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STIRNER ON LOVE

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Excerpts from The Unique and its Property

by Max Stirner

For intercourse with human beings, among all who live religiously, a specific law is placed above all, one whose observance people probably forget at times, but whose value they never dare to deny; this is the law of —love, to which even those who seem to fight against its principle and hate its name have not yet been unfaithful; for they also still have love, indeed, they love more deeply and sublimely, they love “the human being and humanity.”

If we formulate the meaning of this law, it will be something like this: Every man must have a something that is more to him than himself. You’re supposed to put your “private interest aside,” if it is for the welfare of others, the good of the fatherland, the good of society, the common good, the good of humanity, the good cause, and the like! Fatherland, society, humanity, etc., must be more to you than yourself, and facing them, your “private interests” must step back; because you’re not allowed—to be an egoist.

Love is a far-reaching religious demand, which is not limited, for instance, to the love of God and the human being, but is on top in every respect. Whatever we do, think, want, the reason for it is always supposed to be love. So we may indeed judge, but only “with love.” The Bible may certainly be criticized and really quite thoroughly, but above all else the critic must love it and see in it the sacred book. Does this mean anything else than that he isn’t allowed to criticize it to death, he must leave it standing, and indeed as a sacred and irrefutable thing?—Also in our criticism of human beings, love is to remain the unchanged root. Certainly, judgments that hatred inspires are not our own judgments, but judgments of the hatred that rules us, “spiteful judgments.” But are judgments that love inspires in us any more our own? They are judgments of the love that rules us, “loving, forgiving” judgments, not our own, and so not actual judgments at all. The one who burns with love for justice cries fiat justitia, pereat mundus! He can certainly ask and delve into what true justice is or demands and in what it consists, but not if it is anything.

It is quite true: “He who abides in love abides in God and God in him.” God abides in him, he hasn’t gotten rid of God, hasn’t become godless; and he

my food, just as I am also fed upon and consumed by you. We have only one relationship to each other, that of usefulness, usability, advantage. We owe each other nothing, because what I seem to owe to you, I owe at most to myself. If I show you a cheerful expression in order to likewise cheer you up, then your cheerfulness matters to me, and my expression serves my wish; I do not show it to thousands of others, whom I have no intention of cheering up.

One must be brought up into the love that is based on the “human essence” or, in the ecclesiastical and moral period, lies on us as a “commandment.” In what way moral influence, the main ingredient of our upbringing, seeks to control human intercourse will be considered here with egoistic eyes in at least one example.

Excerpt is from The Unique and its Property by Max Stirner which can be read in full for free at theanarchistlibrary.org or for money at underworldamusements.com

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If earlier I said, I love the world, now I add as well: I don't love it, because I annihilate it, as I annihilate myself; I break it up. I don't limit myself to one feeling for human beings, but give free play to all of which I am capable. How should I not dare to express it in all its stridency? Yes, I use the world and human beings! In this way I can keep myself open to every impression without being torn away from myself by one of them. I can love, love with all my heart, and let the most consuming glow of passion burn in my heart, without taking the beloved for anything other than nourishment for my passion, on which it always refreshes itself anew. All my care for him counts only for the object of my love, only for him whom my love needs, only for him whom I "ardently love." How indifferent he would be to me without this—my love. I only feed my love with him, I use him only for this: I enjoy him.

Let's choose another obvious example. I see how people are frightened in dark superstition by a swarm of ghosts. If, in accordance with my strengths, I perhaps allow a bit of daylight to fall on the nocturnal phantasmagoria, is it because love for you inspires this in me? Do I write out of love for human beings? No, I write because I want to give my thoughts and existence in the world; and even if I foresaw that these thoughts would take away your rest and peace, even if I saw the bloodiest wars and the destruction of many generations sprouting from this seed of thought:—still I would scatter it. Do with it what you will and can, that's your affair, and I don't care. You'll perhaps only have sorrow, struggle and death from it; a very few will draw joy from it. If your welfare lay at my heart, then I'd act like the church did, which withheld the Bible from the laity, or the Christian governments, which make it a sacred duty to "protect the common people from bad books."

But it's not only not for your sake, but also not for the truth's sake that I express what I think. No:

I sing as the bird sings
That lives up in the tree;
The song that from its throat springs
Pays well for any fee.

I sing because—I am a singer. But I use you for it, because I— need ears.

When the world gets in my way—and it gets in my way everywhere—then I consume it to quiet the hunger of my egoism. You are nothing for me but—

abides in God, doesn't come to himself and into his own home, abides in the love of God and hasn't become loveless.

"God is love! All times and all generations recognize in these words the center of Christianity." God, who is love, is a meddlesome god: he cannot leave the world in peace, but wants to bless it. "God became a human being to make human beings divine." He has his hand in play everywhere, and nothing happens without it; everywhere he has his "best intentions," his "incomprehensible plans and decrees." Reason, which he himself is, should also be advanced and realized throughout the world. His fatherly care deprives us of all independence. We can do nothing sensible without someone saying God did that! and can draw no misfortune to ourselves without hearing God imposed that; we have nothing that we don't have from him; he "gave" everything. But as God does, so does the human being. God absolutely wants to bless the world, and the human being wants to make it happy, wants to make all human beings happy. Therefore, every "human being" wants to awaken the reason, which he considers himself to have, in all. Everything should be absolutely rational. God torments himself with the devil; the philosopher does it with unreason and the accidental. God lets no being go its own way, and the human being likewise wants to let us lead only a human way of life.

But whoever is full of sacred (religious, moral, humane) love loves only the phantasm, the "true human being," and persecutes with dull relentlessness the individual, the actual human being, under the phlegmatic legal title of proceedings against the "inhuman monster." He finds it laudable and indispensable to practice ruthlessness in the harshest measure; because love of the phantasm or the universal commands him to hate the unghostly, i.e., the egoist or individual; that is the meaning of the famous love-phenomenon that people call "justice."

The embarrassed defendant can expect no mercy, and no one kindly spreads a cloth over his unhappy nakedness. Without emotion the strict judge strips the last rags of excuse from the body of the poor accused one; without compassion the jailer drags him into his gloomy dwelling; without forgiveness, when the time of punishment ends, the jailer thrusts the stigmatized one back out among human beings who spit on him with contempt, his good, loyal, Christian brethren. Yes, without mercy, a criminal "deserving of death" is led to the scaffold, and before the eyes of the cheering crowd the compensated moral law celebrates its sublime—revenge. Only one can live, the moral law or the criminal. Where criminals

live with impunity, the moral law has gone under, and where the moral law prevails, the criminals must fall. Their enmity is indestructible.

The Christian age is precisely that of mercy, love, concern for letting people get what is due to them, indeed, for bringing them to where they fulfill their human (divine) calling. Therefore, for intercourse people have put this first: this and this is the essence of the human being and consequently his calling, to which either God has called him, or (according to today's concepts) his being human (the species) calls him. From this comes the zeal for proselytizing. That the communists and the humane expect more from human beings than the Christians doesn't take away from this standpoint in the least. The human being should get what is human! If for the pious it was enough that the divine became his part, the humane require that what is human will not wither away in him. Both take a stand against what is egoistic. Of course—because the egoistic cannot be granted or conferred to him (a fief); rather he must get hold of it for himself. Love grants the former; only I can give myself the latter.

Up to now, intercourse was based on love, considerate behavior, doing for each other. As a person owed it to himself to make himself blessed or to take up into himself blessedness, the supreme essence, and bring it to a *vérité* (a truth and actuality), so one owes it to others to help them realize their essence and calling: in both cases, one owed it to the human essence to contribute to its realization.

But one owes it neither to himself to make anything out of himself, not to others to make anything out of them; because he owes nothing to his or anyone else's essence. Intercourse based on essence is an intercourse with a phantasm, not with any actual thing. If I hold intercourse with the highest essence, then I don't hold intercourse with myself, and if I hold intercourse with the human essence, then I don't hold intercourse with human beings.

The natural human being's love becomes through education a commandment. But as a commandment it belongs to the human being as such, not to me; it is my essence, about which people make so much fuss, not my property. The human being, i.e., humanity, places this requirement on me; love is required, it is my duty. So instead of actually being gained by me, it is gained by the universal, the human being, as his property or ownness: "It behooves the human being, every human being, to love; love is the human being's duty and calling," etc.

"A love that is limited by faith is an untrue love. The sole limitation that does not contradict the essence of love is the self-limitation of love by reason, by intelligence. Love that disdains the rigor, the law, of intelligence, is theoretically a false, and practically a ruinous, love." So love is in its essence rational! So thinks Feuerbach; the believer, on the contrary, thinks that love is in its essence believing. The former rails against irrational, the latter against unbelieving, love. For both, it can at most count as a *splendidum vitium*. Don't both allow love to exist, even in the form of unreason and unbelief? They dare not say, irrational or unbelieving love is nonsense, is not love; as little as they want to say: irrational or unbelieving tears are not tears. But if even irrational, etc., love must count as love, and if they are nevertheless supposed to be unworthy of the human being, then this simply follows: Love is not the highest thing, but rather reason or faith; even the unreasonable and the unbelieving person can love; but love only has worth when it is that of a rational or a believing person. It is an illusion when Feuerbach calls love's rationality its "self-limitation"; the believer could with equal right call faith its "self-limitation." Irrational love is neither false nor ruinous; it does its service as love.

Toward the world, and especially toward human beings, I am supposed to assume a particular feeling, and "meet them with love," with the feeling of love, right from the start. Admittedly, in this there is far more caprice and self-determination revealed than when I let the world assail me with all possible feelings, and remain exposed to the most muddled and random impressions. I go to the world rather with a preconceived feeling, a prejudice as it were and a preconceived opinion; I have determined my behavior toward it in advance, and, despite all its challenges, feel and think about it only as I have once determined to feel. I safeguard myself against the world's domination through the principle of love; for, come what may, I—love. The ugly, for example, makes a disgusting impression on me; but, determined to love, I master this impression, as with any antipathy.

But the feeling to which I have determined and—condemned myself from the start is a close-minded feeling, because it is a predestined one from which I myself cannot get away or which I cannot renounce. Because it's preconceived, it is a prejudice. I no longer reveal myself in front of the world, but rather my love reveals itself. Indeed, the world does not rule me, but so much the more inevitably the spirit of love rules me. I have overcome the world, to become the slave of this spirit.

For example, family love, as it is usually understood as “filial piety,” is a religious love; love of the fatherland, preached as “patriotism,” likewise. All our romantic love moves in the same pattern; everywhere the hypocrisy, or rather the self-deception, of an “unselfish love,” an interest in the object for the object’s sake and not for my sake and mine alone.

Religious or romantic love is distinguished from sensual love certainly by the difference of the object, but not by the dependence of the relationship to it. In the latter respect, both are cases of being possessed; but in the former regard, one of the objects is profane, the other sacred. The domination of the objects over me is in both cases the same, except that in one instance it is a sensuous one, in the other instance a spiritual (ghostly) one. My love is my own only when it consists altogether in a selfish and egoistic interest, and so the object of my love is actually my object or my property. I owe my property nothing and have no obligation to it, as little as I have an obligation to my eye; if I still tend it with the greatest care, I do so for my sake.

Antiquity lacked love as little as the Christian era; the love god is older than the God of Love. But the condition of being mystically possessed belongs to the moderns.

The condition of being possessed by love lies in the alienation of the object, or in my powerlessness against its alienation and superior power. For the egoist, nothing is so high that he would humble himself before it, nothing so independent that he would live for the love of it, nothing so sacred that he would sacrifice himself to it. The egoist’s love wells up from selfishness, flows in a bed of selfishness, and empties back into selfishness.

Can this still be called love? If you know another word for it, go ahead and choose it; then the sweet word love may wither with the dead world; for now, I at least find none in our Christian language, and therefore stick with the old sound and “love” my object, my—property.

Only as one of my feelings do I cherish love, but as a power over me, as a divine power (Feuerbach), as a passion that I should not avoid, as a religious or moral duty—I despise it. As my feeling, it is mine; as a principle to which I dedicate and “give over” my soul, it is a master and divine, just as hatred as a principle is diabolical: the one no better than the other. In short, egoistic love, i.e., my love, is neither holy nor unholy, neither divine nor diabolical.

Consequently, I must again claim love for myself and rescue it from the power of the human being.

What was originally mine, but by chance, instinctively, was conferred to me as the property of the human being; I became a fief—holder when I loved, I became the vassal of humanity, only a specimen of this species, and in loving acted not as I, but as a human, as a specimen of the human being, i.e., humanly. The whole condition of civilization is the feudal system, property being the human being’s or humanity’s, not mine. A vast feudal state was founded, the individual robbed of everything, everything left to “the human being.” The individual finally had to appear as “a sinner through and through.”

Am I perhaps to have no lively interest in the person of another, should his joys and his well-being not lie at my heart, should the enjoyment that I prepare for him not be more to me than other enjoyments of my own? On the contrary, I can sacrifice numberless enjoyments to him with joy, I can deny myself countless things to heighten his pleasure, and I can risk for him what would be dearest to me without him, my life, my welfare, my freedom. Indeed, it forms my pleasure and happiness to feast on his pleasure and happiness. But me, myself I do not sacrifice to him, but rather remain an egoist and—enjoy him. If I sacrifice to him everything I would keep without my love for him, that is very easy, and even more commonplace in life than it seems to be; but it proves nothing more than that this one passion in me is more powerful than all the rest. Christianity also teaches to sacrifice all other passions to this one. But if I sacrifice others to one passion, I still do not, for this reason, sacrifice myself, and sacrifice nothing through which I truly am myself; I do not sacrifice my particular worth, my ownness. Where this nasty incident occurs, love looks no better than any other passion that I blindly obey. The ambitious person, who is swept away by ambition and remains deaf to every warning that a quiet moment engenders in him, has let this passion grow into a tyrant against which he gives up all power of breaking off: he has given up himself, because he cannot break off and therefore cannot release himself from the passion: he is possessed.

I also love human beings, not just a few individuals, but every one. But I love them with the awareness of egoism; I love them because love makes me happy, I love because love is natural to me, it pleases me. I know no “commandment of love.” I have fellow-feeling with every feeling being, and their torment torments me, their refreshment refreshes me too; I

can kill, not torture, them. In contrast, the high-minded, virtuous philistine prince Rudolph in *The Mysteries of Paris*^[359] plots the torture of the wicked, because they “enrage” him. That fellow-feeling only proves that the feeling of those who feel is also mine, my property; in contrast to which the relentless practices of the “righteous” person (for example, against the notary Ferrand) resembles the lack of feeling of that robber who cut off or stretched his prisoners’ legs to the measure of his bedstead: Rudolph’s bedstead, to whose measure he cut human beings, is the concept of the “good.” The feeling for right, virtue, etc., makes one hard-hearted and intolerant. Rudolph doesn’t feel as the notary feels, but contrarily feels that “it serves the rascal right”; this is not fellow-feeling.

You love the human being, therefore you torture the individual human being, the egoist; your love of humanity is the tormenting of human beings.

If I see the beloved suffering, I suffer with him, and I find no rest until I’ve tried everything to comfort and cheer him; if I see him joyful, I too become joyful over his joy. It doesn’t follow from this that the same thing causes suffering or joy in me, as that which brings about these effects in him, as any bodily pain sufficiently proves, since I don’t feel it as he does; his tooth gives him pain, but his pain gives me pain.

But because I cannot bear the sorrowful crease on the beloved forehead, therefore, then for my sake, I kiss it away. If I didn’t love this person, he could go right on creasing his forehead, that wouldn’t trouble me; I’m only driving away my troubles.

Now, how does anyone or anything that I do not love, have a right to be loved by me? Is my love first or is his right first? Parents, relatives, fatherland, people, hometown, etc., and finally fellow human beings in general (“brothers, brotherhood”) claim to have a right to my love and lay claim to it without further ado. They look upon it as their property, and upon me, if I don’t respect it, as a robber who deprives them of what is due to them and is theirs. I am supposed to love. If love is a commandment and a law, then I must be educated for it, trained in it, and if I violate it, punished. People will therefore exercise the strongest “moral influence” possible on me, to bring me to love. And there’s no doubt that one can titillate and seduce human beings to love as to other passions, for example, to hatred as well. Hatred runs through whole generations simply because the ancestors of one belonged to the Guelphs, those of the other to the Ghibellines.^[363]

But love is not a commandment, but rather, like each of my feelings, my property. Acquire, i.e., purchase, my property, and then I will give it up to you. I don’t need to love a church, a people, a fatherland, a family, etc., that don’t know how to acquire my love, and I set the purchase price of my love thoroughly to my pleasure.

Selfish love is very far from unselfish, mystical, or romantic love. One can love every possible thing, not just human beings, but any “object” at all (wine, one’s fatherland, etc.). Love becomes blind and crazy through a must taking it out of my power (infatuation), romantic through a should entering into it, i.e., through the “object” becoming sacred to me, or through me becoming bound to it by duty, conscience, oath. Now the object is no longer there for me, but I for it.

Love is a case of being possessed, not as my feeling—as such I prefer to keep them in my possession as property—but through the alienness of the object. Thus, religious love consists precisely in the commandment to love the “sacred one” in the beloved, or to cling to a sacred one; for unselfish love, there are absolutely lovable objects for which my heart is supposed to beat, for example, fellow human beings, or the spouse, relatives, etc. Sacred love loves the sacred in the beloved, and therefore also strives more and more to make the beloved into a sacred being (for example a “human being”).

The beloved is an object that I should love. He is not an object of my love on account of, because of, or through my loving him, but is an object of love in and of himself. I do not make him into an object of love, but rather he is inherently such; because that he has become so by my choice, as bride, spouse, and the like, doesn’t matter here, since also then, as the one once chosen, he has obtained forever a “right of his own to my love,” and I, because I have loved him, am obligated to love him for eternity. So he is not an object of my love, but of love in general: an object that should be loved. Love is fitting for him, is due to him, or is his right, but I am obligated to love him. My love, i.e., the love that I pay him as tribute, is in truth his love, which he only collects from me as tribute.

Every love to which even the smallest fleck of obligation clings is an unselfish love, and, as far as this fleck reaches, is a case of being possessed. Whoever believes that he owes the object of his love something loves romantically or religiously.