

On School Rules

Max Stirner

1834

It cannot be our charge to deal with the laws concerning the school in the broadest sense, since they are to be regarded as applying not only to the pupils but also to the teachers and across all [*über alle*] relationships of the school, both internally and externally. Rather, we know the school laws as the object of our task only in the sense that they are laws *for the pupils*, and preclude any further sense of them all the more, since a correct solution of this task at the same time draws the at least the baselines for every extended and more comprehensive one. For the *essence* of the laws for the pupils must remain untarnished [and] and the same for the teachers, although here mostly in reversed terms, but which [nevertheless] always recur across all situations [*über alle Verhältnisse*] concerning school laws, both in reference to its relations [*bezug*] of internal organization and to its position [with regards] to the other forms of the state and to the state itself.

But even under this restricted scope of inquiry, the school laws are necessarily ways [of being] concerned [with] the universal [*allgemeine*] concept of law in general, and only through the correct understanding [*Verständniß*] of the latter can their own circumference and center be brought into clear intuition [*Anschauung*]. For all law is neither arbitrary nor accidental, but grounded and, as it were, enveloped in the nature of the object for which it is law. For every being, whether in the world of appearances or of the spirit, presents itself simply in this or that particular form. Thus, and for that very reason, through difference, [every being] which is full and rich in content, decomposes within itself into [a] divided [*Getheiltes*] manifold. Should these differences be emphasized and shown how, in what relation, and in what kind of concretion they necessarily belong to that simplicity of the object, then they would be present in this setting-apart [*Auseinandersetzen*] of the object since it is in-lawed [gesetzt] by a contentful and difference-rich unity. And hence in that they are set-apart [*Auseinandersetzen*] or [what is the same] laws [Gesetzen], these objects give themselves [precisely] because they are the having-been-lawed/set-apart [*auseinandergesetzte*].

It follows from this that no law is given its object from outside: the laws of gravity are the having-been-lawed/set-apart [*auseinandergesetzte*] content of the concept of gravity itself; the laws of the Jewish people are not, for instance, created and given from the individual legislator's spirit, but are taken from the spirit of their people and are this spirit itself, whose concept they reproduce in the unfolded fullness of its content. We must leave aside the further scientific proof of the implied nature of the law, and we may concern ourselves even less with the possible proof

of it in a number of individual laws ruffled-together [*zusammengeraffter*] from all kinds of fields; it is sufficient here to have pronounced the basic concept from which we are further led. Closer to us, however, lies the question of how laws [*Gesetze*] of the object can become laws [*Gesetzen*] for someone? – If we make an object, or more clearly, a concept, the aim of our striving, if we set it in front of ourselves [*vorsetzen*] as an end, then we lay before [*zuvor*] ourselves what lies apart [*auseinander*] in it, and through such setting-apart [*Auseinandersetzung*] of the content we gain the laws according to which it [the end] exists. At the same time, since the realization of that end is only possible through the execution of its content, which it itself is, those laws are demands on that which strives to fulfil the end [to bring about the object as its goal]. Thus, what the end carries in itself as its own law also presents itself to he who has, through the disclosure of its content as law, made it into the task [*Aufgabe*]. It binds the striving one within itself [*an sich*], bounds them in its circle, and *commands* [*gebietet*] him not to step out of it on any side. The law of the end is for he who wills it, *commandment* [*Gebot*], and every deviation a *prohibition* [*Verbot*]. – That those who give us these laws already know the concept or purpose better than we do, is such that they act only as the conscious speakers of it, who command us nothing of theirs, but only what they have of the law.

After this discussion of the basic concept, we turn to our task with the question, what are school laws in the sense defined above, as laws for pupils? Immediately we give the simple answer: they are the exposit, set out [*auseinandergesetzt*] content of the concept ‘*pupil*’. The aim of our investigation lies in its presentation and structure.

Man begins life in a natural immediacy in which his learning [*Vernehmen*] is solely through the senses, his state is sensibility. In this first form of his consciousness he leads a complete individual-life [*Einzelleben*] without grasping the difference between himself and others, which is first [made] present according to/through possibility [*der erst der Möglichkeit nach vorhanden ist*]; but from such possibility it also immediately wriggles out into reality, and things take on the sheen [*Schein*] of something alien, which man feels driven to get a hold of. His relationship to them takes the form of *play*, in which the first human drive and presents itself within the family.

But such an essential progress (it is to be called an epoch) widens this circle of play in its whole meaning, so that it acquires the view of one completely transformed. Whereas hitherto the object from which the child distinguished itself had the form and sense of *things* to which the child itself behaved as only another thing, it has now become an *I* opposed to the child which has equally [in the same way] determined itself as *I*. And this widening is not a leap that lacks any mediation, but a necessary unfolding of the earlier form of consciousness. The universal, namely, the relationship of the human being to another, has remained; only this other itself has broken through the limit – which was posited [*gesetzt*] for him/it by the natural and immediate consciousness – and made a richer content manifest: determination is abandoned as thing and the *I* moved into its place.

The relationship of an *I* to others of its own kind appears first and foremost as a need for sociability [*Geselligkeitsbedürfnis*], and since the *I* here has only its undeveloped, first and universal meaning, this *I* stands closest to the initial and undeveloped object. So child will play with child and peers join together. Now the individual no longer acquires a mere feeling of self [*Selbstgefühl*] in objective things by handling them, breaking them, throwing them around, etc., but has gained an essentially other object, in which, instead of the feeling of self in terms of its existence [*Dasein*] and mere life, instead, it must acquire the consciousness of its *I*. It must come to an

agreement [*verständigen*] with and on current object, and has to move on from the brittleness of this only primary consciousness of the I to the liveliness of self-consciousness.

But what demands are contained in this relationship of I to I? First of all, like in all relationships, that of entering-into-one-another [*Ineinandereingehen*], self-mediating, agreeing. Therefore, on the one hand each “I” must give itself [the other “I”] and on the other hand rise [above] the other “I”. – This is the beginning of children’s stories to each other and the self-invented little stories to which the children listen *attentively*. – Through such things, one gives the other his possession [*Besitz*], his content and with it himself.

As one is thus driven to open up to the other, the demand arises that everything lies hidden in the human being be revealed. He must disentangle and unfold himself from his awkwardness and lack of open-mindedness: All that he is by predisposition [*Anlage*] gradually comes into the light of day. If we want the human being to emerge out [*Herausbilden*] of the envelopment of his bud, then there appears another activity that we might call inner-formation/cultivation [*Hineinbilden*]. But in truth, nothing else is formed-from [*herausgebildet*] human being than the universal humanity, since he contains the predisposition. What he possesses as a possibility or a capacity [*Vermögen*] is [possessed] only through/via the development towards an actuality and ability [*Vermöchten*]. But [something] so purely human is, in its developed shape/form, the possession of human kind, as attained through the labour of millennia. The individual, therefore, developing himself, at the same time appropriates (and both are one and the same act) the content of humanity, the purely human, an appropriation which, because it is a inner-formation/cultivation [*Hineinbilden*] of that which has already been achieved by it, shows itself as a forming-out of the pure human being – which [was] still immediately dormant in the individual – towards universal agreement. This unity of the internal and external cultivation is *education* [*Diese Einheit des Hinein- wie des Herausbildens ist die Bildung*].

The relationship of the I to I is thus that of formation-drive/education-drive [*Bildungstriebes*], the drive to understand the other I and to have one’s own understood or shared. At first, of course, this drive for communication [*Mittheilung*] refers only to the I that is the same in age and form of consciousness; in this relationship, however, the feeling soon arises that these two I’s, in their natural rigidity against each other, are not able to agree truly and thoroughly. They repel each other [*stoßen einander ab*] and against each enter into battle [*Kampf*], discord, and anger. The relationship between the children without higher supervision and mediation becomes immoral and unsatisfactory. From this unbridled struggle arises the need for a mediating bond. Where the I did not find agreement with others in the relationship to the same I, it now seeks to agree with it in that bonding to a higher [one] and in the striving itself. Here, however, it encounters the richness of a still undreamed-of world, an individual with a fullness of content unknown to it. It is conscious of its difference from the latter and has this awareness of difference at the same time as its immediate certainty that this fullness of the I is not simply alien and inaccessible to it. Thus, we see the inkling [*ahnung*], the hope and the striving for the higher, such that respect and devotion to it awaken. The higher man, which has all greatness in it, is asked by that I to communicate it and in this way is made into-a *teacher*.

From this point on, the *pupil* – for the young person has become such through the need of a higher person as a *teacher* – passes through all stages of his agreement with him, of his learning from him, always with a view to appropriating what he looks upon as if it were the possession [*Besitzthum*] of his teacher.

With just a few more moves we will try to hint at the next elevation of the human being beyond school life. Through the course of understanding with the teacher and the appropriation of what appears to be his, the truth will emerge for consciousness that the content and possession of the teacher also has its own existence independent of its appearance in the teacher. The object of striving and consciousness, which hitherto constituted the teacher, transfigures and expands into that which, via the possession thereof, the teacher alone had value and occupied the higher position in relation to the pupil. Instead of the teacher, Science itself in its pure form presents itself to the I as its task, and its domain as freedom. At first, or in its poorest way, this is only independence from the teacher; but on its further way, through the truth which is the content of science, it imparts itself immediately to true freedom; for “the truth will make you free!” What was previously understanding now becomes a true examination [*Vernehmen*] of the spirit: the understanding of the pupil becomes the rationality [*Vernünftigkeit*] of the so-called undergraduate [*Hochschülers*], who is alone a “Youth of Science” in the full and comprehensive sense of the word. For the university is, in fact, so far beyond the concept of the school that the name of it as a ‘higher school’ only makes sense comparatively. The content of the relationship between teacher and pupil is, in essence, completely different. – Admittedly, school life is not always followed by university life, but by various other forms of life; but these are always like it in that the ground on which they move is freedom, however much this may be depressed to the very poorest and stalest determination, to that of mere independence from the teacher. This is the case with the journeyman, the itinerant, etc.

Thus, we would have placed the school as a necessary stage of the growing human spirit between the boundaries, on the one hand, of the still sensual life within the family before the awakening of the urge for understanding and, on the other hand, of the life of reason in freedom, after the recognition of the insufficiency of the cultivation of the understanding [*Verstandesbildung*]. Within the school itself, however, we find the relationship between teacher and pupil to be a consistent and essential one. The teacher is the object which the pupil strives to take into his consciousness, to unite with himself and to understand. Thus, the teacher is the task for the student and, by revealing himself and explaining his concept, will give the pupil the laws according to which he wants to be received, understood and assimilated by them.

The most general definition in which the essence of the teacher must be summarized is that he is *for the pupil*. It contains first of all the demand against the latter that he not disturb this determination of the teacher or oppose it with his own obstinacy and inaccessibility: the prohibition of *rebelliousness* [*Widersetzlichkeit*]. This is followed, secondly, by the demand on the pupil to be for him as the teacher is for him: the commandment of *submission* [*Ergebenheit*], accessibility, openness, or whatever else one calls it. Both this prohibition and this commandment unite in the law of *obedience* – as much as obedience is the most general and necessary fundamental law, one must not rest on it for the sake of its unstructured generality. Rather, the teacher’s being for the pupil or his relationship to him is a very rich and generous one, the most essential features of which are owed their expression as laws.

As in himself, the teacher is also a feeling, knowing and willing person for the pupil and is comprehended exhaustively by the pupil through the reception of these three sides. As a feeling person he is the believing, as a knowing person the scientific, and as a willing person the ethical [*sittliche*] person. Whoever strives for this, forms his faith, science and ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*] in himself and will – for here, on the level of the pupil’s consciousness, the presupposition stands firm that religion, science and morality are truly present in the teacher and individually pro-

nounced – surely attain that which is called religious, scientific and moral education and, which is regarded as the goal of all striving within the school.

What law, therefore, develops for the pupil first of all from the fact that the teacher is the feeling one? Only directly, according to the nature of feeling, does the teacher behave as a feeling one, and directly, therefore, he can also only be received. The religious faith of the teacher is the faith of the pupil without further mediation than that of tradition. The law that arises for the pupil from this side is that of *divine (religious) faith*, the content of which is also rich in further laws, divisible in detail, through its abundance. These are the laws which, placed within the pupil, bring about his *religious* cultivation [*Bildung*].

As a knower, the teacher himself is already an inner mediating of the manifold of knowledge, a mediation that is achieved through work. In the same way, he must be mediated and received in the corresponding activity of the pupil in working out [what the teacher knows] again. The law that arises from this side is that of scientific work, which in turn is capable of the most diverse provisions, such as that of attentive, orderly and diligent work. The law that arises from this side is that of *scientific work*, which in turn is capable of the most diverse determinations, such as that of attentive, orderly and diligent work and in these likewise takes the form of more particular laws, such as first of all attentiveness, order, diligence. Yes, expressed as prohibitions, these include e. g. prohibitions on truancy, on early vacations, and prohibitions on the misuse of lending libraries and so forth. It is the demands of the content of knowledge that prescribe the ways of cultivating and acquiring knowledge in such laws, and it is through the fulfilment of these laws that *scientific* education to may take place.

As a willing teacher, he is one who, according to the concept of ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*], in which only the will has a true existence, realises and translates the truths of religion and science into life, through an activity of the will. This realization and accomplishment of the truth set by religion and recognized by science corresponds, on the part of the pupil, to the same activity of accomplishing the demands of the willing teacher commanded by the believing teacher and imparted by the knowing one; but the law must here be pronounced as the law of *ethical action*. Like the two preceding ones, this one, too, breaks down into many special laws, namely, regarding the relations of the pupil to his actions (conduct, behaviour, performance). First of all, relating to the teachers (and to these laws of deference belong even the laws about respect for the school building and for the other institutions, employed persons, etc., set up by and for the sake of the teachers, The laws on dress, fashion, spurs, etc.), secondly in relating to the fellow pupils (e.g. prohibition of penny-pinching, commandment of obedience to the supervisor at all times, etc., etc.), and thirdly in relating to the rest of the surrounding world. The latter may again be divided into relations to the family (the laws concerning pensioners are also to be placed in this series), to civil society (e.g. the prohibition of visiting public houses, etc.), and to the state (e.g. the prohibition of secret, especially demagogic, connections, etc.). – Through the fulfilment of the laws of action, that aim of the school is finally attained which is pronounced as the highest demand under the name of *ethical* education and is to be regarded as the end of all arbitrariness; for “before the will, the arbitrariness is silent!

With this we believe that we have here presented the basics of school legislation, insofar as it is legislation for pupils, without it being necessary to demonstrate in detail the further growth, ramifications and branching out into the individual and most singular laws from this root, and even without it being possible to solve such a task of a whole teacher’s life and a rich teaching experience with the means of our little experience.

However, the question of how far school legislation may or may not interfere with the sphere of action of parents may still be answered. The family is not exempt from the school laws, but must rather see to it that the pupils are also kept [to the laws] out of school. As soon as the parents have handed the child over to the school, they receive back from it the right of paternalism and supervision which has been transferred to them, with the instruction to see to it that the pupil observes all the teachings of the school or the laws of the same in the widest sense and also acts outside the school and in all circles and shows himself to be such a person as is transformed and formed by the school in all directions. – It is however, the circle of supervision to which the parents of the school are entrusted in the manner of a superintendent, although this transferal is often very limited in different schools, and the parental duties in relation to military schools [*Kadettenschulen*].

That the children are not deprived of school as a necessary stage of life in overall is the responsibility of the state. That within it [the school] there are no obstructions by parents, guardians, etc., is also the responsibility of the state, to which the school must report. – Thus, the school has *no* laws against parents, etc. The law of regular attendance at school is the same. The law of regular attendance at school may be enforced by the school on the pupil, if *he* wishes to circumvent it; but if he is hindered by his parents, etc., some power other than that of the school must intervene. The same applies to the law on the punctual payment of school fees. Only the pupil can be prosecuted by the school and only his guilt can be punished. But for this very reason the school laws are also without restriction with regard to the pupil's *free action* and have their limit only where the pupil's free action is inhibited and conditioned by the family: i.e., where the pupil is indeed the organ of action, but the agent himself is another. This restriction prevents the Spartan tearing away of the children from the family unit and at the same time preserves the essence of the school laws as intact.

How, finally, the laws for the pupils at the same time form the basis and, as it were, the upper side of the inverse of the laws for the teachers, is evident from the previous investigation, which itself was the development of what is essentially posited in the teacher or must be presupposed within him. No less do the laws for the school as an institution [*Anstalt*] to offer the appropriate means for that appropriation of the teacher on the part of the pupil, find their justification and establishment in the essence of the laws developed here. However, we do not presume to consider their elaboration, which we undertook right at the beginning, as our task, since it seems to argue with the modesty that befits us.

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[Translated for the most part mechanically, however translation edited with corrections on terminology by myself (A.C. Jones)]

Editor's Note: This is the second of two papers written by Max Stirner as part of his examination by the Royal Scientific Examination Commission in 1834. To my knowledge this is the only extant translation of the text, and was produced in part for the purpose of my doctoral studies in the work of Stirner, particularly the chapter on anthropology and education. Attached is a link to the original German for anyone whom wishes to review or correct my editing of the partially-mechanized work of translation:

<http://max-stirner-archiv-leipzig.de/dokumente/1834-Ueber-Schulgesetze.pdf> Any suggested edits are more than welcome.

UPDATE: 17/06/2022 This is now being Co-Translated with Dr Terence Thomson, edits reflect this.

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