

THE EGOIST

CONTROVERSY: More On Archists, Anarchists And Egoists...

Comments From An Anarchist

Fritz R. Ward

I was not overly impressed with your article "Archists, Anarchists and Egoists" in the last issue of The Egoist. In using Clark's definition of anarchism, which I think applies only to those communists who also profess to be anarchists, I believe you have confused the issue. Anarchists do not assert (the somewhat confused quote by Mackay aside) that one must renounce domination and serve the god of non-invasion without question. They do, however, assert that in a social environment where liberty prevails, aggression will rarely be of any benefit. They also prefer anarchy because, to quote Tucker, "as a choice of blessings, liberty is the greater; as a choice of evils, liberty is the smaller." (Individual Liberty, p85. His essay Why I Am An Anarchist expresses a similar egoistical basis for anarchism).

In short, the opposition of individualist anarchism to "domination" is definitional, not religious¹. For example, Tucker believed that interest existed because of invasive laws which prohibited free contract. But, in an anarchist society² he wouldn't forbid anyone from taking interest above and beyond cost if he could get it. Tucker just didn't think the person would be able to get such returns if conditions of liberty prevailed. Also, consider along these lines, the more recent comments by anarcho-capitalist David Friedman. Friedman believes laws will be, with few possible exceptions, libertarian in an anarcho-capitalist society because the costs of aggression would outweigh the benefits. In blunt terms, your criteria for egoistical "domination", i.e., when one could "gain greater satisfaction from dominating than from not dominating" would simply not arise often enough to be statistically significant.

Although Tucker and others postulated such a society for the future, they certainly didn't feel that they should refrain from taking what few advantages the state offered. You already cited Robinson in this regard and you could have added that Tucker, for all his supposed "clerico-libertarianism", had no "moral" problem investing the money left to him by his mother in interest-bearing annuity shares. The same was true of Mackay. Obviously, none of the above anarchists considered such an "archistic" act "forbidden". Nor did such benefits which they attributed to archism prevent them from advocating anarchism (while remaining consistent egoists) since they believed that it would give greater benefits than they enjoyed under the State.

In the final analysis, anarchism as advocated by the individualists is not incompatible with egoism. While it might be possible to construct some sort of non-anarchistic framework for a social organization which may be compatible with egoism under some limited circumstances, I don't believe your essay does this³. Instead you place undue emphasis on certain phrases and neglect the fundamental ideas of individualist anarchism. Until you can suggest a realistic alternative to anarchism in which liberty is not the greater of benefits or the lesser of evils, I will remain an anarchist.

Along these lines, I think Marsden's comments that the anarchist acts like an archist in defending his freedom, avoids coming to grips with the definition of the State as institutionalized aggression. The defensive and aggressive use of force are not the same thing. And, again, this is a question of definition, not morality. To accuse the post-revolution anarchist of acting like an archist is a misleading use of terms...

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

1 I am excepting, of course, such natural rights anarchists as Spooner and Rothbard.

2 When I use the term "society" here I am not speaking of some entity above the individual. I merely use it as a convenient term meant to imply all the individuals living in a given region.

3 I suspect that de Sade, in Philosophy in the Bedroom, tried to do so but the result was an inadequate egoism as well as a non-anarchist, if somewhat libertine, form of social organization.

In Reply To Ward

S. E. Parker

Mr. Ward claims that Clark's definition of anarchism as "non-domination" is only applicable to "those communists who also profess to be anarchists". This is not the case. K.H.Z. Solneman, a disciple of John Henry Mackay and hence well within the Tuckerian tradition, writes in his book The Manifesto of Peace and Freedom (Mackay-Gesellschaft 1933) that "the standard of whether someone is really an anarchist or not lies in whether he renounces domination over others or not" (p180) and defines anarchy as "a state of non-domination" (p IX). I have not, therefore, confused the issue. Indeed, since Mr. Ward himself goes on to argue that the opposition of "individualist anarchism" to domination is "definitional", this can only mean that any attempt to dominate others is, by definition, an anti-anarchist act. When Tucker and Mackay invested their money in interest-bearing annuities they certainly showed good sense but at the expense of their anarchist consistency since they were looking to the domination of the State to maintain the system which provided them with their incomes. Such behaviour is quite in accord with pursuing one's own interests, but it is hardly something that will help to "starve" the State out of existence in order to make way for the anarchist society.

Mr Ward believes that when the Tuckerian version of anarchy is established acts of "egoistical" domination "would simply not arise often enough to be statistically significant". How does he know they would not? Since no has ever seen such a system in operation what he affirms about is merely a statement of faith. The theories of Tucker regarding what anarchism would be like in practice, like those of the anarchist communists, are not based on any empirical evidence. This is shown in Tucker's essay Why I Am An Anarchist to which Mr. Ward refers. Here the reader is regaled with such claims as

"no prospect can be positively alluring that does not promise both requisites of happiness – liberty and wealth. Now, Anarchism does promise both. In fact, it promises the second as the result of the first, and happiness as the result of both... Abolish the tarriffs, issue no patents, take down the bars from unoccupied land, and labour will straightway rush in and take possession of its own. Then mankind will live in freedom and in comfort."

Having made these rosy promises, however, Tucker has to admit that he cannot prove his case, yet he seeks to wriggle out of the problems this poses by claiming that it "cannot be dismissed by plain denial" in plain disregard of the fact that it is up to him to prove his affirmations not for the denier to "disprove" them.

At the bottom of Tucker's doctrine lies the democratic delusion that each and every individual (the insane excepted) can and should take an equal part in determining human affairs. He believed that everyone was potentially capable of exercising "the sovereignty of the individual" and that, furthermore, their self-interest would lead them to accept his particular brand of social salvation. Despite his admiration for Max Stirner he was a possessed man – possessed by the fixed idea that he had the answer to the "social question"⁴. His egoism was pressed into the service of an ideal which neutered it.

Mr Ward's distinction, derived from Tucker, between the "aggressive and defensive use of force", does not impress me. What is defensive and what is aggressive is more a matter of position than anything else. If I judge that I can benefit myself by "invading" the "equal liberty" of another then it does not matter how many copies of Instead Of A Book are held up before my sacreligious eyes. If I am competent enough to "invade" I do so – and enjoy the prize! Tucker's ideological blinkers prevented him from seeing that the logic of conscious ego(ism) bursts the strait jacket of anarchism.

As for for Ward's challenge to me to "construct" a non-anarchist "social framework" based on egoism, I long ago gave up indulging in hypothetical social engineering. I am not about to begin again.

The Difference Between Archism And Egoism

Alan Koontz

While you make a distinction between anarchism and egoism, you didn't make one between archism and egoism. Indeed, it appeared to be your point that there was no difference between archism and egoism and therein lay the difference between egoism and anarchism. I beg to differ with you on this point insofar as I perceive a difference between archism and egoism.

It is implied in the article that the State is simply a condition of domination. An individual or group dominates another group. This definition is, however, incomplete for it leaves out that which makes it static.

⁴ It is interesting to note, however, that, according to his daughter Oriole, at the end of his life Tucker no longer believed that anarchism would work. (See Benjamin R. Tucker And The Champions Of Liberty. 1986. Page 26)

The State is in fact the condition of domination wherein only a certain individual or group is permitted to dominate another group. The authority to dominate resides in a portion of the population over which the State reigns. The remainder of the population lacks such authority and indeed must renounce all desire to dominate (in the spirit of anarchism, no less).

The difference between the State and simple archy is that the former is tied to a concept while the latter is not. That concept is the authority to use force or impose one's will on another – i. e., to dominate. The reign of the State depends on the reign of this concept.

State depends on the reign of this concept. The reason the egoist and the State are incompatible is that the former is the ruler of all concepts: including the concept on which the State depends. As far as the egoist is concerned, no one is authorized to dominate another. One possibly has the power to dominate another i.e. the former possesses some sort of advantage over the latter – but no one has the authority. The egoist has no compunction about dominating another “if this is in his interest”. Nor is the egoist offended by domination as such. What the egoist doesn't recognize is anyone's exclusive authority to dominate another. This calls for renunciation on the part of the other even if it is not in his interest. Such authority is antagonistic to egoism.

The difference between the archist and the egoist is that the former could be possessed by the exclusive authority to dominate others whereas the latter could never be, even though neither is ever “bound by any demand for the renunciation of domination”. The archist thus could dominate not because it is in his interest, but simply because he is authorized to do so. That wouldn't be egoistic.

In Reply To Koontz

S. E. Parker

I am no believer in the authority of the State. In the essay from which I quoted Dora Marsden draws a distinction between “archistic” and “archonistic”. The first she defines as “any kind of initiatory action, any kind of ‘setting to’ of the living unit to the task of dominating the conditions which lie between it and the goal of its desire.”

The second she defines as relating to “the highest State magistrate” (the Archon) – i. e. the political ruler. In her use of the term “archism” therefore it is quite compatible with egoism, but “archonism”, insofar as it involves for its exercise a belief in authority, is not. Nonetheless, I can see no sound egoistic reason why an egoist should not assume the mantle of an authority towards others if it facilitates any act of domination he wishes to carry out and is competent to achieve. Of course, if there are egoists among these others they will not be taken in by this authority but will simply estimate how powerful the dominator is when deciding how to deal with him. Conscious egoism does not mean that I must necessarily expect all other egoists to be my allies. They may be the opposite.

THE COST OF RUNNING AMOK WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE STATE

Alan Koontz

There are those who contend that without the State the peepul would run amok; they would be at each other's throats, invariably, trying to satisfy their individual needs or desires. What is it about the State that is supposed to prevent this from happening?

The primary feature of all States is the concept of Law in the minds of individuals. Law is meant to be a regulating force in human interaction. Presumably, the individual cannot make a decision about what action to take without consulting the Law. Each State has with it a regulatory or governmental apparatus to apply force in the name of the Law. However, in no case is the State physically capable of regulating every individual action. Indeed, for the most part individuals are depended upon to, presumably, follow the letter of the Law with only the threat of intervention by the government. The State is this condition of “voluntary” obedience to or obsession with the Law.

At first glance, it would seem that the thing about the State that keeps people from running amok is the concept of Law. On closer examination, however, one will find that the thing which keeps people from running amok is the relatively high cost of running amok. In all praxeological decision-making, the higher the cost of particular action the less likely the individual will take that action. The individual, as a rule, tends to follow the least-cost operation.

How do we know that the cost of running amok is relatively high? It is established as a scientific fact that no individual likes to be victimized; i. e., have his boundary violated against his will (see the late Robert LeFevre's essay, Natural Rights, in New Libertarian 15). Furthermore, we know that people, generally speaking, are capable of violating boundaries, one

way or another. What cannot be predicted is how someone will react to victimization. However, one may reasonably expect that the risk of a person's own victimization is relatively higher in cases where that person victimizes another. That is to say, an action which tends to victimize someone tends to be a higher cost operation than one that doesn't. Moreover, since the livelihood of each individual is more dependent on others, the greater the division of labour, the cost of victimization tends to be higher due just to the correspondingly higher losses each individual experiences as a result; including, of course, the victimizer.

The original question now becomes: How is the cost of running amok affected by the existence of the State? To the extent that the State through its governmental apparatus is able to contribute to the relatively high cost of running amok one may see a connection. However, the State is not really an essential feature of the scheme. In fact, it tends to disrupt the natural operation of the scheme by actually lowering the cost of running amok to next to nothing for certain people; viz., the governmental functionaries. On the other hand, there are the functionaries who have the Authority to violate people's boundaries in the name of the Law. On the other, there are potential victims of governmental functionaries who are bound by the Law not to victimize the functionaries. The cost of victimization for the governmental functionary is, therefore, virtually zero! The net effect is the large-scale victimization which the State alone enables certain people to get away with. This net effect is indeed the tendency within ALL States since, on the one hand, its functionaries are obsessed with enforcing the letter of the Law, regardless of the consequences to their own welfare, and on the other, the incentive for individuals or groups to take advantage of the relatively low cost of victimization is always present. The most significant contribution to this tendency, however, is that of the victims of governments who are actually, as a group, more powerful than the total governmental apparatus, but are hamstrung by the obsession which is, in the final analysis, the State itself.

So, the cost of running amok within the State is lower some than it is for all others. The net effect is large-scale victimization on the part of those naturally undertaking the least-cost operation. Without the State, the cost of running amok is generally the same for each individual. All each individual knows for sure, in this case, is that the cost of running amok is relatively high. The net effect is the general tendency to follow the least-cost operation, as in the former case, but with relatively few running amok.

June 1986

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

BOOK REVIEWS

The Centenary of Liberty

Stephen Marletta

(Benjamin Tucker and the Champions of Liberty. A centenary anthology edited by Michael E. Coughlin, Charles H. Hamilton, and Mark Sullivan. Michael E. Coughlin, 1985 Selby Avenue, St Paul, MN 55104, USA. Hardback \$15.00.)

Away back in my Malatesta/Bakunin period, before I became absorbed in Stirner, Benjamin Tucker became, for a time, the writer who appealed to me most. Hence my added interest in this book's appearance. It has seventeen contributions. To mention a few:

The introduction by Charles H. Hamilton in which he points out that Tucker, besides being a publisher of what was best in radical and anarchist thought, was a brilliant controversialist. The blooming forth of these interests enrich the pages of the anthology.

Paul Avrich's interview with Oriole, the daughter of Tucker, gives us an insight into the other side of the man.

Wendy McElroy gives us the non-economic debates in Liberty. A section of her article describing the debate on egoism – among the participants being James L. Walker – and the impact Stirner had is the one to enjoy.

The joint labours of Mildred J Loomis and Mark A Sullivan bring us into contact with another giant, Laurance Labadie.

Soshanna Edwards deals with "Benj R Tucker and G. Bernard" – a debate concerning "State Socialism". Tucker, who was seldom cordial towards his critics, said of Shaw "after the buffoonery of 'The Workmen's Advocate' and the superficiality of 'Der Sozialist', it is pleasant to be criticized by a man of brain and wit."

"The New Freewoman: Dora Marsden and Benj. Tucker" by S. E. Parker gives an interesting account of another debate. Dora Marsden, who was equally brilliant, proves to be more than a match for Tucker.

There are also articles on economics, free banking and property – enough to whet the appetite for the enthusiast.

Natural Law Egoist

(Natural Law or Don't Put A Rubber On Your Willy. By Robert Anton Wilson. Loompanics Unlimited, PO Box 1197, Port Townsend, WA 98368, USA. \$5.95)

Robert Anton Wilson's new booklet is an appropriately savage attack on the "natural law" doctrines of certain "libertarian" pundits – in particular Murray Rothbard, George H. Smith and Samuel Konkin III – and is an extended version of an essay he contributed to the controversy on this question in *The New Libertarian* in 1985. Wilson convincingly distinguishes between "natural law" as a scientific description of phenomena and "natural law" as a prescriptive ideal of behaviour. The first he accepts, the second he dismisses with scorching contempt.

When Wilson is analysing the absurdities of the natural law theorists, their vagaries, their intellectual roots in Platonic hocus pocus and Medieval Catholic dogma, he is excellent. In his remarks on Max Stirner, however, he claims that the reason for Stirner rejecting morality is because "morality is a human invention". He gives no evidence for this claim, which is not surprising since Stirner does not reject morality on this ground. Wilson's wish to retain morality, despite his brilliant demolition of the case for natural law, shows that he is still "spooked".

LETTER

Sir,

In issue No. 8 of your publication Francis Ellingham states that human beings have various opposing desires and lists wealth, social approval, power, friendship, companionship and fame as examples of these. He then goes on to state that all these are forms of one fundamental desire: the desire for pleasure – which is based on an even more fundamental desire: to escape from the void ("an aching sense of emptiness, isolation, loneliness, frustration, inadequacy" which is created when the desire for pleasure is blocked!)

Mr Ellingham might possibly have avoided reasoning himself into a cul-de-sac if he had first consulted Nuttall's Standard Dictionary of the English Language where he would have seen that "pleasure" can be defined as "what the will dictates or desires... arbitrary will or choice", or The Everyman's Dictionary: "will, choice", or James L Walker's The Philosophy of Egoism: "*Philosophically 'pleasure' stands for sovereignty – is used in contradistinction to servitude*".

Seen from this angle the various opposing desires which are troubling Mr. Ellingham are all forms of the universal desire or drive for power (or, more fundamentally, self-unity) and this is as strong as the corresponding desire to escape from, or overcome feelings of, self-division, vulnerability and powerlessness.

The chief difficulty that we all face is the fact that self-unity is not to be achieved through the most accessible forms of escape, those of group unity and group identity, even though they may represent one of the stages along the way.

Being ingenious we have evolved at least three main strategies for coping with this dilemma.

The majority of us sense that the odds are stacked against us and retreat quite early on in life into the pseudo-emotional omnipotence of infancy, with a little help from alcohol, cigarettes, promiscuous sex, simplistic religion and morality of the News of the World – Sun – Daily Mirror variety.

The middle and next largest group often identify with a simplistic political ideology (which will solve the problems of the whole of society...) and their letters on this theme are found in the pages of *The Guardian*. People in this category often favour "radical" violence and destruction which they believe will draw attention to their deep-seated wish for "unity".

The smallest group follow their own individual creative drives in the arts of writing, painting, sculpting, music, philosophy, science, industry, and philanthropy, although they are, of course, not above falling into one or both of the above categories.

Yours, etc.,

J. Gillard

Llandudno.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Nothing is more fearsome than the man who is prepared to crucify you to establish a world without pain.

Brian Walden

Out Of The Mouths Of Vicars And Sucklings – The Reverend Cook on the Radio 4 Today God Slot:

“We are all so hopelessly selfish and self-centred that we cannot serve others for their sakes as there is not much in it for us. But perhaps we could do it for the sake of the Christian Church and for Jesus’ sake... The slave or servant is the most virtuous position.”

The least conscious egoists are those who claim to act on behalf of others.

Anon.