the whole of humanity. Humanity, that which for them is a noxious abstraction, is the environment in which they have to live and which they cannot forget, since *one* cannot be free among slaves except by being the tyrant. And they cannot forget the collectivity around them also because, in order to demolish the formidable institutions that most hinder human conscience and action, philosophy books and individual rebellion, however understood, are not enough, and it is necessary the organized effort by the crowds, simultaneous and guided by an agreed concept.

This is how socialist anarchists conceive the social revolution: the war against the authoritarian and bourgeois institutions by a multitude — albeit a minority compared to the mass of the uncertain, indifferent and passive people — composed of thinking individuals, voluntarily united for the battle by the bond, the only libertarian bond, of *solidarity*.

Perhaps not all Stirnerian individualists combat the principle of solidarity (many do), but all neglect it completely. Which means almost completely neglecting the social question in all its political and especially economic aspects.

They thus ignore a very important coefficient of human life, without which there would be no possible humanity, nor would individual existence be possible. Solidarity and individualism are two forces of evolution that are for society as the centrifugal and centripetal movements are for the cosmos. A Stirnerian would be like a physics scholar who, in his investigations, wanted to take into account only the centripetal force; just as a state socialist

would be like another one who wanted to take into account only the centrifugal force.

The anarchist socialist, on the other hand, does not intend to neglect either of the forces; he seeks the balance between them, and finds it — or at least believes to having found it — in anarchy, a state of affairs in which the individual freedom of each will be completed by the freedom of all, since there is no greater obstacle to freedom than isolation.

“*The isolated man is the strongest*,” says Ibsen; and this paradoxical saying has been repeated so many times that today it will be considered a paradox to say, as I maintain, that the isolated man is weaker than the associate. I said *associate*; do not translate it as *disciplined*.

The isolated man is the weakest and least free, because, if it is true that necessity will make him develop some qualities to a higher level than the average, such qualities will always be powerless to overcome the difficulties and obstacles of the environment, albeit only natural, which instead are easily overcome by normal associated men.

A man who lived alone, and was as strong as an orangutan and as intelligent as Dante, would always be less free — freedom basically consists in the possibility of doing what one wants and what one needs to — than a child living in the middle of society.

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Some will say that I am being redundant, and that we already knew these things since childhood when we were taught the story of the sprig that breaks easily when it is alone, and becomes strong united to others in a bundle.

It is true; but philosophical speculation, launched without restraint into the limitless fields of abstraction and paradox, often comes to this, to the oblivion and contempt of the most elementary truths. It is not a bad thing, therefore, that one repeats such

the face of prevailing prejudices — the ideological affinity that on the other hand connects them to the followers of such concept.

It is therefore necessary not to confuse these non-true individualists, who instead fall into the broad category of anarchist communists, with the Stirnerian individualists that I speak of.

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Thus closing the parentheses, I take the opportunity to affirm once again that Stirnerian individualism, in the means as well as in theory, is anything but revolutionary, in the historical and practical sense of the term.<sup>4</sup> Stirnerian individualists (remember that I always speak of individualists who call themselves anarchists and are militants, not sportsmen, literary people<sup>5</sup> and let alone supermen à la D’Annunzio) are outright opposed to any idea of violence, either individual or collective. They entrust the triumph of their ideas to natural selection, to peaceful propaganda, to passive resistance against authoritarian society, to mild propaganda by the deed consisting in acting in life as much as possible according to their own ideas and against prevailing prejudices. Leon Tolstoy, apart from the mystical varnish, is in this sense an interpreter of their program of struggle, if it can so be called.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Ghio has sent me a book recently edited by Colin on *Anarchism in the United States*, in which, speaking of B.R. Tucker’s individualist anarchism and largely summarizing his theories, he confirms my judgment of them as contrary to the revolutionary concept of communist anarchists, and favorable to the maintenance of individual property. (Fabbri)

<sup>5</sup> I admitted individualism as possible in the intellectual field, but now I realize that it is also necessary to have due reservations here. Which stirnerian individualist could escape, in his work, the cooperation of so many other intellectuals? Who could say that his most peregrine idea is exactly due to him, and not determined by the intellectual work of a whole series of predecessors? So, albeit retrospectively, society recaptures him and has him linked to itself. Max Stirner himself did nothing but draw consequences, in paradoxical form, from premises put before him by other thinkers; and in him form is more original than thought. (Fabbri)

ualism; besides, it is natural that this relationship exists, however small it may be, since all theories, even the most contradictory ones, have on the one hand or the other something in common.

### III

I have spoken so far of individualists, and I forgot to give a warning to the reader that he may be confused by so much clutter of names, subdivisions, theories.

There is, among anarchist communists, a fraction that in economics is anything but individualistic and who, however, for some time liked to call themselves individualists to differentiate, not in theory but in the practice of struggle, from their own comrades, also anarchist communists, on the issue of party organization, workers' associationism, individual and collective action, among others. These, although in the ends being anything but Stirnerian individualists, combat the idea of organization within today's society, and, in contradiction with the others, think that it is harmful to the revolutionary cause to form an organized party, to favor workers' associations, to unite in a pre-established agreement for the struggle against institutions. In my view they are illogical and mistaken in thinking so, but despite the different ideological shades, despite the contradictory name, they are always socialist anarchists, theoretically not dissimilar, at least in the broad lines, of all the anarchic socialists who make up the international libertarian movement. Anarchist socialists, those who like to call themselves so, may even disagree — not all really disagree — with the concept of violence and reprisal against bourgeois society so admirably exposed by Émile Henry in his self-defense before jurors (considered a literary jewel by Mirbeau, Leyret and others) before going up to the gallows; but they cannot deny — by an excessive love of tranquility in the face of reaction or simply in

truths, especially to prevent their neglect among those who most need to remember and practice them in the daily struggle for their rights.

And then, the Stirnerian paradox, being indeed a paradox when one draws from it the consequences of individual isolation, ceases to be so when instead we take it as the triumph of the strongest in the midst of society, a triumph obtained *beyond good and evil*, as a follower of Nietzsche would say, that is, in ordinary language, outside any consideration of morality and justice: the individual who satisfies his own "self" without caring about others, and even to the detriment of others.

This is no longer a paradox; the struggle for life, as the old school Darwinists understood it, fought *tooth and nail* between man and man, between brother and brother, is its practical application, already carried out in social life. In the past, it was the political despots who won, today it is the economic ones; and then as now the *strongest individual* won and wins.

Certainly, today's winners are more unsympathetic than the old ones, because the maximum element of victory for them is no longer the religious illusion that animated the errant knights and the crusades, nor the sparkling chivalrous prejudice of the nobility, but only something stupid and gross with no shadow of an ideal appearance: money. The money that defiles everything, that imposes itself on everyone, makes smart the idiot who owns it, strong the most cowardly, stifles the inspirations by imposing itself and imposing mediocrity, even where it would have less say in the matter, in art, in literature.

And artists and literatures, among whom most individualists are counted, are in their right when they oppose the genius "self", the individual's own superiority, to all modern society stuck with the most vulgar mud, and to a majority which, due to the perverse social organization, cannot rise to the understanding of certain artistic concepts and certain literary refinements. Their conscious rebellion in the name of their own intellectual individuality is a rev-

olutionary coefficient not to be neglected; the corrosive criticism of institutions that comes out of any work by Paul Adam, novels by Mirbeau, booklets — each being a masterpiece — by Leon Tolstoj (also an individualist in spite of religious monomania), are for modern society what Beaumarchais' satirical comedies were before 1789: the prelude to Revolution, the creaking of the social building on the brink of ruin.

As long as one does not make the very serious mistake of confusing the majority of society with the people themselves, addressing exclusively to them the contempt deserved by the former — as taught by the insolences to the plebs of D'Annunzio's *Laus Vitae* —, which anarchist would not subscribe to the pages of these individualists?

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But pure individualism, one of the agents of progress in art and literature, must therefore not be transposed into sociology. Individualism in economics results in property privilege, competition of interests, capitalism in one word, Hobbes's *homo homini lupus*.

The anarchist individualists of Max Stirner's school, those who wanted to draw from Stirnerian doctrine consequences in economic matters, like John Henry Mackay and Benjamin Tucker — the former set out his ideas in a well-known book, *Anarchistes*, and the latter advertises them with an English-language journal in New York, *Liberty* — are true bourgeois economists, liberalists who would join hands with our Maffeo Pantaleoni, Vilfredo Pareto and... the young conservative liberal monarchists, etc., like Giovanni Borelli.

And Mackay — whom Zoccoli, in his preface to Stirner's book,<sup>2</sup> does not want, *out of respect for readers, to honor with an excessive act of courtesy* (probably Zoccoli, as well as he ignores all the

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<sup>2</sup> M. STIRNER: *L'Unico*, with an introduction by E. Zoccoli — Fratelli Bocca, ed. Torino L. S. (Fabbri)

anarchism he talks about, also ignores that Mackay is known in Germany and England as one of the best poets) — is the most authoritative interpreter of his master. It was Mackay who first took care of the reissue of Stirner's works, who collected his minor writings, and wrote a biography; and he was the first one to make the mistake of seeing in the *Unique* a kind of Bible of anarchism.

Stirnerian individualism leads in economics to "individual" property, to capitalist privilege, that is, to the denial, through the power of money (which anarchist stirnerians do not want abolished), of that freedom they claim in politics, morals and philosophy. Mackay, by the way, does not hide his liberalist ideas in any way, although he denies their logical consequences; he maintains that in anarchy free competition of interests will facilitate natural selection, and that property is necessary to freedom.<sup>3</sup>

It is not appropriate here to explain the mistake that Mackay falls into, and to refute his theory.

In politics, the consequence of Stirnerian individualism is either the isolation I mentioned above, or tyranny: the former impossible, the latter perverse, and above all anti-anarchist.

Outside the concept of solidarity, the individual who thinks only of himself, and of others only insofar as they are useful or harmful to him, in order to be completely free needs to stand above everyone, to be the highest authority; which may even be good, if history tells us that some absolute rulers were good, but it may also be bad. And for anarchists, it is not a question of having a good or bad tyrant, but of having none over them and not being one over others.

If the Stirnerian theory is dragged into the field of reality, of lived life, outside of abstract speculation, we soon see how tenuous and vague is the thread that binds anarchism properly said to individ-

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<sup>3</sup> J. H. MACKAY: *Anarchistes*, moeurs du jour. — Tresse e Stok. ed., Paris. (Fabbri)