

THE EGOIST

ARCHISTS, ANARCHISTS AND EGOISTS

S. E. Parker

"I am an anarchist! Wherefore I will not rule. And also ruled I will not be."

– John Henry Mackay

"What I get by force I get by force, and what I do not get by force I have no right to."

– Max Stirner

In his book MAX STIRNER'S EGOISM John P. Clark claims that Stirner is an anarchist, but that his anarchism is "greatly inadequate". This is because "he opposes domination of the ego by the State, but he advises people to seek to dominate others in any other way they can manage... Stirner, for all his opposition to the State... still exalts the will to dominate."

Clark's criticism springs from his definition of anarchism as opposition to "domination" in all its forms "not only domination of subjects by political rulers, but domination of races by other races, of females by males, of the young by the old, of the weak by the strong, and not least of all, the domination of nature by humans."

In view of the comprehensiveness of his definition it is odd that Clark still sees Stirner's philosophy as a type of anarchism – albeit a "greatly inadequate" one. He is quite correct in stating that the *leitmotif of theoretical anarchism* is opposition to domination and that, despite his anti-Statist sentiments, Stirner has no *principled* objection to domination. Indeed, he writes "I know that my freedom is diminished even by my not being able to carry out my will on another object, be this something without will, like a government, an individual etc."

Is conscious egoism, therefore, compatible with anarchism? There is no doubt that it is possible to formulate a concept of anarchism that is ostensibly egoistic. For many years I tried to do this and I know of several individuals who still claim to be anarchists because they are egoists. The problem, however, is that anarchism as a *theory* of non-domination demands that individuals refrain from dominating others *even if they could gain greater satisfaction from dominating than from not dominating*. To allow domination would be to deny anarchism. In other words, the "freedom" of the anarchist is yet another yoke placed around the neck of the individual in the name of yet another conceptual imperative.

The question was answered at some length by Dora Marsden in two essays that appeared in her review for THE EGOIST September 12, 1914 and February 1, 1915. The first was entitled THE ILLUSION OF ANARCHISM; the second SOME CRITICS ANSWERED. Some months before the appearance of her first essay on anarchism Marsden had been engaged in a controversy with the redoubtable Benjamin Tucker in which she had defended what she called "egoist anarchism" against what she saw as the "clerico-libertarianism" of Tucker. At the premature end of the controversy Tucker denounced her as an "egoist and anarchist", to which she replied that she was quite willing to "not – according to Mr Tucker – be called 'Anarchist'" but responded readily to "Egoist".

In the interval between the end of the controversy and the publication of her first essay she had evidently given considerable thought to the relation of egoism to anarchism and had decided that the latter was something in which she could no longer believe. The gist of her new position was as follows:

"Every form of life is archistic. "An archist is one who seeks to establish, maintain, and protect by the strongest weapons at his disposal, the law of his own interest". All growing life-forms are aggressive: aggressive is what growing means. Each fights for its own place, and to enlarge it, and enlarging it is a growth. And because life-forms are gregarious there are myriads of claims to lay exclusive hold on any place. The claimants are myriad: bird, beast, plant, insect, vermin – each will assert its sole claim to any place as long as it is permitted: as witness the pugnacity of gnat, weed, and flea, the scant ceremony of the housewife's broom, the axe which makes a clearing, the scythe, the fisherman's net, the slaughter-house bludgeon: all assertions of aggressive interest promptly countered by more powerful interests! The world falls to him who can take it, if instinctive action can tell us anything."

It is this aggressive 'territoriality' that motivates domination.

"The living unit is an organism of embodied wants; and a want is a term which indicates an apprehension of the existence of barriers – conditions easy or hard – which lie between the 'setting onwards' and the 'arrival', i.e. the satisfaction. Thus every want has two sides,

obverse and reverse, of which the one would read the 'not yet dominated', and the other 'progressive domination'. The two sides grow at the expense of each other. The co-existence of the consciousness of a lacking satisfaction, with the corresponding and inevitable 'instinct to dominate', that which prolongs the lack, are features which characterize life. Bridging the interval between the want and its satisfaction is the exercising of the 'instinct to dominate' – obstructing conditions. The distinction between the lifeless and the living is comprised under an inability to be other than a victim to conditions. That of which the latter can be said, possesses life; that of which the former, is inanimate. It is to this doministic instinct to which we have applied the label archistic."

Of course, this exercising of the doministic instinct does not result in every life-form becoming dominant. Power being naturally unequal the struggle for predominance usually settles down into a condition in which the less powerful end up being dominated by the more powerful. Indeed, many of the less powerful satisfy the instinct to dominate by identifying themselves with those who actually do dominate: "the great lord can always count on having doorkeepers in abundance".

Marsden argues that anarchists are among those who, like Christians, seek to muzzle the doministic tendency by urging us to renounce our desires to dominate. Their purpose "is to make men willing to assert that though they are born and inclined archists they *ought* to be anarchists". Faced with "this colossal encounter of interest, i.e. of lives... the anarchist breaks in with his 'Thus far and no further'" and "introduces his 'law' of 'the inviolability of individual liberty'."

The anarchist is thus a *principled embargoist* who sees in domination the evil of evils.

"It is the first article of my faith that archistic encroachments upon the 'free' activity of Men are not compatible with the respect due to the dignity of Man as Man. The ideal of Humanity forbids the domination of one man by his fellows'... This humanitarian embargo is an Absolute: a procedure of which the observance is Good-in-itself. The government of Man by Man is wrong: the respect of an embargo constitutes Right."

The irony is, that in the process of seeking to establish this condition of non-domination called anarchy, the anarchist would be compelled to turn to a sanction that is but another form of domination. In the *theoretical* society of the anarchist they would have to resort to the intra-individual domination of *conscience* in order to prevent the inter-individual domination that characterizes political government. In the end, therefore, anarchism boils down to a species of "clerico-libertarianism" and is the gloss covering the wishes of "a unit possessed of the instinct to dominate – even his fellow-men."

Not only this, but faced with the *practical* problems of achieving the "Free Society", the anarchist fantasy would melt away before the realities of power.

"The State is fallen, long live the State' – the furthest going revolutionary anarchist cannot get away from this. On the morrow of his successful revolution he would need to set about finding means to protect his 'anarchistic' notions: and would find himself protecting his own interests with all the powers he could command, like an archist: formulating his laws and maintaining his State, until some franker archist arrived to displace and supersede him."

Nonetheless, having abandoned anarchism, Marsden has no intention of returning to an acceptance of the *authority* of the State and its laws for this would be to confuse "an attitude which refused to hold laws and interests sacred (i.e. whole unquestioned, untouched) and that which refuses to respect the existence of forces, of which Laws are merely the outward visible index. It is a very general error, but the anarchist is especially the victim of it: the greater intelligence of the archist will understand that though laws considered as sacred are foolishness, respect for any and every law is due for just the amount of retaliatory force there may be involved in it, if it be flouted. Respect for 'sanctity' and respect for 'power' stand at opposite poles, the respecter of the one is the verbalist, of the other – the archist: the egoist."

I agree with Dora Marsden. Anarchism is a redemptionist secular religion concerned to purge the world of the sin of political government. Its adherents envisage a "free society" in which all archistic acts are forbidden. Cleansed of the evil of domination "mankind" will live, so they say, in freedom and harmony and our present "oppressions" will be confined to the pages of history books. When, therefore, Marsden writes that "*anarchists are not separated in any way from kinship with the devout. They belong to the Christian Church and should be recognized as Christianity's picked children*" she is not being merely frivolous. Anarchism is a *theory* of an ideal society – whether communist, mutualist, or individualist, matters little in this respect – of necessity must demand *renunciation* of domination both in means and ends. That in *practice* it would necessitate another form of domination for its operation is a contradiction not unknown in other religions - which in no way alter their essence.

The conscious egoist, in contrast, is not bound by any demand for renunciation of domination and if it is within his competence he will dominate others *if this is in his interest*. That anarchism and egoism are not equivalent is admitted, albeit unwillingly, by the well-known American anarchist John Beverley Robinson – who depicted an anarchist society in the most

lachrymous terms in his REBUILDING THE WORLD – in his succinct essay EGOISM. Throwing anarchist principles overboard he writes of the egoist that

“if the State does things that benefit him, he will support it; if it attacks him and encroaches on his liberty, he will evade it by any means in his power, if he is not strong enough to withstand it.” Again, *“if the law happens to be to his advantage, he will avail himself of it; if it invades his liberty he will transgress it as far as he thinks it wise to do so. But he has no regard for it as a thing supernal.”*

Robinson thus denies the validity of the anarchist principle of non-domination, since the existence of the State and its laws necessitates the existence of a permanent apparatus of repression. If I make use of them for my advantage, then I invoke their repressive power against anyone who stands opposed to what I want. In other words, I make use of an *archistic* action to gain my end.

Egoism, *conscious* egoism, seen for what it is instead of being pressed into the service of a utopian ideology, has nothing to do with what Marsden well-called “clerico-libertarianism”. It means, as she put it in her controversy with Tucker, “...a tub for Diogenes; a continent for Napoleon; control of a Trust for Rockefeller; all that I desire for me: *if we can get them*”. It is not based upon any fantasy for its champions are well aware of the vital difference between “if I want something I ought to get it” and “being competent to achieve what I want”. The egoist lives among the realities of power in the world of archists, not among the myths of the renouncers in the dream world of anarchists.

NOTES AND NOTIONS

S. E. Parker

The Institute For The Study Of Terrorism (65 Blandford St., London W1H 3AJ) is “a private research institute supported entirely by private donations and its own earnings. Its Chairman, Lord Chalfont, is a former Minister of Defence, and its Director, Jillian Becker, is a writer on the subject of terrorism with an international reputation”. Its first two publications are booklets dealing with terrorism in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and in South Africa.

Tamil Terrorism: Nationalist Or Marxist? by Penelope Tremayne and Ian Geldard is about the political allegiances of the little-known Tamil “nationalist” movement. It provides ample documentation of Marxist influence on the various Tamil groups ostensibly demanding their own form of “apartheid” in Sri Lanka, but in fact seeking to seize control of the whole State. (48pp. 4. 00 inc. post.)

Unlike Sri Lanka, the Republic of South Africa is very rarely out of the headlines. An object of moral execration for guilt-ridden white and bombastic black politicians, the complexities of its racial problems are brushed aside and praise is heaped upon the communist led African National Congress which has, among others, the charming habit of burning opponents to death by means of a gruesome process known as “necklacing”. ANC: A Soviet Task Force? by Keith Campbell is a convincing exposure of the claim that this organization does not have a close relationship with the South Africa Communist Party. Among the many facts it presents is cogent evidence that the darling of the Western media, Nelson Mandela, is a communist, despite his apparent lack of formal membership of the Communist Party. (58pp. £2. 95 inc. post.)

Department of Terrorist Apologetics: The publishers of Anarchism and Violence: Severino Di Giovanni in Argentina 1923-1931 state in their “blurb” that Di Giovanni's actions “...were never indiscriminate... They were always guided by a precise revolutionary reasoning: to strike at the centres of power...” Really? A bomb he exploded at a bank killed two and wounded twenty two. Another bomb exploded at the Italian Consulate killed nine and injured thirty four. A young man was killed when a suitcase he found exploded. A fellow-anarchist, Emilio Lopez Arango, was murdered because he denounced Di Giovanni. No “centre of power” was ever damaged. If these actions were “discriminate” and guided by “precise revolutionary reasoning”, I wonder what actions resulting from “indiscriminate” attitudes and “imprecise” reasoning would be like?

The anarchist publishers Freedom Press have just celebrated their first centenary and have published an enlarged and glossy edition of their paper Freedom to commemorate the fact. Although its many contributors write of its past history, recount their personal reminiscences, or indulge in prophetic forecasts, there is a noticeable lack of any serious consideration of why it is, after one hundred years of existence, they are still a minute group preaching the good news to a small minority of the faithful. Indeed, it is only in a few contributions, such as those of Vernon Richards and Donald Rooum, that there is any hint that things are not what it was once hoped they would be.

This omission is all the more striking since they reproduce the entire first edition of Freedom which contained the statement that “but few years will elapse before Governments will be

overthrown on the Continent". It is something of an irony that a group originally founded to help to bring about an anarchist revolution should be celebrating its first hundred years!

Max Stirner and his ideas are mentioned by three writers: one of them, Peter Cadogan, with his notions of the "sacred", is, not surprisingly, hostile; two of them are favourable, Arthur Moyse (this is surprising) and Tony Gibson. The latter refers to the influence of Stirner upon a group of Glaswegian anarchists in the 1940s and 1950s, but, while he is free with names in other directions, he fails to name even one of this group. I find it hard to believe that he has forgotten Eddie Shaw, Jimmy Raeside or Bobby Lynn, even if he does not know that another member, Stephen Marletta, has been a staunch supporter of this publication since it began in 1963.

The same preference for anonymity prevails when he refers to me. He writes that The Ego And His Own has been known "to have an explosive effect upon some people. One lad, a devoted anarchist-communist and a follower of Voltairine de Cleyre, at first inveighed against the book and pompously condemned the Clydeside anarchists, but he experienced a conversion similar to that of Saul on the road to Tarsus, and later founded a Stirnerite journal."

I certainly opposed the egoist ideas propounded by Eddie Shaw at a meeting of the London Anarchist Group in the early 1950s – something which gives me wry amusement these days – but at the time of my "conversion" (1961) I had long ago ceased to be a "follower" of Voltairine de Cleyre, nor was I a "devoted anarchist-communist", having been a "pluralist anarchist" for some years. (My present views on anarchism are given elsewhere in this issue). Whether writing reminiscences or history, it is very useful to check available facts before doing so.

Freedom/A Hundred Years is available from Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High St., London E1 7QX. Price £2.00.

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Others... are springing up to classify the Ego and Egoism in philosophy. The Unit of Stirner is – yourself, if you like. You, as a person of flesh and blood, will not be successfully classified in "philosophy", I think, if you grasp the idea and act on it. The old so-called philosophic egoism was a disquisition on the common characteristics of men, a sort of generality. The real, living Egoism is the fact of untrammelled mind in this or that person and the actions resulting, the end of the tyranny of general ideas.

James L. Walker