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The addenda of *Max Stirner on the Path of Doubt.* <bloomsbury.com/uk/max-stirner-on-the-path-of-doubt-9781793636904>
"*Die Freien*" first appeared in the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung,* No. 195, July 14, 1842. Republished in Stirner's *Kleinere Schriften* hrs. John Henry Mackay (Berlin: Bernhard Zack, 1914); republished (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1976). pp. 132–141.

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The *Königsberger Zeitung* was first to report the existence of the club "Free Ones," and their report was soon followed by a series of others directed to this same topic by almost every other newspaper. The club has had to suffer such vehement and fanatical attack that even any opponent of the group, if he did not consider violence a virtue, must ask, that given such enemies, if this club really has no rights whatsoever. Certainly, this club might be considered worthy of attention by anyone who understands the importance of intellectual trends; but in any case, it must be quietly considered, and one must presuppose the best, as it is with this presupposition that one must begin in every court proceeding and with every criticism. Most newspapers broke out in a furious storm against the "Free Ones," with the lead being taken by the Spenes'sche[1] with its fright-

[1] A few weeks before Stirner's article appeared, Frederick Engles discussed the *Spenersche Zeitung* [*Berlinische Nachrichten von Staats- und gelehrten Sachen* in an article which he wrote for the *Rheinische Zeitung*. In his article Engles rightly criticizes the claim made by the *Spenersche Zeitung* that it was a liberal newspaper.

ening call that "The Autonomy of the Spirit[2] is the fruit of a childish conceit and a sinful misjudgment of the limits of human understanding, and in that Christian community, wherein whose womb such a propaganda of disbelief would have nourished itself, a judgment of a deeper degeneracy can be pronounced." They ring out storm bells against the heretics and clearly enough point out the club [Knüttel][3] to the people of Berlin by which they can also re-enact in our own Market that lovely mob-scene held against Strauss in Zurich.[4]

> Certainly, in our city, the deepest contempt of its fellow citizens would greet those who would openly teach the adoration of the human spirit rather than devotion to the church! They would not tolerate the tendency of a group, whose opinions are only employed in order to undermine the moral grounds of civil society, nor allow its gates and doors to be open to the entrance of this most capricious and be opened for principles whose practical consequences would require bullet-proof vests under coats and to completely lock up both home and family for their protection.

The "Kolnische"[5] dressed up these few crude words and paraphrased them into three large columns. However in so hon-

[2] Likely based upon the Hegelian conception of self-consciousness as "being in and for itself." A key conception which led many of his followers into a radical humanism or atheism.

[3] A bit of word-play, as a "*Knüttel*" was a physical club, and not a not a social "Club."

[4] In 1839, David F. Strauss was invited by some liberal officials in Züurich to fill a Chair of Theology at the University. Hearing of this, the orthodox clergy and conservative government officials generated such opposition that in time even a public demonstration was held opposing the appointment. The invitation was rescinded.

[5] Kölnische Zeitung. From 1842–1843 it published a number of articles by Karl Marx.

Regarding our culture, all of our present relationships, all of our common civic life, must now be taught that the false axiom ["All of our European States have a Christian foundation"] be transformed into this: "All of our European States have cultivated reason [*Bildung*] as their basis." It must be admitted, although this is not the place for any further explanation, that "developing culture" will indeed support the faith—even though this idea might not be understood here.

Believers will always have something to believe in if only it can be believed. On the other hand the truly educated person is a free spirit, a free spirit in the purest meaning of the term. The solid and full development of rational culture can only be grounded in free knowledge and free will

What the "Others" [the "Free Ones"] are really opposed to is not the Church, but the State, and this opposition to one of the institutions of the State is a loyal opposition. They are as loyal, for example, as those who speak against the censor, and so would make their convictions valid: it is a "legal opposition."

oring its sister, it lowered not only its own honor but those it represented as well—the educated and Christian world. No, those who consider themselves to be permitted to make a public statement over the merits of the intellectual currents of their time, should at least have a measure of culture, and in their exposition betray at least some attempt to penetrate into the subject matter.

Indeed, the public does not read newspapers in order to commiserate with some shaking statements of cowardly fears, but to read important and well-written reports. How much more worthily has the *Aachener Zeitung* conducted itself, for although it is otherwise opposed to the *Freien*, it nevertheless has stood up with faultless candor and has declared itself against all intervention by "governmental actions." But your newspaper has already taken up this matter in a series of leading articles which on every occasion display prejudice. For us, who draw upon all forms of liberalism, forms so heavy and meaningful in our changing times, and who would seek to overhear the fundamental issues and to secure our relative right against obstinate fault, there is no sound so fitting than that of the quiet and more fearless reflection that you have loudly criticized. Whoever looks danger in the eye, overcomes it, or at least it frightens them no more.[6] You have already reported that a club, the "Free Ones" exists, and in the manner it does exist. I'll pass these reports along as they come in, but at the moment I will only state that the majority, as well as the leading voices of the group, fear that the absurd ideas of the club being developed will rob them of something they hold very dear. Certainly, the *Königsberger Zeitung* bears some blame for its fragmentary and hurried representations of the intentions of this group.

[6] In the first chapter of *Der Einzige*, Stirner writes of how a child can stand up to the "Father's stern look" and by this "obdurate courage" secure its own maturity and freedom.

Now, let us see what the "Free Ones" really want—what "they openly present as a valid principle." First off, in what does this principle consist? In this: "To raise the banner of the 'Autonomy of the Spirit' and to be fundamentally committed to leading modern philosophy from out of its restricted sphere as a science into the wider circle of modern life." This is certainly not the place to simply state this fundamental commitment, and then to merely recognize it or cast it aside. The principle is actually found within the scientific work of modern philosophy itself and will find its enemies in this field and can only then either claim victory or be defeated. No one can deny that, first and foremost, it is a "commitment," and if the "Free Ones" would claim to represent this, then no one can either rebuke or damn them except with the weapon of commitment itself. Only the "Free Ones" wish this principle "introduced in the wider circle of life," and this appears to be the immediate meaning of "making it valid in the world." On the other hand, one cannot understand what could be the object of those who hold a certain conviction, one that would lack the strength to be maintained, could gain by confronting others who hold opposing viewpoints.

The mutual exchange of viewpoints and convictions must be free. If, for the moment, the pressure of the press hampers this exchange rather than permitting it to happen, there still remains the trade route of vocal traffic, an open and direct route all the more eagerly taken when the roads of literature are guarded against smuggled goods.[7]

What is told into the ear of another penetrates more deeply into the heart than the roaring tangle of a thousand passing

[7] Stirner's Der Einzige narrowly avoided being confiscated by the Prussian censors who thought that it had been earlier censored by the Saxony censors in Leipzig. When they found out this was not the case it was then disregarded by the Prussian censors as being too absurd to censor. Bauer's 1843 book. *Das entdeckte Christentum* was confiscated and destroyed except for one copy, discovered in 1927, which was then reprinted.

ther "Christian" or "Human." It is said that "All of our European States have a Christian foundation." Proof? "It does not require one, it is an indisputable axiom!" A beautiful thought, but although a mathematical axiom requires no proof, a worm-eaten conceit cannot pretend to be an axiom. To claim that Christianity is the foundation of our states is not only a sign of historical ignorance, but an even greater sign of incompetent thinking. To demonstrate that our states are not Christian, although an extensive task, is not all that difficult, but it does require that the prejudices of a Balde[12] be swept away. That our states cannot be Christian will be soon be seen. Here, the limits of space only permit a few short remarks.

It appears to be quite clear, that insofar as we are Christians, our state would also be the product of Christianity, and yet this is little a fact as a Christian development of physical science or as fully developed German Philosophy is a Christian Philosophy. It is rather the case that the State rests upon the principle of "Culture, of Civilization." The State is based upon a "Secular" principle, Christianity upon the "Kingdom of Heaven" ("My Kingdom is not of this world"). Christianity is completely indifferent to what the State holds of the greatest meaning; everything appears indifferent to it, even Freedom. With compassion, the "Children of God" look down from their height upon all other freedom as something "other." It does not disturb the Christian if one be noble or a beggar, master or servant, free or slave, poor or rich, crude or refined, and so on. A slap in the face, given to either the Count or the beggar, is not punished in different ways: the Count just as the beggar must turn the other cheek. The secular should not cause the Christian any concern, for they should only recognize it in that they are driven to do so by inexorable need.

[12] Jacob Balde (1604–1668) a Jesuit known for the patriotic tone of his popular poetry.

Church but against the State, not against the impotency of the Church, but against the power of the State. Indeed, the "Free Ones" have been credited with accepting the statement of the Philalethen[10] that they also "have cast aside as unnecessary such clerical requirements as Marriage and Baptism whose enforcement rests upon the State." These "requirements" would be necessary if any group needed correction.

In all this we see evidence of the weak against the strong, of a small minority setting out against a huge majority. Who runs the greater risk and danger? Not those who, without material power, would try to set up an opposition, but rather the majority, who must stand with the Devil and so validate his evil principle "Might makes Right." I have heard some say that it is not good that the State should alter a law or an organization because some minority wants it changed. Quite to the contrary, even the will of one man might overturn a law of a thousand years if that law be wrong and unjust. For a long time, among the English, many old laws, whose application would be an injustice, have been either adjusted, or better, simply cast aside. Indeed, what the "Free Ones" seek, which is simply that the State should no longer tie its citizens to one religious confession, is no longer merely the wish of a few. The Jews well know, if they trace their wish for Emancipation back to its ultimate ground, leads to nothing less than to the separation of Religious confession from citizenship.[11]

One of the most important matters of contemporary political life is drawn from the unconcealed and open assertions of the "Free Ones." In the last analysis they revolve about the issue of whether or not the modern European State is to be ei-

[10] A very obscure and secretive society, active in the late seventeenth century, which had Rosecrucian and hermenutic interests. Little is known of them, it seems that Stirner is engaged in a bit of humorous scholarship.

[11] See Bauer's 1843 essay "*Die Fahigkeit der heutigen Juden und Christen, frei zu warden [On the Capacity of today's Jews and Christians to become free]* in Sass, pp. 175–96.

voices. One can hardly think of a more favorable condition to really excite and inform people with this or than forbidden viewpoint than that given by present press restrictions—it only requires the privileged party to talk, that party will soon lose all credibility, and what it defends and praises will gradually be rejected and distained by its readership. Indeed, each ounce of freedom that is taken from anyone who wants to present their conviction will add, in the scale of public opinion, a pound of trust in that very conviction and would expectedly add a hundred pounds of distrust against those who erect barriers against free expression. So then, if the "Free Ones" were to be allowed to spread their convictions, who could hinder them? Anyone attempting it would simply help spread this viewpoint even further, and excite even more hunger for it: Forbidden fruit is the sweetest.

If the "Free Ones" were to establish a "Union" toward this end, or even if one is needed, is another question. They at least know that for the moment by taking up this name a spiritual fear has been raised which has closed any attempt to open a discussion. In this respect, how should this Union be considered? It would not be illegal, but rather unwise. There also seems a second reason which would move these "Free Ones" to form a Union: "The group intends to publicly exit the Church and to affix the signatures of every member upon their statement." This is a total misunderstanding. The Church, at least our Protestant Church, has no power to put any pressure upon any individual: the church can neither force a baptism, a confirmation, a wedding, and so on. If it were to employ force, then clerical force would have to be recognized. But as it stands, for example, one who did not seek confirmation, can only expect a civil penalty that would follow from some damage to a civil law. But if the state, through its police power, does not hold a person to be legally bound to the requirements of the church, then the Church cannot punish anyone even if, after being baptized and confirmed, that person never again enters a Church. In-

deed, what is even more, people who live in such an unchurchly manner are not a hair less respected for that. Among others, this was seen to be the case with Jean Paul,[8] who didn't care in the least about the approval of his fellow citizens of Bayreuth when it came to attending church or taking communion.

The Protestant Church has lost that power which, at the time of its full bloom and energy, it had once exercised over people, and has now become invisibly and inwardly transformed. What might it now mean if this invisible and inward church would express itself openly? The Church has no power over those who do not wish to hear a sermon, or take communion, or indeed to leave the church. Thousands do this throughout their lives and no one questions it, and otherwise, if they are respected, such as Jean Paul, they are honored by their fellow citizens and are set among the immortal geniuses of the human race. One feels that going to Church is a personal affair, and that each one must deal with it as they will, and be responsible to no other. To attempt to restrain such a harmless and voluntary matter as this, as the Church would attempt, is both pointless and quite contemptible. Since I have thought about setting out the truth regarding "The Free Ones," I know it is not what their scornful enemies, in a poorly chosen expression would presuppose it to be—as merely a "childish pride" with the basic intention to "exit from the Church." This viewpoint is not contradicted in the *Königsberger* article. But just this sort of miserable language has generated a great deal of hate and enmity for them. One would think that with their exit they wish to make enemies of all those who would protect and keep from change their understanding of Christian belief; one would think that they wish to destroy the Church that every Christian needs, to take away that which is indispensable. This wish does not in the

[8] Jean Paul Richter (1763–1825) a well-known author of humorous novels and stories born in Bayreuth—as was Stirner.

least find any place in their words, and it seems to me that that one must have a very fearful and despondent heart if this is seen as underlying them.[9]

The "Free Ones" also promulgate the view that the "basic conviction of modern philosophy is the Autonomy of the Spirit." Indeed, it might well be the result, for anyone recognizing the Autonomy of the Sprit, that they would no longer have need of the Christian Church. Whoever is won over to this conviction will do what many have done and still do all the time: the Church will be left out of their needs. What will follow for those who remain undisturbed in their fundamental convictions? For those who continue to live with this conviction, although the Church be shattered, will Christianity be taken from them?

Where is it stated that "The Free Ones" would destroy culture, and who has the right to that barbaric reproach? They only wish to introduce their "conviction" into life, and believe that by their exit from the Church they have already presented part of the proof that the Church is not absolutely necessary. Does this mean that they intend to empower those who are convinced just as they are that they should destroy Christendom for all of those who still depend upon it? Not at all. It means nothing other but that they express, in a direct and honest manner, their convictions. In a word, it means, they follow upon the way of their convictions, and not upon the way of storms and revolutions.

It might do well to consider that those opposed to the "Free Ones," those who need force and prohibitions, might well be even more dangerous and worse revolutionaries. Be that as it may, this "exit from the Church" is meaningless, and the anger directed against it should be completely ignored. The exit is inward, not outward. If we look more carefully at this, it was also the case that the *Aufklarung* was not directed against the

[9] Stirner's irony is here particularly apparent.