

non serviam #2

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Editor's Word

A friend of mine was half a year ago confronted with the claim that the Self "really did not exist", and that this was scientifically proven. At the time, I only laughed, and considered the proponent of the idea to be a little weird. I still consider it weird, but having heard the claim over again, I do not laugh.

In the last issue, I went over the basic types of [mistaken] selfishness, and promised to follow up with a discussion of what was the true Self/ego. In conjunction with the above concern, this is the starting point for my article The Self.

Ken Knudson's eminent article continues. The chapter one makes up almost half the article, so I have chosen to issue the rest of the chapter as separate issues, so that discussion may begin. I hope the somewhat arbitrary sectioning of the article into the different issues is forgiven.

The next chapter will be "REVOLUTION: THE ROAD TO FREEDOM?".

The Self

Svein Olav Nyberg

As seen in the last issue, what "selfish" means depends strongly upon what you mean by "self". I will not here try to correct all the wrong ideas of what the Self is, but rather give an indication of what I think the right view is. There are, as you well are aware, many different conceptions of what "self" means. A general line of division between these conceptions I have found very well illustrated in Wilber, Engler and Brown's book on the psychology of meditation [1]: To different stages of cognitive development belongs different self-structures and, not the least, -images. The highest stage, called the Ultimate stage, is described as "the reality, condition, or suchness of all levels." If you draw the stage diagram on a paper, the Ultimate Self is in relation to the other "selves" as the paper in relation to the elements of the

diagram drawn on it. Improper selfishness, then, might be viewed as the mistaking of the image for the real thing.

So, there is a very important division between the underlying Self, and the various self-images. This division is found more or less explicitly in a variety of sources. Pirsig, in his famous best-seller, denounces the ego, but embraces the Self in his praise of arete as "duty towards Self." [2] The philosopher Nietzsche writes that "The Self is always listening and seeking: it compares, subdues, conquers, destroys. It rules and is also the Ego's ruler. Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage - he is called Self.", and also, a little above this, "[the Self] does not say 'I' but performs 'I.'" [3].

In [1] it is concluded that though all who experience the Ultimate stage do essentially the same, the experience and understanding of it depends on the prior interpretation. The Buddhist experience an egoless state, while the theistic meditators experience [being one with] their god. Who is having this unifying experience? The same guy, essentially, who has everyday experience. Fichte [4] asks of his audience, "Gentlemen, think of the wall," and proceeds "Gentlemen, think of him who thought the wall." In this way he gets an infinite chain, as "whenever we try to objectify ourselves, make ourselves into objects of consciousness, there always remains an **I** or ego which transcends objectification and is itself the condition of the unity of consciousness," as Copleston describes.

Now, whether we shall side with the meditators who claim to experience this **I**, or with Fichte who says we cannot, is of little importance here. What is important, is that the **I**, this ground and condition indeed exists, and that it is the ground of the empirical ego or egos.

I want to take a closer look at this **I** - the Self.

So far, the Self may be seen on as something just lying in the background, a kind of ultimate observer. But Fichte's question can also be asked of action, "Who is lifting your arm when you lift your arm?" Like it was clear in the first case that it was not the image of the Self –the ego– that was aware, but the Self itself, it is equally obvious that it is not the image of the Will that lifts the arm - but the Will itself. To understand this better, try to will the coke bottle in front of you to lift. Won't do. Now, "will" your arm up in the same way that you willed the coke bottle. Won't do

either. Still, lifting the arm is easy. (See also [3])

Proceeding like above, we can find a well of parts of the underlying Self. But they are all one. The Self that sees the stick is the same Self that throws a rock at it. How else would it hit? I have found it useful to single out three of them, which I will call the Experiencing Self, the Creative Self and the Teleological Self.

Stirner [5] speaks of "the vanishing point of the ego", and of the "creative nothing". He has "built his case on nothing". This latter is the one that reveals what he intends. For surely, he has built his cause on - himself. But in the way of Fichte, the Self is not a thing, but the basis for speaking of things. To be a thing is to be an object for some subject and, as Fichte showed, the subject cannot properly be an object. So, Stirner's "creative nothing" is him Self.

In contrast to Fichte, however, Stirner emphasizes the finite here-and-now individual Self, not the abstract Ego: "Fichte's ego too is the same essence outside me, for every one is ego; and, if only this ego has rights, then it is "the ego", it is not I. But I am not an ego along with other egos, but the sole ego: I am unique. Hence my wants too are unique, and my deeds; in short everthing about me is unique."

So we see Stirner rejects the positivistic idea of viewing himself from a 3rd person vantage point. He is not "ego", the image of himself. For one can have an image of anyone. But ones own Self is experienced from the 1st person point of view, and one is oneself the only one who can experience oneself from there. Again quoting Stirner: "They say of God: 'Names name thee not.' That holds good of me: No *concept* expresses me; they are only names."

The history of philosophy can be simplified as follows: We have gone from a focus on experienced reality, to experienced self, and from that on to that which contains both - the Experiencing Self. Stirner, as a student of Hegel, must have seen this, and, as he states, this history is also *my* history. The dialectic process is taken back into its owner. I am not any longer viewing myself as a moment in the dialectical self-unfolding of the Absolute, but as he who learns and thinks these thoughts, and - take the advantage of them.

The philosophical process did not stop at the Experiencing Self, with which an empiricist would be content. A reaction came, asking what elements of experience were constituted by the subject himself. The observer was no longer seen as a passive observer, but as an active participant contributing his own elements into experience. Thus we can say that the awareness of the creative role of the intellect was properly emerging. We had the Creative Self. This was idea was taken very far by Stirners teachers - into German idealism.

Stirner's main thesis is that of the individual as the ground not only of observation and creation, but of evaluation. This thesis is given a short presentation as a 0th chapter in *The Ego and His Own*: "All things are Nothing to Me." No outer force is to determine ones cause, ones evaluation. With a convincing rhetoric, Stirner makes room for the case that he himself is the evaluator, the one whose cause is to be acted for.

Stirner's main dialectical triad is then this, that we go from mere experience to action [thought], and as a solution to the strain between these go to valuation and interest, self-interest. This is a recurring theme in his book, and the structure of the argument

is presented in the first chapter, very appropriately named "A human Life".

The triad, as I have understood and interpreted it, is this:

The Experiencing Self: This is, so to say, the beacon that enlightens the empirical world, which makes it possible qua empirical world. With knowledge of oneself only as experiencing, one is stuck with things, and all ones activity is centered around things, as Stirner says. One is a Materialist. In history, both the personal and the philosophical one, the Empirical Self is seen as a passive observer on whom the world is imprinted, all until we come to the antithesis of this view:

The Creative Self: We discover our own more active role in experience, our own contribution of elements/form to our experience, as shown by the [Kantian inspired] experiments of the early Gestalt psychologists. With this knowledge, attention goes to thought itself, and, we become intellectual and spiritual young men. Our quest goes for that in which we can pry Spirit, and we become - Idealists.

The Teleological Self: There is a [dialectical] strain between the two views and aspects of the Self above, a conflict that can only, as Stirner says, be resolved by a third party, which is the synthesis. We begin to ask: Why do I focus on this, and not on that, in experience? Why do I create this and not that? For whom am I doing my creation, my thinking? I find the answer to the above questions in what I will call the Teleological Self. The Teleological Self is he [or rather - **I**] for whom all things done by me are done, the commander who is the measure of all activity. Any value, any selection, and thereby any focus and any creation, owes its existence to the Teleological Self. In the Teleological Self we find the grounding of our "why?".

The dilemma between Materialism and Idealism is resolved in Selfishness. Not do I go for the material for its sake, nor do I let the cause of any ideal invade me and make its cause mine. I take both, but as tools and things to be disposed of at - my pleasure. In this fashion the dialectics is buried. For it is only alive in the world of ideas, which I have taken back into myself.

This was an attempt to convey some thoughts on the Self. If anyone feels tempted to pick up this thread, expand on

it or negate it, you are welcome. It will be a pleasure.

REFERENCES

- [1] Wilber, Engler, Brown: "Transformations of Consciousness"
- [2] Robert Pirsig: "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance"
- [3] Friedrich Nietzsche: "Zarathustra", on the Despisers of the Body.
- [4] Copleston, Vol VII, p. 40
- [5] Max Stirner: "The Ego & His Own"

A Critique of Communism and The Individualist Alternative

Ken Knudson
(serial: 2)

Before one can get into an intelligent criticism of anything, one must begin by defining one's terms. "Anarchism", according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica dictionary, is "the theory that all forms of government are incompatible with individual and social liberty and should be abolished." It further says that it comes from the Greek roots "an" (without) and "archos" (leader).¹ As for "communism", it is "any social theory that calls for the abolition of private property and control by the community over economic affairs." To elaborate on that definition, communists of all varieties hold that all wealth should be produced and distributed according to the

formula "from each according to his² ability, to each according to his needs" and that the administrative mechanism to control such production and distribution should be democratically organised by the workers themselves (i.e. "workers' control"). They further insist that there should be no private ownership of the means of production and no trading of goods except through the official channels agreed upon by the majority. With rare exceptions, communists of all varieties propose to realise this ideal through violent revolution and the expropriation of all private property.

¹ Historically, it was Proudhon who first used the word to mean something other than disorder and chaos: "Although a firm friend of order, I am (in the full force of the term) an anarchist." [5]

² Here Marx uses the masculine pronoun to denote the generic "one". In deference to easy flowing English grammar, I'll stick to his precedent and hope that Women's Lib people will forgive me when I, too, write "his" instead of "one's".

That no one should accuse me of building up straw men in order to knock them down, allow me to quote Kropotkin³ to show that communist-anarchism fits in well with the above definition of communism:

"We have to put an end to the iniquities, the vices, the crimes which result from the idle existence of some and the economic, intellectual, and moral servitude of others.... We are no longer obliged to grope in the dark for the solution.... It is Expropriation.... If all accumulated treasure...does not immediately go back to the collectivity - since ALL have contributed to produce it; if the insurgent people do not take possession of all the goods and provisions amassed in the great cities and do not organise to put them within the reach of all who need them...the insurrection will not be a revolution, and everything will have to be begun over again....Expropriation, - that then, is the watchword which is imposed upon the next revolution, under penalty of failing in its historic mission. The complete expropriation of all who have the means of exploiting human beings. The return to common ownership by the nation of all that can serve in the hands of

³ I have chosen Kropotkin as a "typical" communist- anarchist here and elsewhere in this article for a number of reasons. First, he was a particularly prolific writer, doing much of his original work in English. Secondly, he is generally regarded as "probably the greatest anarchist thinker and writer" by many communist- anarchists, including at least one editor of "Freedom". [6] Finally, he was the founder of Freedom Press, the publisher of the magazine you are now reading.

any one for the exploitation of others." [7]

Now let us take our definitions of communism and anarchism and see where they lead us. The first part of the definition of communism calls for the abolition of private property. "Abolition" is itself a rather authoritarian concept - unless, of course, you're talking about abolishing something which is inherently authoritarian and invasive itself (like slavery or government, for example). So the question boils down to "Is private property authoritarian and invasive?" The communists answer "yes"; the individualists disagree. Who is right? Which is the more "anarchistic" answer? The communists argue that "private property has become a hindrance to the evolution of mankind towards happiness" [8], that "private property offends against justice" [9] and that it "has developed parasitically amidst the free institutions of our earliest ancestors." [10] The individualists, far from denying these assertions, reaffirm them. After all wasn't it Proudhon who first declared property "theft"?⁴ But when the communist says, "Be done, then, with this vile institution; abolish private property once and for all; expropriate and collectivise all property for the common good," the individualist must part company with him. What's wrong with private property today is that it rests primarily in the hands of a legally privileged elite. The resolution of this injustice is not to perpetrate an even greater one, but rather to devise a social and economic system which will distribute property in such a manner that everyone is guaranteed the

⁴ By property Proudhon means property as it exists under government privilege, i.e. property gained not through labour or the exchange of the products of labour (which he favours), but through the legal privileges bestowed by government on idle capital.

product of his labour by natural economic laws. I propose to demonstrate just such a system at the end of this article. If this can be done, it will have been shown that private property is not intrinsically invasive after all, and that the communists in expropriating it would be committing a most UNanarchistic act. It is, therefore, incumbent upon all communists who call themselves anarchists to read carefully that section and either find a flaw in its reasoning or admit that they are not anarchists after all.

The second part of the definition of communism says that economic affairs should be controlled by the community. Individualists say they should be controlled by the market place and that the only law should be the natural law of supply and demand. Which of these two propositions is the more consistent with anarchism? Herbert Spencer wrote in 1884, "The great political superstition of the past was the divine right of kings. The great political superstition of the present is the divine right of parliaments." [11] The communists seem to have carried Spencer's observation one step further: the great political superstition of the future shall be the divine right of workers' majorities. "Workers' control" is their ideology; "Power to the People" their battle cry. What communist-anarchists apparently forget is that workers' control means CONTROL. Marxists, let it be said to their credit, at least are honest about this point. They openly and unashamedly demand the dictatorship of the proletariat. Communist-anarchists seem to be afraid of that phrase, perhaps subconsciously realising the inherent contradiction in their position. But communism, by its very nature, IS dictatorial. The communist-anarchists may christen their governing bodies "workers' councils" or "soviets", but they remain GOVERNMENTS just the same.

Abraham Lincoln was supposed to have asked, "If you call a tail a leg, how many legs has a dog? Five? No! Calling a tail a leg don't MAKE it a leg." The same is true about governments and laws. Calling a law a "social habit" [12] or an "unwritten custom" [13] as Kropotkin does, doesn't change its nature. To paraphrase Shakespeare, that which we call a law by any other name would smell as foul.

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- [10] Ibid., p. 110.
- [11] Herbert Spencer, "The Man Versus The State," ed. Donald MacRae (London: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 151. Originally published in 1884.
- [12] Prince Peter Kropotkin, "The Conquest of Bread" (London: Chapman & Hall, Ltd., 1906), p. 41.
- [13] Eltzbacher, op. cit., p. 101.