

non serviam #7

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Editor's Word

Sidney Parker is the editor of the Stirnerite magazine "Ego", and is the author of the below article on "Archists, Anarchists and Egoists". This article will be the first in a series of articles sent to me by Sidney Parker that I will reprint here. They have previously appeared in the (out of print) magazine "Ego"/"The Egoist".

Archists, Anarchists and Egoists

Sidney 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 archist," 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.

A Critique of Communism and The Individualist Alternative

Ken Knudson
(serial: 3)

Why is it that Utopian dreams have a habit of turning into nightmares in practice? Very simply because people don't act the way the would-be architects of society would have them act. The mythical man never measures up to the real man. This point was brought home forcefully in a recent letter to "Freedom" by S. E. Parker who observed that our modern visionaries are bound for disappointment because they are "trying to deduce an 'is' from an 'ought'." [70] Paper constitutions might work all right in a society of paper dolls, but they can only bring smiles to those who have observed their results in the real world. The same is true of paper revolutions which invariably have to go back to the drawing board once the reign of terror sets in. And if communist-anarchists think that their paper social systems are exempt from this, how do they explain the presence of anarchist "leaders" in high government positions during the Spanish Civil War?

Hasn't everyone been surprised at sometime or other with the behaviour of people they thought they knew well? Perhaps a relative or a good friend does something "totally out of character." We can never completely know even those people closest to us, let alone total strangers. How are we, then, to comprehend and predict the behaviour of complex groups of people? To make assumptions about how people must and will act under a hypothetical social system is idle conjecture. We know from daily experience that men don't act as they "ought" to act or think as they "ought" to

think. Why should things be any different after the revolution? Yet we still find an abundance of revolutionaries willing to kill and be killed for a cause which more likely than not, if realised, would bear no recognizable resemblance to what they were fighting for. This reason alone should be sufficient to give these people second thoughts about their methods. But apparently they are too carried away by the violence of their own rhetoric to be bothered with where it will lead them.¹

There is but one effective way to rid ourselves of the oppressive power of the state. It is not to shoot it to death; it is not to vote it to death; it is not even to persuade it to death. It is rather to starve it to death.

Power feeds on its spoils, and dies when its victims refuse to be despoiled. There is much truth in the well-known pacifist slogan, "Wars will cease when people refuse to fight." This slogan can be generalised to say that "government will cease when people refuse to be governed." As Tucker put it, "There is not a tyrant in the civilised world today who would not do

¹ I am reminded here of a Herblock cartoon which came out during the Johnson-Goldwater presidential campaign of 1964. It pictures Goldwater standing in the rubble of a nuclear war and proclaiming, "But that's not what I meant!" I wonder if the Utopia which our idealists intend to usher in by violent revolution will be what they really "meant"?

anything in his power to precipitate a bloody revolution rather than see himself confronted by any large fraction of his subjects determined not to obey. An insurrection is easily quelled; but no army is willing or able to train its guns on inoffensive people who do not even gather in the streets but stay at home and stand back on their rights." [71]

A particularly effective weapon could be massive tax refusal. If (say) one-fifth of the population of the United States refused to pay their taxes, the government would be impaled on the horns of a dilemma. Should they ignore the problem, it would only get worse - for who is going to willingly contribute to the government's coffers when his neighbours are getting away scot free? Or should they opt to prosecute, the burden just to feed and guard so many "parasites" -not to mention the lose of revenue- would be so great that the other four-fifths of the population would soon rebel. But in order to succeed, this type of action would require massive numbers. Isolated tax refusal -like isolated draft refusal- is a useless waste of resources. It is like trying to purify the salty ocean by dumping a cup of distilled water into it. The individualist-anarchist would no more advocate such sacrificial offerings than the violent revolutionary would advocate walking into his neighbourhood police station and "offing the pig." As he would tell you, "It is not wise warfare to throw your ammunition to the enemy unless you throw it from the cannon's mouth." Tucker agrees. Replying to a critic who felt otherwise he said, "Placed in a situation where, from the choice of one or the other horn of a dilemma, it must follow either that fools will think a man a coward or that wise men will think him a fool, I can conceive of no possible ground for hesitancy in the selection." [72]

There is a tendency among anarchists these days -particularly in the United States- to talk about "alternatives" and "parallel institutions". This is a healthy sign which individualists very much encourage. The best argument one can possibly present against "the system" is to DEMONSTRATE a better one. Some communist-anarchists (let it be said to their credit) are now trying to do just that. Communal farms, schools, etc. have been sprouting up all over the States. Individualists, of course, welcome these experiments - especially where they fulfill the needs of those involved and contribute to their happiness. But we can't help questioning the overall futility of such social landscape gardening. The vast majority of these experiments collapse in dismal failure within the first year or two, proving nothing but the difficulty of communal living. And should an isolated community manage to survive, their success could not be judged as conclusive since it would be said that their principles were applicable only to people well-nigh perfect. They might well be considered as the exceptions which proved the rule. If anarchy is to succeed to any appreciable extent, it has to be brought within the reach of everyone. I'm afraid that tepees in New Mexico don't satisfy that criterion.

The parallel institution I would like to see tried would be something called a "mutual bank".² The beauty of this proposal is that it can be carried out under the very nose of the man-in-the-street. I would hope that in this way people could see for themselves the practical advantages it has to offer them, and ultimately accept the plan as their own. I'm well aware that this scheme, like any other, is subject to the law of metamorphosis referred to earlier. But

² The reader can judge for himself the merits of this plan when I examine it in some detail later on in this article.

should this plan fail, unlike those plans which require bloody revolutions for their implementation, the only thing hurt would be the pride of a few hair-brained individualists.

REFERENCES

[70] S. E. Parker, "Letters", "Freedom," February 27, 1971.

[71] Tucker, "Instead of a Book," p. 413. Reprinted from "Liberty," October 4, 1884.

[72] Tucker, "Instead of a Book," p. 422. Reprinted from "Liberty," June 23, 1888.

Human rights and wrongs are not determined by Justice, but by Might.

—Ragnar Redbeard

Everyone who would be free must show his power

—Ibid