The copy right has been secured as the only existing means of securing remuneration. But abhorring the principle of monopoly and all the workings and tendencies of copy rights and patents and of an endless and unprincipled scramble after indefinite and unlimited gains, the work and the art by which it is printed (which is equally adapted to printing maps, diagrams, and writing, and which is now a secret) shall be thrown open to the free use of every one, whenever any people or government shall merely remunerate the labor that has been bestowed upon them.

“A Few Words to the Writer in a Paper Called the Circular on the Sovereignty of the Individual”

This is a single page from the Labadie Collection. It is evidently directed at the periodical of the Oneida community, the Circular, in which John Humphrey Noyes had criticized Modern Times and Warren (as well as Andrews) by name. That would date this published letter in the 1850s. I have so far not located the exact passage that Warren is replying to, but Noyes was quite hostile to and acerbic about the notion of individual sovereignty. It strikes me that the type is Warren’s, so I don’t think it was published in the Circular itself. It may have been distributed at Modern Times as a handbill. It’s a lively little statement in which Warren gives a version of one of his favorite arguments: that to deny individual sovereignty is to assert it. The denial of the claim that individuals possess sovereignty over their opinions is a contradiction, so that the claim is true and is therefore entailed by any assertion of opinion. Further, he uses a very direct and compelling argument for individualism, contending that the locus of pain is the individual.

I am not fond of disputes—I think the time has passed for long, hard-wrought, and far-fetched argumentation, and that the truth and soundness of any propositions must be pretty nearly self-evident to be of much benefit to the public. As there seems, however, to be a good deal of straightforwardness and honesty in your opposition to
the sovereignty of the individual, I am inclined to think a few words may be serviceable.

I might legitimately say to you, well, sir, if you do not like “the sovereignty of the individual” as a formula, why, then reject it.

But in doing so you would be acting on that very principle you theoretically reject. You would be practicing the very thing you object to the practice of. You stand upon the very ground you endeavor to undermine. You place yourself in the predicament of the man who stood on that part of the plank which he was sawing off: he did not discover his mistake till he found himself landed in the cellar. Perhaps you and some others may be able to profit from his experience.

I might leave the whole matter here as having said enough, but I wish to put you and others right in regard to several mistakes that are very common and which may as well be corrected here.

I have no right to speak for all the friends of the equity movement without consulting them, yet some of us do not choose to be classed as “reformers.” We think that word has become too much disgraced for our purpose; and from what we have experienced, we should expect to be better appreciated by those generally classed as conservatives. Again: Mr. Warren is not “Chief” (in the common and offensive sense of that term) of any “school of reformers”—there is no chief in that sense of the word, where all are sovereigns.

You reason logically from your premises in the main argument, but your premises are false.

You say, in effect, that if one member of my body suffers the whole suffers, and as it is with the individual, so it is with the race: that all humanity suffers for the disease or wickedness of any individual, and then you logically conclude that an individual cannot act in anything at his own cost. Now neither of the premises is true and your conclusion is consequently a fallacy.

It is not true at all that, when I have a toothache, my foot or any other limb suffers. And if this were a fact, it by no means follows that all the people even in the same town will ever suffer or know anything about it.
The absurdity of this reasoning is only equalled by that of the green immigrant who, finding a ten cent piece as soon as he stepped on shore, immediately asserted that the whole country was covered over with money.

As “free criticism” is in so much favor with you I advise the study of A. B. Johnson’s *Treatise on Language*, by which you may learn that general propositions, however loud sounding, may have very few and very insignificant applications.

An Individual

“The Manifesto”

*The Oriole Press* reprinted this text in 1952. In the introduction, Joseph Ishill writes, “This Manifesto was originally written & published by Josiah Warren in 1841, and it was incidentally printed by the author on one of his home-made presses. The present reprint is from a photostat copy supplied by Mr. Ewing C. Baskette, for which we gratefully thank him for having discovered this rare historical document. Josiah Warren was undoubtedly the first American anarchist; as such he devoted most of his life towards the betterment of mankind. In spite of his individualistic tendencies which are so characteristic of the spirit of our old American pioneers, he was heart & soul for all, and for a society where peace and tranquility would be the dominant factors. It is also true that Josiah Warren was by nature and tradition a born rebel against all injustices & human hardships. His writings have shown the way toward liberation & annihilation of all archaic forms of slavery, and above all, he stood fast on his conviction of the sovereignty of the individual. The entire world is today, as never before, under a total eclipse of confusion and disillusionment, due mostly to the manifestation of a perverted ‘ism,’ which has darkened almost the entire horizon of the universe and which seeks to destroy ruthlessly all democratic principles based on truth & justice. This too, we hope, shall pass into oblivion. As to Josiah Warren’s own publications I like to quote here from another great scholar and bibliophile, Dr. Max Nettlau. The following is extracted from an unpublished letter addressed by him to Ewing C. Baskette, dated May 26, 1936,