

non serviam #10

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Editor's Word:

Stirner is a philosopher who is easy to misunderstand, as Sidney Parker shows in his article "The Egoism of Max Stirner" below. One's first attention to Stirner very often comes from political or ideological motivations. And so, with the expectation of finding an author whose idea is a flaming insurrective rhetoric, one finds - just that. And if one is a critic, like Camus mentioned by Parker, or even a contemporary like Moses Hess [1], one is easily led to believe that Stirner is just advocating a new *idea* for which to live and breathe, a new Object which is supposed to be the new centre of one's attention, a new idea which is to be universalized and put in the service of a political ideology - the Ego. But if we read what he has written, we find, like in "The False Principle of Our Education" that his main focus is the discovery of the self as truly Subject, and not just an Object. In the False Principle Stirner makes the distinction between learning as an Object into whom knowledge is stuffed from without, and learning as a Subject acquiring knowledge for itself. In "Art and Religion" we find him speaking of the conception of [future] self set up as an Ideal: "Here lie all the sufferings and struggles of the centuries, for it is fearful to be *outside of oneself*, having yourself as an Object set over and against oneself able to annihilate itself and so oneself."

Further clues can be given in that Stirner speaks of himself as No-thing [2], "In the Unique One the owner himself returns to his creative nothing, of which he is born." No thing, neither as some kind of thought, nor as a percept, am I.[3] So, we conclude that Stirner's unnameable Unique One is the Subject.

Looking at the consequences of this, one sees that indeed we all are Subjects, actors who pursue this and that by our own creation. In this, we are egoists already. However, unless this is a condition of which we are conscious, it will do us little good, and we might as well follow this Ideal as that, in that we do not know ourselves from within, but only as "intimate objects".

The famous formula from Gal. 2.29, "Not I live, but Christ lives in me" is quoted and paraphrased by Stirner as the basic teaching of the possessed: "Not I live, but X lives in me." This is where Stirner's philosophy is of interest. For while Luther may say "Here I stand, I can do naught else!", Stirner teaches the liberation from fixed ideas in creating oneself each day anew.

As the quote at the end of this edition of the newsletter shows, this is also the way to finding a well of love that can be consumed with all one's selfish desire without ever going dry.

[1] Hess' criticism of Stirner boils down to "Ego[ism] is empty." But as is evident, Hess' criticism is of Ego as object, and he has not grasped the subtlety in Stirner's description of the Subject as no-thing. Thus Hess simply shows his lack of understanding.

[2] I am taking the liberty of utilizing the English language here.

[3] Notice the affinity with some of Buddhism's teachings. In the teaching of Buddha you are told to seek through the phenomena to see if you find the Self

there, a search that will ultimately end in failure. Stirner provides the positive side of this coin by providing the I as he who fails in this search.

The Egoism of Max Stirner

Sid Parker

(The following extracts are taken from my booklet entitled THE EGOISM OF MAX STIRNER: SOME CRITICAL BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES to be published by the Mackay Society of New York)

Albert Camus

Camus devotes a section of THE REBEL to Stirner. Despite a fairly accurate summarization of some of Stirner's ideas he nonetheless consigns him to dwelling in a desert of isolation and negation "drunk with destruction". Camus accuses Stirner of going "as far as he can in blasphemy" as if in some strange way an atheist like Stirner can "blaspheme" against something he does not believe in. He proclaims that Stirner is "intoxicated" with the "perspective" of "justifying" crime without mentioning that Stirner carefully distinguishes between the ordinary criminal and the "criminal" as violator of the "sacred". He brands Stirner as the direct ancestor of "terrorist anarchy" when in fact Stirner regards political terrorists as acting under the possession of a "spook". He furthermore misquotes Stirner by asserting that he "specifies" in relation to other human beings "kill them, do not martyr them" when in fact he writes "I can kill them, not torture them" - and this in relation to the moralist who both kills and tortures to serve the "concept of the 'good'".

Although throughout his book Camus is concerned to present "the rebel" as a preferred alternative to "the revolutionary" he nowhere acknowledges that this distinction is taken from the one that Stirner makes between "the revolutionary" and "the insurrectionist". That this should occur in a work whose purpose is a somewhat frantic attempt at rehabilitating "ethics" well illustrates Stirner's ironic statement that "the hard fist of morality treats the noble nature of egoism altogether without compassion."

Eugene Fleischmann

Academic treatment of Stirner is often obfuscating even when it is not downright hostile. A marked contrast is Fleischmann's essay STIRNER, MARX AND HEGEL which is included in the symposium HEGEL'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY. Clearly preferring Stirner to Marx, Fleischmann presents a straightforward account of his ideas unencumbered by "psychiatric" interpretations and *ad hominem* arguments. He correctly points out that the "human self" signifies for Stirner "the individual in all his indefinable, empirical concreteness. The word 'unique' [einzig] means for Stirner man as he is in his irreducible individuality, always different from his fellows, and always thrown back on himself in his dealings with them. Thus, when he talks of 'egoism' as the ultimate definition of the human 'essence' it is not at

all a question of a moral category but of a simple existential fact."

Fleischmann contends that "Marx and Engels' critique of Stirner is notoriously misleading. It is not just that ridicule of a man's person is not equivalent to refutation of his ideas, for the reader is also aware that the authors are not reacting at all to the problems raised by their adversary." Stirner is not simply "just another doctrinaire ideologue". His "reality is the world of his immediate experience" and he wants "to come into his own power now, not after some remote and hypothetical 'proletarian revolution'. Marx and Engels had nothing to offer the individual in the present: Stirner has."

In his conclusion Fleischmann states that Stirner's view that the individual "must find his entire satisfaction in his own life" is a reversion "to the resigned attitude of a simple mortal". This is not a serious criticism. If I cannot find satisfaction in my own life, where can I find it? Even if it is *my* satisfaction that I experience, any satisfaction that the other may have being something that he or she experiences - not *me*. If this constitutes being a "simple mortal" then so be it, but that it is a "resigned attitude" is another matter.

Benedict Lachmann & Herbert Stourzh

Lachmann's and Stourzh's TWO ESSAYS ON EGOISM provide a stimulating and instructive introduction to Stirner's ideas. Although both authors give a good summary of his egoism they differ sufficiently in their approach to allow the reader to enjoy adjudicating between them.

Lachmann's essay PROTAGORAS - NIETZSCHE - STIRNER traces the development of relativist thinking as exemplified in the three philosophers of its title. Protagoras is the originator of

relativism with his dictum "Man (the individual) is the measure of all things". This in turn is taken up by Stirner and Nietzsche. Of the two, however, Stirner is by far the most consistent and for this reason Lachmann places him after Nietzsche in his account. For him Stirner surpasses Nietzsche by bringing Protagorean relativism to its logical conclusion in conscious egoism - the fulfilment of one's own will.

In fact, he views Nietzsche as markedly inferior to Stirner both in respect to his style and the clarity of his thinking. "In contrast to Nietzsche's work," he writes, THE EGO AND ITS OWN "is written in a clear, precise form and language, though it avoids the pitfalls of a dry academic style. Its sharpness, clarity and passion make the book truly shattering and overwhelming." Unlike Nietzsche's, Stirner's philosophy does not lead to the replacement of one religious "spook" by another, the substitution of the "Superman" for the Christian "God". On the contrary, it makes "the individual's interests the centre of the world."

Intelligent, lucid and well-conceived, Lachmann's essay throws new light on Stirner's ideas.

Its companion essay, Stourzh's MAX STIRNER'S PHILOSOPHY OF THE EGO is evidently the work of a theist, but it is nonetheless sympathetic to Stirnerian egoism. Stourzh states that one of his aims in writing it "is beyond the categories of master and slave to foster an intellectual and spiritual stand-point different from the stand-point prescribed by the prophets of mass thinking, the dogmatists of socialism, who conceive of the individual only as an insignificant part of the whole, as a number or mere addenda of the group."

Stourzh draws a valuable distinction between the "imperative" approach of the moralist and the "indicative" approach of Stirner towards human behaviour. He also gives an informative outline of the critical reaction to Stirner of such philosophers as Ludwig Feuerbach, Kuno Fischer and Eduard von Hartman. Stourzh mars his interpretation, however, by making the nonsensical claim that Stirner's egoism "need in no sense mean the destruction of the divine mystery itself." And in line with his desire to preserve the "sacredness" of this "divine mystery" he at times patently seeks to "sweeten" Stirner by avoiding certain of his most challenging remarks.

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A Critique of Communism and The Individualist Alternative

Ken Knudson
(serial: 10)

MUTUALISM: THE ECONOMICS OF FREEDOM

There is perhaps no business which yields a profit so certain and liberal as the business of banking and exchange, and it is proper that it should be open as far as practicable to the most free competition and its advantages shared by all classes of people.

—Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, 1837

When it comes to economics, most anarchists reveal an ignorance verging on the indecent. For example, in the first piece of the first issue of the new "Anarchy" the California Libertarian Alliance talks in all seriousness of "Marx's 'labour theory of value', which causes communist

governments to repress homosexuals." [98] Now, passing over the fact that Adam Smith developed the principles of this theory long before Marx was even born, I can't for the life of me see what the labour theory of value has to do with the repression of homosexuals - be they communist, capitalist, or mercantilist. Kropotkin was no better; in his "Conquest of Bread" he shows a total lack of any economic sense, as he amply demonstrates by his rejection of the very foundation of any rational economic system: the division of labour. "A society that will satisfy the needs of all, and which will know how to organise production, will also have to make a clean sweep of several prejudices concerning industry, and first of all of the theory often preached by economists —The

Division of Labour Theory— which we are going to discuss in the next chapter....It is this horrible principle, so noxious to society, so brutalising to the individual, source of so much harm, that we propose to discuss in its divers manifestations." [99] He then fills the next two pages of perhaps the shortest chapter in history with a discussion of this theory "in its divers manifestations." In these few paragraphs he fancies himself as having overturned the economic thought of centuries and to have struck "a crushing blow at the theory of the division of labour which was supposed to be so sound." [100] Let's see just how sound it is.

Primitive man discovered two great advantages to social life. The first was man's ability to gain knowledge, not only through personal experience, but also through the experience of others. By learning from others, man was able to acquire knowledge which he could never have gained alone.

This knowledge was handed down from generation to generation - growing with each passing year, until today every individual has at his fingertips a wealth of information which took thousands of years to acquire. The second great advantage of social life was man's discovery of trade. By being able to exchange goods, man discovered that he was able to concentrate his efforts on a particular task at which he was especially good and/or which he especially liked. He could then trade the products of his labour for the products of the labour of others who specialised in other fields. This was found to be mutually beneficial to all concerned.

That the division of labour is beneficial when A produces one thing better than B and when B produces another thing better than A was obvious even to the caveman. Each produces that which he does best and

trades with the other to their mutual advantage. But what happens when A produces BOTH things better than B? David Ricardo answered this question when he expounded his law of association over 150 years ago. This law is best illustrated by a concrete example. Let us say that Jones can produce one pair of shoes in 3 hours compared to Smith's 5 hours. Also let us say that Jones can produce one bushel of wheat in 2 hours compared to Smith's 4 hours (cf. Table I). If each man is to work 120 hours, what is the most advantageous way of dividing up the work? Table II shows three cases: the two extremes where one man does only one job while the other man does the other, and the middle road where each man divides his time equally between jobs. It is clear from Table III that it is to the advantage of BOTH men that the most productive man should devote ALL of his energies to the job which he does best (relative to the other) while the least productive man concentrates his energies on the other job (case 3). It is interesting to note that in the reverse situation (case 1) —which is also the least productive case— the drop in productivity is only 6% for Jones (the best worker), while for Smith it's a whopping 11%. So the division of labour, while helping both men, tends to help the least productive worker more than his more efficient workmate - a fact which opponents of this idea should note well.

These figures show something which is pretty obvious intuitively. A skilled surgeon, after many years invested in schooling, internship, practice, etc., may find his time more productively spent in actually performing operations than in washing his surgical instruments in preparation for these operations. It would seem natural, then, for him to hire a medical student (say for 1 pound per hour) to do the washing up job while he does the operating (for say 3 pounds per hour).

Even if the surgeon could wash his own instruments twice as fast as the student, this division of labour would be profitable for all concerned.

TABLE I

PRODUCTIVITY RATES		
Time Necessary to Produce ...		
	A	B
Jones:	3	2
Smith:	5	4

TABLE II

PRODUCTIVITY UNDER DIVISION OF LABOUR				

A: Hours of Shoemaking				
B: Hours of Farming				
C: Shoes Produced				
D: Bushels of Wheat				
	A	B	C	D
Jones	120	0	40	0
Case 1 Smith	0	120	0	30
Total	120	120	40	30

Jones	60	60	20	30
Case 2 Smith	60	60	12	15
Total	120	120	32	45

Jones	0	120	0	60
Case 3 Smith	120	0	24	0
Total	120	120	24	60

TABLE III

TIME NECESSARY TO PRODUCE THE SAME AMOUNT OF GOODS WHILE WORKING ALONE (HOURS)		
	Jones	Smith
Case 1:	180 =120+60	320 =200+120
Case 2:	186 =96+90	340 =160+180
Case 3:	192 =72+120	360 =120+240

If the earth were a homogeneous sphere, equally endowed with natural resources at each and every point of its surface, and if each man were equally capable of performing every task as well as his neighbour, then the division of labour would have no ECONOMIC meaning. There would be no material advantage to letting someone else do for you what you could do equally well yourself. But the division of labour would have arisen just the same because of the variety of human tastes. It is a fact of human nature that not all people like doing the same things. Kropotkin may think this unfortunate, but I'm afraid that's the way human beings are built. And as long as this is the case, people are going to WANT to specialise their labour and trade their products with one another.

REFERENCES

- [98] "Libertarian Message to Gay Liberation," "Anarchy," February, 1971, p. 2.
- [99] Kropotkin, "Conquest of Bread," pp. 245 & 248.
- [100] Ibid., p. 250. & p. 184.