# **10. In the Margins of One’s Own Life: A New Theory of Masking ADHD**

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# **Introduction: *Eppur si muove***

A contradiction exists when we apply our definitions of masking to those who mask their ADHD. Elizabeth Radulski perfectly encapsulates the dominant contemporary definition of masking when she defines it as, “the internal process of *noticing* visible Autistic traits within oneself and *acting to conceal them*.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Masking is understood to be a form of conscious self-regulation done to conceal one’s more visibly disruptive traits;[[2]](#footnote-2) it is done in order to appear more socially presentable and to conform to the perceived social expectations, which are norms constructed on the basis of neurotypical behaviors and standards of functioning.[[3]](#footnote-3) ADHD’s status as an executive functioning disorder complicates this internal dynamic of self-regulation. To see how, we can turn to Russell Barkley’s explaination of executive functioning: “[Executive Functioning] can therefore be initially defined as *those self-directed actions needed to choose goals and to create, enact, and sustain actions toward those goals*, or more simply as *self-regulation to achieve goals*: [Executive Functioning] = [Self-Regulation].”[[4]](#footnote-4) This definition seemingly renders it impossible for someone with ADHD to mask, if we understand masking as a form of self-regulation, because ADHD is defined as a disorder of the ability to self-regulate. ADHD does not render self-regulation impossible. Executive dysfunction is not the same thing as a total absence of executive functioning ability; there are various degrees of executive functioning ability that fall under the label of executive dysfunction. Rather, what executive dysfunction impairs is the consistent and volitional exercise of self-regulation. This punctuates one’s attempts to consistently mask executive dysfunction with instants in which one’s executive dysfunction causes one to be unable to mask. Thus, we have arrived at a paradoxical position: executive dysfunction can only be sucessfully masked when it itself is not inhibiting the masking individual. One can only mask when one does not need to do so, and one only needs to mask when they are unable to do so.[[5]](#footnote-5) The problem is that what I have just shown to be logically impossible nonetheless happens; people with ADHD, like myself, *do* mask in these moments of executive dysfunction; for me, it is an everyday fact of life and occurs in almost every social interaction in which I take part. Nonetheless, it appears to be rendered theoretically impossibleby our definitions. How is it then possible for those with ADHD to mask?

The problem with a definition of masking as ‘conscious self-regulation’ is not simply on the front of self-regulation; the criterion that this process be conscious is problematic for the exact same reason. Executive functioning has many different component functions that work in tandem with each other. Barkley argues that there are six distinct levels of executive functioning that progressively develop upon each other. The first of these functions that all others are based upon is “self-directed attention,”[[6]](#footnote-6) or self-awareness, which is immediately associated with the function of self-inhibition. This is problematic for the ‘conscious’ criterion of masking executive dysfunction, because those who mask often lack the ability to even be aware of the socially unacceptable behaviors they are attempting to mask until their negative consequences are made manifest. This view of masking as conscious internal self-regulation is thus, paradoxically, predicated on neurotypical norms of ability that exclude the experience of those with ADHD in discussions of masking.

It appears now that those of us with ADHD find our self-regulative abilities insufficient to sucessfully mask. Yet, it remains a fact that there are some with ADHD who mask and, thus, do self-regulate. On one hand, this kind of self-regulation seems theoretically impossible, yet on the other hand, we see it happening daily. The only way in which we can resolve this contradiction between theory and lived experience is to rethink our theories of both ADHD and masking. In line with this, I posit that we ought to understand ADHD as a dysfunction of merely one type of self-regulation: quasi-transcendent self-regulation (i.e. metacognition), in which one adopts a position over and against oneself to judge and determine what one does and expresses. I qualify this transcendence as ‘quasi-transcendent’ because it is a form of ‘transcendence’ that arises from a mere arranging of immanent matter so as to produce a reflexive system; thus, it never goes beyond the scope of the immanent material plane. In this new formulation, one’s executive function would be the faculty one has to instantiate a biophysical transcendence over oneself (hereafter ‘transcendent masking/self-regulation’). Transcendent self-regulation is also conscious and internal self-regulation, as this transcendent position one adopts towards oneself is the product of a self-reflexive move that constitutes self-awareness (in which the self appears to itself from a transcendent position).

I argue that a definition of masking as transcendent self-regulation is insufficient to explain all cases of those with ADHD who mask. Instead, I oppose it with a new notion of an externally-oriented immanent self-regulation in which one regulates oneself in accordance with their local environment and those they encounter within it. Masking in this respect would be referring to the ways in which the neurotypical behavioral norms one encounters in their engagements with others regulate the self without requiring one to be aware of this external influence/determination.[[7]](#footnote-7) This form of self-regulation develops when the acts of exclusion one feels by breaking a given context’s neurotypical social norms become incorporated into the self and devalues it in relation to others. Once one is unconsciously devalued in relation to the other, there is little resistance to the determination and regulation of oneself by the other. This devaluation prompts one to conform to the different expectations present within the various social contexts they inhabit. Exclusively acting in accordance with the demands of others reveals this devaluation to be an alienation immanent to the self, thus, continually displacing the self that exceeds the social expectations we encounter from its proper centrality. This dynamic places one who masks in a double-bind: they must either embody their internal alienation by *satisfying* the expectations others have of them, excluding their self in the process; or refuse to embody this internal alienation by satisfying the expectations of others and, in doing so, externalize their alienation into their relations with others by leaving their expectations *unsatisfied*. One who masks in this way is given a simple choice: be internally alienated, *but satisfy others*, or be externally alienated from those others, *and leave them dissatisfied*.

In the first section, I will articulate my own experiences of masking my ADHD in order to formulate those experiences into a theory of how this form of masking develops from a first-person perspective. I do so without relying on any pre-given theoretical perspective from which I interpret my experiences so as to avoid adopting another form of mask in the process of coming to a fuller understanding of myself.

The second section of this chapter draws upon Max Stirner’s socio-psychological history of the continual progression of (what I refer to as) the logic of domination that can serve to ground my first-person analysis of the dynamic taking place within immanent masking. I do so by tracking two key turning points in this history: the shift from Catholicism to Protestantism, and the internal logic of socialism as it progresses in its shift to humanism. I will argue that the logic of the first shift characterizes transcendent self-regulation, while the logic of the second characterizes immanent self-regulation by developing a novel form of internal alienation that cannot be understood as an alienation *between* two people.

In the concluding third section, I want to recognize that, despite the seeming inevitability of alienation for those who mask in this way, there is the possibility to break out of this logic of domination. I turn to Stirner’s political model of insurrection to propose my own ethical model of the micro-insurrection, along with a specific micro-insurrectionary tactic of subversive humor. Subversive humor is a way of employing humor in order to intentionally break the implicit social expectations of a given context so as to draw attention to them and make them explicit. The intention and goal of strategically breaking implied social expectations is to destabilize a social situation in order to either render the implicit power dynamics ambiguous, or to temporarily reverse them.

# **I. The Logic of Nihilism: My Experiences of Masking ADHD**

The name ‘Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder’ reveals a great deal as to how this condition is viewed socially and medically. It is named after its two most visibly problematic symptoms: attention-deficiency and hyperactivity. Both symptoms suffer from gross social mischaracterizations in terms of their quality and centrality to the experience of living with ADHD. Against the popular perception of attention-deficiency as a lack of attention, it is more accurately understood as an inability to regulate one’s attention. Likewise, hyperactivity better refers to stimulus-seeking behavior rather than the misconception of having high amounts of energy. Both of these symptoms are ever-present in the life of someone with ADHD, but they are oftentimes not the primarily problematic symptoms for us. For example, two other symptoms that can cause a greater proximal deal of distress for people with ADHD are working memory issues, and the lack of emotional self-regulation (which includes the lack of ability to prompt or regulate one’s motivation for specific tasks).

Despite these issues, the name “Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder” reveals that it is primarily considered insofar as those with it are disruptive towards others. In the very first instance, ADHD is being considered from the point of view of others and the demands they place on those with it, rather than being considered as internally disruptive to their first-person perspective. This other-oriented perspective on ADHD is what leads many to discuss the ways in which its diagnosis is oftentimes used as a disciplinary mechanism.[[8]](#footnote-8)

This priority of the other’s perspective is important to keep in mind methodologically for this article. If I were to attempt to take a preexisting philosophical framework and articulate/incorporate my experiences of ADHD into that framework, *I would be making the same popular error I am attempting to critique*. Thus, I am uninterested in appealing to others in articulating my first-person experiences of masking, especially when masking results from the tacit social enforcement of the Other’s perspective on the self. If I cannot articulate my experiences of socially masking without intellectually masking, then I fail to see the point of trying to make others aware of my experiences when they are unwilling to engage with them on my own terms. Instead, for reasons that will become evident momentarily, I understand my experiences of ADHD as a site of resistance to our currently established philosophical frameworks. Thus in the following section, I will interpret my experiences with ADHD without relying upon the rigid frameworks made by those who have no basis on which they can relate to them. Because masking is fundamentally a social phenomenon, my analysis will be primarily focused on the social dynamics and conflicts that ADHD creates rather than the invisible internal problems it presents to those of us with it.[[9]](#footnote-9) I will first supplement my analysis with a brief scientific description of how ADHD operates, which will serve the dual function of setting the stage for my social analysis, as well as helping to combat the public prejudices surrounding ADHD to make clear the gravity of the disorder.

## **A. The Psychology of ADHD**

Russell Barkley argues that ADHD is a disorder of the ability to self-regulate.[[10]](#footnote-10) Self-regulation is considered to be any form of self-directed action. He defines a set of six self-regulative functions, called executive functions, that develop at different stages and provide us with greater and greater abilities to regulate ourselves.[[11]](#footnote-11) Executive functions enable the inhibition of our immediate responses to our environment in order to eventually allow us to weigh abstract possible futures against the concrete present moment in our decision-making. Without executive functioning, we would only be able to engage in actions oriented towards very short term individual goals. Executive functions allow us to socially engage with others by allowing us to internalize social norms, letting us develop increasingly complex social structures that enable the maintenance of increasingly complex goal-oriented actions over longer spans of time.

This psychological perspective allows us to understand ADHD as a disorder of the faculty that allows us to comport ourselves to the social demands of others, in both a spatial sense of other individuals present with me, as well as a temporal sense of the demands of a possible future me as an other.[[12]](#footnote-12) Thus, ADHD seem to be inherently socially disruptive, insofar as it asserts the self in the present moment over abstract present and future others. This self-orientation often manifests socially via the symptom of impulsiveness, which leads those of us with ADHD to continually break social norms and expectations. This is usually then punished, either socially or institutionally, causing a disproportionate negative emotional response due to the impaired ability to regulate one’s emotions, whose expression is itself often socially disruptive. Trying to socially engage with ADHD in the wrong contexts can very easily create negative feedback loops of disruption-punishment-disruption that leads one to feel more and more socially excluded.

## **B. My Experiences**

It is at this point that I wish to turn to my own experiences of social exclusion caused by my ADHD symptoms. But, in reflecting on my life and my experiences of feeling othered by my peers, I find it difficult to grasp many memories of concrete events. It has been such a common experience in my life that very few stand out to me as significant enough to remember in full. Likewise, two of the executive functions impaired in ADHD are the two that compose our working memory. Thus, I have fewer memories of these events than one might expect, especially when they became a more regular part of my life as I grew up to encounter more social norms and expectations to disrupt. I mainly recall momentary fragments with associated feelings of social exclusion, alongside mere intimations of the precise context that produced these affective fragments. There are a handful of instances impactful enough, for unknown reasons, to stand out in my mind such that I can draw upon them. Thus, these memories should be taken as emblematic of a pattern of events repeated throughout my life, rather than as one-off instances.

One early memory is of an activity in my first grade classroom[[13]](#footnote-13) where students got to color in different nations’ flags. I wanted to color in the Mexican flag because it had a cool eagle, and, as a young boy, ‘cool’ was my sole metric for value. I was lucky and just barely managed to get the last flag. One of my friends at the time was upset because he thought he should have it instead of me. His mom was from Mexico, so he felt a special sense of ownership over this flag. I became overwhelmed with the urge to cry.[[14]](#footnote-14) My mind suddenly became a battleground between the insurmountable force of my emotions and the young child facing them alone; a battle I could only lose. This feeling of impending defeat prompted a wave of guilt and sorrow to wash over me out of the recognition that these feelings were so alien to me that I could even be at war with them in the first place. An alien force took over my exterior, leaving me to only writhe in resistance on the interior. I felt disconnected from myself, like I was aware that I was being overtaken by a part of myself beyond my ability to control. I was so ashamed and alone, for I could see no such conflict in my peers, no such struggle for them to relate.

This disconnect from my emotions was not a mere issue of my childhood. On the first day of biology class in my freshman year of high school, we were required to turn in our notes on a short video we watched in class. The teacher specified that our notes had to be Cornell style. I carried a history of active resistance to Cornell notes from my time in middle school, where I had another teacher who tried to force them on me. Imposing a style of note-taking on students, I felt, was an attempt to remold my own thoughts to others’ standards. I believed my notes should be written for my own personal use; whether or not someone else could even understand them was a matter of indifference. This was a battle I had endured and won several times before, and it was one I was willing to endure again. In this case, though, I found that the foundation from which I had drawn my strength to endure was about to crumble. When I turned in my notes *my way*, the teacher chastised me in view of my peers. When I tried explaining myself, I found that the battle I had prepared for was not the one I found myself within. It unexpectedly became a two-front conflict, with the teacher from one side and the recurring battle with myself on the other. The true battle of the day was to be that which haunted me over and over throughout my life, the one I lost over and over: that internal conflict of my alien emotions and myself. There was the same sense of frustration and disappointment with myself, the same guilt and shame. I was overtaken by these feelings other to me, but these feelings simultaneously maligned me in the eyes of my peers. Being overtaken by my own internal otherness did not envelop me into the indifferent sea of the social other, but set me further apart from that otherness. I could no longer communicate my wants, my desires, my needs. It was a confrontational situation, and a stressful one at that, but it was also a situation in which I felt that I should have been able to express myself without holding back an emotional breakdown over something so simple. I felt as though I should have had control over my emotional expressions on par with my peers, and the fact that I did not was a source of immense guilt.[[15]](#footnote-15)

This final story highlights the damage that these constant internal battles leave on the terrain they are fought within. I was at a family gathering. My family is such that even the most minor events create a crowd. One of my cousins asked me if I had been working out. They thought I looked fitter; they wanted to know my routine. My gym experience was limited to the brief workout my friend showed me, which I followed automatically without leaving room for conscious reflection. I floundered because I did not know what kind of answer was expected of me. I could only answer in general terms, but I could not satisfy their subsequent questions asking me to specify. This whole encounter fomented an internal panic because I felt it was impossible for me to satisfy the demands of the other. But equally distressing was feeling as though I broke the rhythm and pattern of the conversation, which revealed to me that ‘I’ was never present in the conversation to begin with; it revealed that all I was doing was performing, playing with their expectations on my exterior surface, reflecting their questions back at them in the form of answers. It jolted me into a groundless reflective mode in which there was no ‘one’ present on which to reflect. This total sense of exteriority provoked an intense distress that required me to seek out EMDR therapy, a trauma-reprocessing therapeutic model, to recover from it.

## **C. Theoretical Progression from Social Exclusion to Immanent Masking**

When one is continually socially marginalized for disrupting the social standards that they seem to never be able to meet—when one sees how others treat them and their concerns as less valuable because they are unable to conform to strict standards of behavior—the exclusion and devaluation one feels become internalized on an unconscious level. This internalization, however, is not a standard internalization of conscious beliefs like learning or habit; one who begins to devalue themself like this can often be unaware that they are doing so and can be unaware of when it happens. What is internalized are the socially excluding remarks as *acts* of exclusion, not necessarily the conscious content of what is said in the excluding *remarks*. The concerns of the abstract others exert microscopic acts of power against the concrete momentary self, which in turn establishes the independence and autonomy of these others over the self. This leads to treating one’s own desires and concerns as less important than those of the others around them. Now whenever there is a conflict between my desires and those of others, I defer to the others because my concerns are now ‘lesser’ than theirs.

The ultimate logic of the devaluation of my own desires, concerns, and expectations is that I automatically adopt the expectations of others and I become unable to go beyond the strict confines of their expectations. This is because expectations act as a kind of social prompt for me to respond to: there is an expectation by some other, and a response by me. If I have internalized a devaluation of myself in relation to others, then how can I provide a possible satisfaction of the other’s expectation if not by embodying the implied response contained within it? If I truly consider the other and their expectations as of higher value than myself, there would be no possible way for me, as a lesser being, to fulfill the expectations they have of me. Expectations are not neutral prompts, but prompts whose answer is implied in the prompt itself, only to be made explicit by means of the other. Expectations are a manner in which we exert power over others by holding them to standards of the smallest possible behaviors. Masking thus involves a heightened sensitivity to the expectations others have of me, combined with an unconscious devaluation of self, internally compelling me to respond by reflecting the image of the other contained within their expectations back to them.

I tangibly feel this devaluation of self in masking. I feel the presence of a strange sense of continuity in the actions and contributions of others in social situations, while my contributions are relegated to a disruption of that continuity. It is as though others share something in common to which I am not privy and to which I cannot contribute. The sense of the commonness of the other is present as though the condition of its presence is my exclusion from it; this commonness or continuity is always alien to me. The only way in which I can engage with this continuity is by attempting to embody it. But the embodiment of this continuity is the embodiment of an alienating otherness that constitutes myself in accordance with it.

The final conclusion of this logic comes when one who masks attempts to reflect on themself, on who they are as an individual. The logic of devaluation requires a reference to an other in relation to whom I am lesser. When I turn my reflection back on myself and attempt to consider myself as an independent individual irrespective of others, I ultimately find nothing; I am left without a sense of self to ground me. I find that the only way in which I understand myself is as a reflection of the other in the moment something is expected of me. I have no answer to the question “who am I?” Without the other that systematically excludes me, I am nothing. But with them, I can only be their lesser hollowed reflection. The attempt at *general* social belonging for someone who tends to be socially disruptive ends up presenting them with the choice to either be internally alienated by considering themself in common with others, or be externally alienated by attempting to divorce themself from others in the recognition of the inner violence they have inflicted upon oneself. One is given the choice to recognize the other as your lord and yourself as their bondsman, or to recognize yourself as nothing. The logic of micro-exclusions and social negation reveals itself in its final instance as the logic of nihilism, with a dynamic of self-denial as its engine.

# **II. Transcendent and Immanent Alienation**

The following section will attempt to understand my internal first-person perspective of masking as one which is produced from my social situation—an attempt to provide my internal perspective with its corresponding external perspective. Unlike in the previous section, here it is necessary to adopt an external perspective on my experiences. This perspective will be none other than that of the egoist anarchist Max Stirner. Stirner is a unique figure to work with because the main ethical thesis of his work is that we should recognize our preexisting state of egoism and live in accordance with it, which equates to taking up what we encounter as our own and employing it for our own ends. To write with Stirner in a way that is faithful to the stated goals of his work requires one to be willing to use him for one’s own ends rather than his. Stirner uniquely empowers me to use his work to articulate myself such that I can adopt an external perspective on my experiences of masking without forcing them to fit within a pre-given framework of intelligibility. Thus, I will not be expressing myself within his framework so much as I will be letting his theory empower me to articulate myself in ways that I do not yet have the power to do alone.

Stirner’s thought consists of a dynamic taking place between two registers that each situate him as a thematic precursor of two later movements: French existentialism and poststructuralism. In this section, I will employ his affinities with the latter to develop an account of this external social, historical, and psychological domination that creates the internal lived experience of masking. I will do so by following Stirner’s historical and psychological progression of a logic of domination he identifies in history, and, in doing so, I will explain both the transcendent and immanent forms of masking/self-regulation as internal manifestations of an external progressive decentralization and depersonalization of power throughout society. Tracking this progression will make clear the conscious ideological mechanisms that lead one to mask, as well as the unconscious social expressions of power that enforce this state. This will reveal that the immanent masking I find in my lived experience of ADHD is a social development of this logic of domination upon the transcendent form of masking.[[16]](#footnote-16) Thus, I will first describe how the conditions that lead to transcendent masking/self-regulation are to be found in the social and ideological shift from Catholicism to Protestantism, in which, according to Stirner, the self-policing mechanism of conscience develops. Then, I will describe how this logic terminates in a total decentralization of power via an externalization of the self, its social regulation, and re-internalization of that socially regulated self.

## **A. The Protestant Scourge**

The first half of Stirner’s *The Unique and Its Property* traces the trajectory of a logic of domination present in Western history. The engine of this logic of domination consists in a desire to cling to what is most universal and abstract, which produces the corresponding desire to reject and deny that which is particular and concrete. This desire plays out in history as the continual expansion of the abstract into the concrete, and is responsible for the historical condition that forms us into the kind of subjects that see the ideas in things before the concrete things themselves.[[17]](#footnote-17) For much of this history, the desire for abstraction manifested through religion and the religious status of the ‘sacred’ by denoting people, things, spaces, and actions as beyond the scope of our particular, personal, and concrete interests. As this logic manifests in history, it appears as the continual sanctification of what is profane; the incorporation of the concrete into the abstract. Insofar as this abstract domination is simultaneously the domination and expansion of what is universal, the ideas that come to be primary to the concrete things they represent establish a commonality between them. Now, the real is the abstract, and the abstract is universal. This is the logic of the incorporation of the multiple into ‘the One.’ With this logic made explicit, we can better understand its relevant manifestation in the shift from Catholicism to Protestantism.

Prior to the Protestant Reformation, society was ideologically ruled by the Catholic Church. The Church centralized power in the local churches via the figure of the priest, who possessed society’s moral and ideological authority. Stirner emphasizes that this centralization of power establishes clean distinctions between the sacred and profane, setting up places/areas of life in which Church power is intentionally absent. Catholicism maintains spaces in which one can resist or remain outside the scope of Church power, on the condition that one recognize the places in which the Church does have power: moral matters. In contrast, Protestantism abolishes the category of the ‘profane,’ instead treating everything as already sacred:

People keep on complimenting Protestantism for having brought the worldly back into honor, for example, marriage, the state, etc. But the worldly in itself, as worldly, the profane, is of far less importance to Protestantism than to Catholicism, which lets the profane world exist, indeed, savors its pleasures, whereas the rational, consistent Protestant prepares to annihilate the worldly altogether, and that simply by *making it sacred*.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Catholicism operates on a logic of the incorporation of the external into the internal, but, in doing so, it necessitates and reinforces the boundary between the two; sanctity in Catholicism relies on the profane for its support. In Protestantism, however, sanctity is presupposed and the profane is designated as a stain upon or a negation of the sacred; the external is only conceived of as a negation of the internal.[[19]](#footnote-19) Protestantism can be exemplified by a shift from the language of the ‘profane’ to a language of the ‘sinful’ or the ‘desecrated.’ Abolishing the boundary between sacred and profane expands power into these formerly profane spaces by means ofdecentralization. This decentralization occurs through an internalization of the watchful eye of morality into the psyche to form the mechanism of conscience:

Because faith in Protestantism became a more inward faith, the enslavement has also become a more inward enslavement; the person has taken these sanctities into himself, intertwined them with all his hopes and endeavors, made them into a “matter of conscience,” prepared from them a “sacred duty” for himself. Therefore, what the Protestant’s conscience cannot get away from is sacred to him, and conscientiousness most clearly defines his character.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Stirner continues to describe the profound psychological effects of this internalization:

Protestantism has actually made the human being into a “secret police state.” The spy and lookout, “conscience,” monitors every movement of the mind, and every thought and action is a “matter of conscience,” i.e., a police matter. The Protestant consists in this fragmentation of the human being into “natural desire” and “conscience” (inner populace and inner police). Biblical reason (in the place of the Catholic “Church reason”) is considered sacred, and this feeling and consciousness that the biblical word is sacred is called—conscience… The Catholic finds himself satisfied when he fulfills the command; the Protestant acts to “the best of his knowledge and conscience.” The Catholic is in fact only a layman; the Protestant is himself a clergyman.[[21]](#footnote-21)

The decentralization of power in Protestantism fractures the psyche of the layperson. In Catholicism, your psyche was a privileged space beyond the reach of the Church’s central authority; the priest could neither see nor judge your thoughts and feelings. Under Protestantism, you are given the task to judge and punish yourself in accordance with your strong moral beliefs. Everyone becomes their own priest, that is, their own disciplinarian, extending ‘the sacred’ into the furthest reaches of our minds.

It is worth noting that conscience here is an internalization of the authoritative gaze of the other; thus, the role of conscious belief in this dynamic is the first-person perception of others who appear to consciously believe in the moral law as embodied in their actions. It is precisely the insidiousness of Protestantism that it no longer requires the central figure of the priest, who at least nominally believes in the moral law, in order to achieve a more absolute level of control than was previously possible. Due to the structure of the logic of domination that denies the personal in favor of the impersonal, there does not even need to be a strict content of the beliefs being enforced. Rather, the ‘content’ is formed through the application of the logic of domination that expands the scope of power over time; the content of belief is strictly determined by the physical, psychological, and other possible spaces in which the logic of domination can be applied. Stirner would say that there is no difference in the fundamental logic motivating the ideologies of Catholicism, Protestantism, Liberalism, Socialism, and Humanism. The differences come in the fact that each successive ideology applies the same principle further than the preceding ideology. Only after the fact does this logic produce the doctrinal differences of its ideological manifestations as a secondary subsidiary effect, allowing us to retroactively apply them to our understanding of the initial ideological transition. Thus, the conscious beliefs that one uses as the criteria for desires, thoughts, and actions are simply the same set of beliefs that were held in Catholicism applied to a new terrain. The mechanism of internalization itself is what constitutes the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism. Insofar as we can say there is a primary ‘content’ to the conscious beliefs, we must say that the content is the very form and structure of the Protestant psyche, the dynamic of life-denial internalized into the self, and not any set of codified doctrines that this dynamic produces.

Stirner’s description of the psychology of Protestantism describes the formation of the transcendent self-regulation taking place in Radulski’s definition of masking I called upon in the introduction. This new internal psychological dynamic is a kind of moral or religious masking; to ‘pass’ now means to pass off as a believer to oneself, which has now become the prerequisite condition to pass with others. Likewise, passing as a believer simultaneously reinforces the strength of conscience as the gaze of the other in those for whom you are passing. Thus, the difference between this transcendent form of religious masking and neurodivergent masking is merely what norms have been produced by the logic of domination.

## **B. Laziness, the Inhuman, and Internal Alienation**

For Stirner, Protestantism represents both a quantitative increase in the scope of power as well as a qualitative watershed moment in the history of the logic of domination. It extended the reach of power into the psyche of the individual and, in doing so, it created the possibility for a new structure of domination. I described this new structure in the previous subsection: that of the internalization of beliefs that come to serve as a self-policing mechanism. This shift in the scope of disciplinary power has constituted us as subjects that can be dominated in new ways: we are now subject to a secularizing move that progressively replaces the central phantasm of “God” with the “State,” the “Society,” and eventually “Humanity.” Each of these new phantasms has a corresponding secondary identity it imposes on its subjects: the “Citizen,” the “Worker,” and the “Human Being.” Stirner argues that the development of each new central phantasm is the continuation of a depersonalizing logic: first, personal will is removed from the state apparatus by replacing the will of the sovereign with the impersonal will of the “people;”[[22]](#footnote-22) second, personal will is removed from the economic realm by eliminating the notion of private property in favor of collective property;[[23]](#footnote-23) and finally, there is an attempt to remove personal will from oneself by embodying the generality of the “Human Being.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

Of interest to my analysis of ADHD masking is that each of these three central phantasms and their corresponding sanctioned identities also produce an opposing identity that allows for each to incorporate the resistance to their rule into the system itself. The State produces the sanctioned identity of the “Citizen,” as well as the opposing identity of the “Criminal.” Society produces the sanctioned identity of the “Worker,” and produces its opposite in the form of the “Lazybones” or the “Lazy Human Being.” Finally, Humanity naturally creates the identity of the “Human Being,” but also the more insidious “Unman,” or the “Inhuman Monster” [*Unmensch*].[[25]](#footnote-25) Each counter identity serves as a justification for the exclusion, marginalization, and punishment of those who fall under its label. This system of identity/counter-identity pairs will allow us to understand the possibility of interpersonal exclusion within immanent masking. I will show how Stirner’s critique of socialism, under the moniker of “Social Liberalism,” reveals an interpersonal development of this logic of domination that aligns with the reduction of the self present in my own experiences of masking. In doing so, I will articulate and emphasize an aspect of Stirner’s critique of socialism that has remained largely absent from the secondary literature: the shift from institutional regulation to intersubjective regulation. In doing so, I will also resituate this shift within the trajectory he traces in his critiques of the three types of liberalism.

The standard view of Stirner’s critique of socialism is as follows: political liberalism sought to do away with personal interests in politics by replacing them with the will of the impersonal figure of the ‘people.’ Instead of the sovereign ruling over a society in which every social mechanism is an extension of their power, now the impersonal state fulfills that role, and all that takes place within a state society is done via the power and approval of the state. Now, property is no longer owned by the sovereign, but by the state which grants you the approval to use its property as you please. Socialism looks at liberalism and sees still too much personal will, not in politics, but in economics. Now that everyone has been made politically equal in the eyes of the state, the economic power manifesting from private property is the new way in which personal power is expressed and people are made unequal. Thus, it seeks to remove statist private property by shifting the centrality of the ‘State’ to a centrality of ‘Society,’ in which we can now have forms of collective ownership of property. This is a shift from conceiving of ourselves as citizens of a state to members of a society, specifically *working* members of society *producing* for the needs of all. We are no longer citizens, but workers. The individual is now subject to a new phantasm and has been divested in a new domain of life.[[26]](#footnote-26)

This is an accurate but incomplete picture of Stirner’s critique, excluding the micro-level dynamics at play by failing to include how the form of the logic of domination itself changes post-political liberalism. The shift from political to social liberalism is not one in which the transcendent position of state power is vacated and occupied by the phantasm of ‘Society.’ Rather, the transition consists in the disintegration of the transcendent position of the state and the integration of ‘Society’ into the immanent interpersonal social relations taking place:

Now communism replies: Our dignity and our essence do not consist in our all being — the *equal children* of our mother, the state, all born with an equal claim to her love and protection, but in all of us being *for each other*. This is our equality or in this we are *the same*, that I as well as you and all of you, are active and working for each other; thus, in that each of us is a *worker*. In this, what matters is not what we are *for the state*, namely citizens, thus not our *bourgeois citizenship*, but what we are *for each other*, that each of us only exists through the other, who, since he takes care of my needs, at the same time sees his own satisfied by me.[[27]](#footnote-27)

The problem of socialism is that it imposes an identity of the worker on the members of society, and that this identity then establishes labor as the mediator of our engagements with each other. I now come to encounter others through the labor they provide for me in the process of material production for the community as a whole. The problem that arises from this is that the sole source of my value comes in what I can *do* for *others*; my value is a product of a particular way in which I actively engage with others: the fulfillment of their material needs. My social status as an acceptable, valuable member of society is only maintained insofar as I am *performing* certain kinds of actions for others. Thus, I, as an individual, become reduced to the ways in which I am acceptable to the other and the ways in which I fulfill their needs.

According to the work-day side, [the communist] doesn’t by any means take you as a human being as such, but as a human worker, as a working person… If you were a “lazybones,” he would certainly not fail to recognize the human being in you, but would strive to cleanse it, as a “lazy human being” from laziness and to convert you to the *faith* that work is the human being’s “destiny and calling.”[[28]](#footnote-28)

When I am unable to fulfill their needs, they designate me as ‘lazy,’ which prompts an attempt to coerce me back into laboring for others. Because I now exist primarily for others, my social being can be determined and regulated by others.

Stirner’s genius here consists in the recognition that our social existence is determined by others on the basis of the continual performance of certain acts we do for their benefit, instead of for our own.[[29]](#footnote-29) The structure of social engagements in socialism is the same as the structure of immanent masking. The difference consists in the activity being regulated. Rather than labor being that which fulfills the other’s needs, in immanent masking, the activity the self is reduced to is the performance of neurotypical behavioral norms that are expected by others. One who masks their neurodivergence in this way is relegated to a role in which they must fulfill the social expectations of others, or else risk being designated as socially deviant by being identified as “strange” or “special”: the present counter-identities of neurotypicality. Relegation to a counter identity is a form of alienation internal to the logic of domination, but one which remains external to the self. Counter-identities alienate us from others and the society as a whole, but we are designated as such insofar as we authentically express ourselves in a social environment hostile to us. We become alienated from others, but this alienation has yet to become an internal alienation. Transcendent masking appears to have a form of internal alienation, but it comes about through the unconscious fracturing of the self, which forms an alienation *between* two aspects of the self. This form of alienation is, thus, actually a form of *external* alienation that simply happens to be *within the psyche*. We do not yet have a formulation of the internal alienation we need to understand the experience of immanent masking. *But*, we do have the key to formulating it in Stirner’s analysis.

The thesis of Stirner’s social analysis is that the boundary between the internal and external, between self and world, is incredibly porous. There remains a distinction between my internal psychical space and the external world of action and others, but it is one that is regularly overcome. There are two key points in his history of the logic of domination where this takes place. The first is in the shift from Catholicism to Protestantism that I described in the previous sub-section. The second takes place in the shift from Social Liberalism to Humane Liberalism, in which the phantasm of the impersonal “Human Being'' comes to lord over us and excludes all that is personal and individual in us by prompting us to inflict a form of violence on ourselves. We are no longer designated as valuable in our activity as workers, but rather exclusively in our passive participation in the generality of ‘Humanity.’ This shift correspondingly designates the activity of our individual personal interest in our possessions and other people as a stain on the value we have from passively embodying the ‘Human Being.’

When we read the shift in the progression from socialism to humanism as a continuation of the trajectory of Stirner’s three critiques of liberalism I described just now—as a shift from the central position of the state to the decentralized interpersonal interactions of society—we might naturally conclude that humanism constitutes a repetition of the same Protestant innovation: the development of interiority. This repetition appears very strange, because repeating the exact same event—the internalization of a dominant ruling concept into the psyche in order to serve as the principle by which we police ourselves—disturbs the seamless progression of Stirner’s history.

This confusion is resolved when we recognize that the difference between these two internalizations consists in the same structural distinction I make between transcendent and immanent masking. In the first case, the phantasm of God is introduced into the psyche as an alien element that lords over us from a transcendent position. However, in the second case, the phantasm of the Human Being becomes an immanent regulative principle. The divestment of the self into its *external* social activity in socialism hollows one out and entirely externalizes them into their production; one no longer has a transcendent position to their labor and its products, now one is immanent to their labor by means of externalization. Humanism takes this external structure of immanent social regulation and internalizes it again to produce an externally-oriented immanent self-regulation. Thus, the shift from socialism to humanism consists in a shift from a devaluation of the self formed from a situation in which the self is socially reduced to fulfill the other’s needs, to a devaluation of the self in relation to the other taken as an immanent regulative principle. The external-orientation of this regulative principle places the other in a transcendent position in relation to the self insofar as they falsely replace me from my proper role as lawgiver. However, the alienation experienced from satisfying their expectations is not alienation between myself and the other, but is a properly internal alienation. The ambiguity from placing the indefinite other in this transcendent position leads to the anxious situation in which the self does not know the ways in which they ought to regulate themselves in order to properly fulfill the expectations of the other. Thus, we are left in a situation in which we can experience alienation from both *fulfilling* the expectations of the other, and also *not fulfilling* these expectations. In the former case, the alienation we feel is from the fact that we are reduced to the other’s expectations of us: an internal alienation. In the latter case, our alienation takes the form of being designated as socially deviant, which justifies our social exclusion and marginalization: an external alienation.

# **III. Having the Courage to be Destructive: The Micro-Insurrection**

This article began with the presentation of a lived impossibility—with the fact that those who are disabled in a way that inhibits their ability to self-regulate nonetheless regulate themselves to an extreme, even self-oppressive, degree. This contradiction is produced by the externally oriented perspective that has come to dominate academic discourse on ADHD, and it is one which is resolved when we break from said perspective. In doing so, we are able to make a crucial distinction between transcendent and immanent masking. Transcendent masking is an active form of masking founded upon a self-reflexive gesture in which one adopts an external perspective on oneself so as to adjust one’s social performance in accord with the supposed perspective of others. Immanent masking is a passive form of masking that does not rely on any self-reflexive gesture, and instead results from a devaluation of oneself produced by a history of social exclusion and marginalization due to one’s symptoms; this devaluation of oneself automatically situates others in a transcendent position in relation to this masking self, producing an automatic deference to the other. ADHD is only an inhibition of the self-reflexive gesture characteristic of transcendent masking, not of immanent masking.

It is worth briefly noting that transcendent and immanent masking often go hand-in-hand. For example, I have found that, as I became more conscious about how my ADHD impacts my life, I have started to make more efforts to engage in transcendent masking alongside my automatic immanent masking. My claim is not that it is impossible for people with ADHD to engage in transcendent masking. Rather, my claim is that transcendent masking cannot be the primary type of masking those with ADHD engage in. This is because it is impossible for transcendent masking to be as total and as consistent of a factor for those with ADHD as our masking appears to be. There are few things that ADHD alone renders impossible for one to do, but there are numerous things that it renders impossible for one to do consistently and at will. My position is that transcendent masking is just another thing in this category. However, what is problematic about the phenomenon of masking I have attempted to describe in this work is that there is seemingly no escape from it; it constitutes a totality that should not be possible for transcendent masking alone to form. Thus, it requires the formulation of a form of masking that does not rely on any mechanism inhibited by ADHD: an immanent form of masking.

My Stirnerian account of the totality of immanent masking serves to reveal the central tension to which Stirner’s work is developed in response: that between totality and excess. He articulates the most total possible condition of self-subjugation such that he can display the element that absolutely exceeds its grasp. Herein Stirner reveals both the strength as well as the weakness of immanent masking: that every dominating totality relies on an illusion that hides a more fundamental excessive element which renders it contingent. Thus, the all-encompassing process of immanent masking is constantly being ruptured by the being which it is founded upon: ourselves.

Stirner argues that our individual being exceeds any possible historical or theoretical determination to which we are subject. He understands our very being as a non-identical excess to all possible discursivity that he calls the “unique.” Our subjection to discursive determination is only a consequence of a historical condition in which we are confused into thinking that the indeterminacy of our being has simply not yet been determined. Stirner’s political intervention consists in prompting us to instead recognize ourselves as a *pure* indeterminacy, one which is actively hostile to all possible determination.[[30]](#footnote-30) At his most existential, Stirner refers to us as “the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself create everything as creator.”[[31]](#footnote-31) He calls for us to recognize that we are always being created as completely new in every moment, and thus we cannot be bound in any necessary sense to our determinations. Thus, he champions a total sense of freedom that he refers to as ‘ownness’ or being an owner, which consists in recognizing my centrality in my world as the owner of what I encounter. Stirner’s understanding of ownership is tied up in the notion of consumption as simultaneously a destructive and creative process. It is a process of absorbing our property by bringing it into ourself, and, in doing so, creating both it and ourselves anew. He associates this process of destruction/creation with the physical process of digestion throughout his work.

This absolute sense of freedom and contingency against oppressive social and intellectual systems of determination is what allows Stirner to mobilize against the very history of the increasingly broad incorporation of the logic of domination that he describes in the first half of *The Unique and Its Property*. While Stirner seeks to destroy the discursivity of history, he does not wish to supplant it with another discourse. To do so would be to blind oneself to the fact that the revolutionary model of political change is precisely the engine that progresses the logic of domination from which Stirner is attempting to escape. Instead, he champions a notion of insurrection, which does not start from a focus on the change of conditions, but instead “from the discontent of human beings with themselves”:

The revolution aimed at new *arrangements*, the insurrection leads us to no longer *let* ourselves be arranged, but rather to arrange ourselves, and sets no radiant hopes on “institutions.” It is not a fight against the established, since, if it prospers, the established will collapse of itself; it is only a working of my way out of the established.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Paradoxically, the insurrection is not *against* the established order that produced the discontent leading to it. Rather, the insurrection is a stepping beyond the bounds of the established order out of our discontent; it is a disengagement with or refusal to participate in the structures of power to which we are subject. The revolution functions on a process of transgression of what is held to be sacred, which reinforces that which is transgressed as having some special status that justifies our treatment of it in this transgressive way. In contrast, the insurrection functions via an ethic of profanation, in which we treat the sacred as ordinary, and thus remove its special status, by refusing participation in the discourse that constitutes it as sacred.[[33]](#footnote-33)

I want to draw on this broader notion of political insurrection to propose a narrower ethical strategy to break down immanent masking that I have developed in my own struggles with it. I describe this strategy as the “micro-insurrection,” which I define as actions and remarks that intentionally destabilize the local discourse of social expectations one finds oneself in, such that individuals who were in relative positions of lacking power can temporarily abolish or flip the implicit power dynamics at play. It can best be understood as an ethic in which the actor in question steps beyond the confines of the social expectations they are subject to, refusing to participate in them by divesting social expectations of any authority capable of limiting one’s behavior. Micro-insurrections are ways in which one can intentionally draw attention to the implicit expectations operative in different contexts so as to make them and their arbitrariness explicit. This awareness is accomplished through acts that treat certain expectations and norms, held to be sacred, as ordinary by playing with them and not treating them with their expected gravity. Micro-insurrectionary acts can serve to challenge and foster greater awareness of the social expectations neurotypicals hold of others to which those who mask are subject, the existence of which they are normally blind to as a result of being in a position of relative social power. Such newfound awareness presents those for whom these expectations were previously implicit with the dilemma of whether they ought to consciously uphold them or cease doing so. Micro-insurrections can thus serve to destabilize the otherwise fixed social situations that impress expectations onto people who mask, creating an autonomous space in which those who mask can begin to explore expressing themselves. Those who mask can employ these micro-insurrections to destabilize social situations, but neurotypicals who have been made aware of the dominant discourse of social expectations can likewise do so in order to open up social spaces to those who mask.

Of the various ways I integrate micro-insurrections into my daily life, one of my favorites is a running ‘joke’ I have among the other students in my graduate program: arguing that theft is morally good, and actively pushing the people I know to steal at any available opportunity.[[34]](#footnote-34) This is an excellent example of humor employed as a micro-insurrection because the joke is merely a more hyperbolic and morally unsettling framing of a belief I actually do hold: that the act of theft is devoid of any moral content because neither morality nor any system of normative ethics exists. These two positions, one stated and the other held, appear totally contradictory, that is, until one looks at what function they are both serving in relation to the present discourse. My held belief, that theft is a completely amoral act, while being a position not commonly agreed with, is a totally valid position to adopt *within* the scope of intellectual ethical discussions. The problem is that my position, which seeks to *undermine* the discourse of such discussions, has now been incorporated and normalized within that very discourse. Instead, my stated belief in the moral goodness of theft paradoxically better achieves the intended effects of my held position of the amorality of theft. I performatively adopt an absurd position beyond those normalized by the present discourse in order to challenge the fixity of the discourse’s set of normal and acceptable positions for one to hold. Thus, the positions that a discourse renders absurd and impossible are those that, when embodied, can serve to destabilize it and thereby temporarily produce an autonomous space within which those who are excluded from full participation in the discourse’s normal functioning can freely move.[[35]](#footnote-35)

There are two main outcomes I have noticed in my own micro-insurrectionary practice, corresponding to two distinct styles of implementation. First, oftentimes others will tacitly hand all the social power to you by making you the center of attention out of their curiosity of your position. This empowerment can be very affirming, but, depending on your goals for the social encounter, it must be handled carefully. If you wish to make those with you conscious of their implicit biases and expectations, then you must walk a careful balance between absurdity and seriousness: your positions must be absurd enough to produce a spectacle that warrants their curiosity and attention, but they must also be serious enough such that serious engagement with them can be justified. You must navigate a contradictory position by standing on the edge of the discourse or positioning yourself within arms reach just beyond its bounds so as to draw attention to its very boundedness and limitation. This involves the most work and stress, because you are effectively taking up positions you do not believe and defending them as though you do; but it also can be very productive by reorienting the attitudes of those with which you are engaging, especially if these are people you encounter frequently in various contexts.

The second outcome involves shedding the care of the first approach in order to suddenly and severely disrupt a single situation. This can produce a situation in which local social power is distributed in an extremely ambiguous way or even momentarily suspended out of confusion. There are two main risks involved in this style of micro-insurrection. First is that people will write you off and not take you seriously in order to preserve the stability of the situation; they will simply exclude you. For this reason, this style of micro-insurrection is recommended for situations in which you will likely never see the people involved again, or, if you do have to re-encounter them in the same situation, being socially included must not be vital to fulfilling the reason for putting yourself in the situation in the first place.[[36]](#footnote-36) The second risk is that you disrupt some belief or norm that is so strongly held that disrupting it is seen as a provocation or a challenge to another’s identity. This can easily escalate or even progress to physical violence. I need not say more as to why this style of micro-insurrection is risky.

There is both great risk and a great affirmative and empowering possibility in these humorous micro-insurrections. Much like theft, there is no possible judgment one can make about this practice as a whole being ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ helpful or harmful, safe or dangerous, etc. This is a *mode of resistance* that concretely gives me as an individual autonomy in situations in which I find myself automatically conforming to the expectations of others. There is no higher end to this ethic of micro-insurrections beyond the will of the individual embodying it; there is no right way to live in the margins of one’s own life, nor is there a right way to break out of this self-marginality. But, as Stirner makes us aware, the fixity of subjection is founded upon the very element that constantly threatens to destabilize it. In one of his earliest essays, he expresses this situation of coming to realize there is a way out of subjection that strongly resonates with me, and with which I will conclude the present work:

Only when a human feels lost and alone will he rise up and realize [his state of subjection]; an urge will then flow through his muscles and his courage will swell and he will realize *who he is* and *the power he possesses*. Bravely he will no longer follow with blind trust and beliefs, and only those stripped of their blind will to follow will experience freedom. *Have the courage to be destructive and you will soon see which wonderful flowers grow out of the ashes of what you have torn down*.[[37]](#footnote-37)

1. Radulski, Elizabeth M. “Conceptualising autistic masking, camouflaging, and neurotypical privilege: Towards a minority group model of neurodiversity.” *Human Development*, vol. 66, no. 2, 21 Mar. 2022, pp. 113–127, <https://doi.org/10.1159/000524122> (my emphasis). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. When speaking on the experiences of those with Autism (like in this instance), I chose to respect what appears to be the academic preference by scholars with Autism by using “trait” instead of “symptom.” I will break with this convention when speaking on ADHD and my experiences with it, because I do not believe it is possible to conceive of ADHD without understanding how it is internally problematic to those with it. In other words, ADHD mainfests in many ‘disorder-ing’ ways irrespective of the social expectations and determinations to which we are subject. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a more comprehensive and concrete description of what masking is and what behaviors it entails, see chapter 11 of the present volume, Mélissa Fox-Muraton, “Autistic (Un)Masking and the Challenges of ‘Authentic’ Self-Disclosure.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Barkley, Russell A. *Executive Functions: What They Are, How They Work, and Why They Evolved*. The Guilford Press, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. I acknowledge that, despite the logical synchronic inability to mask, one can still logically diachronically mask either by not synchronically failing to mask often (as would be the case with someone with a lesser degree of executive dysfunction), or having one’s synchronic inability to mask be attributed to another cause (like the designation of many women with ADHD as ‘bubily,’ a ‘chatterbox,’ or an ‘airhead’). Likewise, one can also mask executive dysfunction that occurred in the past. For example, some have referred to the situation in which someone with ADHD does all of their cleaning chores in a rush before people come over as a way in which they present themself as neurotypical and thus mask their symptoms. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Barkley, *Executive Functions*, 63-64 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. There are additional ways in which the structure and layout of various spaces can establish expectations on those within them without the presence of other people. For example, Max Stirner discusses how the space of the prison imposes the identity of the prisoner onto those within it, which prompts them to act as prisoners. “Prison no longer just means a space, but a space with express reference to its residents... What gives a common stamp to the collectivity in it? Obviously, the prison, since they are prisoners only by means of the prison. So what determines the *way of life* of prison society? The prison! What determines their intercourse? Perhaps also the prison? Of course, they can only carry on intercourse as prisoners, i.e., only as far as prison laws allow it…” (Stirner, Max. *The Unique and Its Property*. Ardent Press, 2020, pp.204) However, I consider this phenomenon to be a product of the suceptability to the expectations of other people I am attempting to describe through my notion of immanent masking. I know from my own experience that I act very differently in public spaces with people, public spaces without people, and private spaces in which there is no possibility of another disrupting my privacy. This leads me to believe that, in this discussion of how the world absent of other people effects masking, the expectations I find myself subject to in various empty spaces still involves an internalized/expected indefinite Other whose possibility of intervention has become laden in these spaces. For this (normally transcendent) dominating structure to be possible for those with ADHD requires a notion of immanent suceptibility to social expectations, i.e., immanent masking. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This other-oriented perspective on ADHD sometimes leads some from a Foucauldian perspective to argue that it is a ‘constructed’ disorder. For example, “it must be said that ADHD is a work of fiction used to control children and, increasingly, adults; to marginalize them from the social sphere as if the individuals themselves had no self-control.” (Puumeister, Ott. “Biopolitics, surveillance, and the subject of ADHD.” Semiotica, vol. 2014, no. 202, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2014-0061>.) Puumeister’s argument focuses on the history of the discovery of ADHD as one in which we discovered that certain stimulants have identifiably different effects on people with what we now call ADHD, and how we worked backwards from the treatment to a formulation of the disorder corresponding to it. I do not take issue with any of these claims on the history of ADHD. But, Puumeister’s perspective gleefully ignores the fact that, as attested to by my bank transaction history, *I really do have no self-control*. Thus, I take tremendous issue with the way in which Puumeister totally disregards the actual concrete positive effects that such treatment brings to people like myself. They do not even consider the first person perspective of what medications allow people like me to do which we were unable to do without. Irrespective of how we socially construct our *understanding* of ADHD, I cannot read more than three lines of text at a time without taking an amphetamine (or enough caffeine to kill a mouse) to help me focus. It is this concrete first-person perspective that Puumeister and thinkers of their same disposition are ignoring in favor of the reductive perspective in which our lived-experience is only understood in terms of how we are disruptive towards others. Ironically, they are reinforcing the very same discourse that justifies the employment of the ADHD diagnosis for disciplinary purposes rather than problematizing it. It is for these reasons that I fear that the argument in favor of ADHD as a production of a disciplinary matrix could ultimately serve to undermine both the political work of increasing access to medical treatments that address *both* the internal and external problems of ADHD, as well as the cultural work of attaining recognition of the reality of this condition beyond dissmisive remarks and frustrating ‘jokes’ about distractability. Thus, I worry that such perspectives ultimately indirectly harmpeople like myself.

   It is also worth noting that there is an internal inconsistency in Puumeister’s article. They waffle on their hard claim that ADHD is a, “work of fiction,” by saying in their very next concluding paragraph, “Maybe we could ask the people searching for disorders where maybe there are none to recognize that there is a problem in the way that *ADHD is sometimes clearly over-diagnosed and children too easily over-medicated*.” (318, my emphasis). They cannot both claim that ADHD is a “work of fiction,” and then soften their position without justification by claiming that ADHD is merely “sometimes clearly overdiagnosed and children too easily over-medicated.” Puumeister is either being inconsistent or appears to be displaying a lack of commitment. Either ADHD is a fiction, thus making the appropriate level of diagnosis zero; or there is some reality to ADHD as a disorder and its treatment is just *commonly used* as a disciplinary device rather than as a medical intervention, which would then allow them to say that ADHD is *sometimes* overdiagnosed. They cannot say it is both a fiction *and* that it is *only* sometimesoverdiagnosed and children sometimes overmedicated. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. As my critique of the Foucauldian approach Puumeister adopts from my previous footnote hinges on the lack of consideration of the internal problems of ADHD invisible to the other, I will be dedicating a future work to address this topic more comprehensively than is possible to address alongside the topic of the present work. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Barkley, Russell A. *ADHD and the Nature of Self-Control*. Guilford Press, 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. They are as follows: (1) self-directed attention (self-awareness), (2) self-restraint (inhibition), (3) self-directed sensory-motor action (non-verbal working memory), (4) self-directed private speech (verbal working memory), (5) self-directed appraisal (emotional self-regulation and self-motivation; these two are sometimes distinguished into two separate functions), and (6) self-directed play (planning and problem solving). Barkley, *Executive Functions*, pp. 81-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Barkley describes the split in the self that takes place in the development of the fourth level of executive functioning, the level of self-directed private speech/verbal working memory, forming the actual present self and the possible future self. Conceiving of a possible future version of myself allows me to orient my present actions towards that foreseen future possibility, extending my ability to orient my behavior towards goals farther into the future. Ibid., 86-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For non-American readers, this would be around ages 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. While not unusual for a first grader to get emotional over trivial matters, the ease at which I came to tears was emblematic of a difficulty I had controlling my emotions as a child and young adult. I now recognize this difficulty as rooted in the emotional dysregulation issues from my ADHD. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I wish to briefly mention that there is also a gender-specific pressure at play here: the ongoing emotional violence inflicted on men in our patriarchal society that attempts to cut us off from our natural emotional responses. There is always an additional shame most men feel in expressing emotions other than supposedly ‘righteous’ anger, especially in public. The age and gender specific pressures intersect in this example through the distinction between a young “boy” and a grown “man;” where the figure of the boy is a man that is incomplete and still in the process of development. Thus, young boys who have harder times regulating their emotions and their emotional expressions because of ADHD are targets for ridicule for not being ‘manly’ enough, or even being rejected from their gender as a whole by having femininity attributed to them through comparisons of ‘acting a girl.’ The dynamic of age serves as a disciplinary mechanism, where age for children directly correlates to how much you are able to do for yourself/how much freedom you are afforded. Thus, emotional expression for young boys is punished as failing to live up to the stoic masculine ideal by being threatened with being stripped of their already limited freedom and responsibility, with ‘freedom’ meaning an inner conquest and successful subjugation of one’s emotions. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This is not to say that immanent masking requires transcendent masking as a precondition *on an individual level*, but that the broader social conditions that constitute us as subjects have a history of their own in which transcendent self-regulation enables the development of immanent self-regulation. To be constituted as a subject in this later stage does not mean that one must individually relive the history of social domination up until the present moment. Thus, immanent masking can exist in an individual without needing a basis in transcendent masking. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. “The [idealist/youth] does not try to grasp *things*, for example, to bring the data of history into his head, but rather the *thoughts* that lie hidden in things, therefore, for example, the *spirit* of history.” Stirner, Max. *The Unique and Its Property*. Translated by Wolfi Landstreicher, Ardent Press, 2018., pp. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid., pp. 82-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. “[The moralist] can do nothing else; he must find the egoist immoral in everything in which the egoist pays no regard to morality. If he didn’t find him so, he would have already become an apostate to morality without admitting it, he would not [sic] longer be a truly moral person.” Ibid., 49-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid., 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See “Political Liberalism” in *The Unique and Its Property*, 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See “Social Liberalism” in *The Unique and Its Property*, 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See “Humane Liberalism” in *The Unique and Its Property*, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *Unmensch* is translated as “unman” in the older Byington translation, which was, on the whole, a terrible translation. Byington was paid extra to translate *Der Einzige*, which has recently been translated as “the unique” or “the unique one,” as “the Ego” in order to include the word “ego” in the translated title. In the more recent Landstreicher translation, *Unmensch* has been translated as “inhuman monster” or simply as “inhuman.” Much of the secondary literature still uses “unman” as it arguably better conveys its strict opposition with the identity of “man”; this is a convention I will follow. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This reading can be found in Newman, Saul. *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power*. Lexington Books, 2007. pp. 60-61; Welsh, John F. *Max Stirner’s Dialectical Egoism: A New Interpretation*. Lexington Books, 2011. pp. 73-74; and Dematteis, Philip Breed. *Max Stirner versus Karl Marx: Individuality and the Social Organism*. Stand Alone, 2019. pp. 84-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*, 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid., 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. There is an obvious connection to Judith Butler’s theory of performativity here. One key difference between Stirner’s view and Butler’s is that Butler embraces the same Foucauldian attitude I criticized in Puumeister’s article in n9, in which there is a total reduction of the self down to their manifestation for the other (both in the interpersonal and broad social sense). Thus, Butler would see this constitution of the self by the other through the medium of labor as, simply, the way in which the self is constituted, whereas Stirner would see this as an alienating and false constitution imposed on the self, antithetical to it. I intend to fully explore this connection in the future, but it currently lies beyond the scope of the present work. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. “Being, thought, the I, are only undetermined concepts, which receive their determinateness only through other concepts, i.e., through conceptual development. The unique, on the other hand, is a concept *that lacks determination* and cannot be made determinate by other concepts or receive a ‘nearer content’; it is not the ‘principle of a series of concepts,’ but a word or concept that, as word or concept, is not capable of any development.” Stirner, Max. *Stirner’s Critics*. Translated by Wolfi Landstreicher, LBC Books, 2012. pp. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid., 301. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Newman, Saul. “What is an insurrection? Destituent power and ontological anarchy in Agamben and Stirner.” *Political Studies*, vol. 65, no. 2, 9 Aug. 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321716654498>. pp. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. I will (perhaps intentionally…) show little care as to the distinction between ethics and morality in the following paragraphs. I recognize that it is a common distinction for those inclined towards normative ethics. My carelessness as to such a distinction in what follows is not out of ignorance, but rather apathy. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. If you choose to engage in a similar practice, you must actively resist attempts to capture and incorporate these impossible positions within the discourse. The most common response I encounter when I sing the praises of theft is: “I can see how stealing from big corporations can be acceptable, because, in a roundabout way, they are really stealing from us already.” Replies such as this are attempts to incorporate and normalize impossible positions such as theft within the social discourse by reducing it to its consequences and its social context. Such a reduction attempts to relate the consequences and context of the theft to what the person responding already holds to be good. This constitutes an attempt to make the impossible position I adopt a possible consequence of what they already believe, neutering it of its disruptive power. These responses must be stamped out in the harshest possible terms. I do so by radicalizing my position in insisting that attempts to contextualize theft—incorporating it within a pre-existing understanding of what is already ‘good’—miss the point entirely: theft is good *in itself*, the context has no bearing on its moral status. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. For example, a highly structured, mechanical, or bureaucratic environment would still allow you to be written off by the front desk person or the cashier without impeding the fulfillment of your reason for being in such a place. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Stirner, Max. “You Only Have the Courage to Be Destructive.” *The Anarchist Library*, [www.theanarchistlibrary.org/library/max-stirner-you-only-have-the-courage-to-be-destructive](http://www.theanarchistlibrary.org/library/max-stirner-you-only-have-the-courage-to-be-destructive). Accessed 12 Nov. 2023 (my emphasis). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)