

THE EGOIST

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MARX versus STIRNER

Notes Towards A Critique Of *The German Ideology* by Marx/Engels

Frank Jordan

Page 129: "Since St Max pays no attention to the physical and social 'life' of the individual, he quite consistently abstracts from historical epochs, nationalities, classes, etc..."

Stirner, on the contrary, pays a great deal of attention to the physical and social 'life' of the individual. He only 'abstracts' from historical epochs etc., to point out that the individual – i.e. the conscious egoist – can make use of the "physical and social life" for himself and not be manipulated by these external forces as has happened countless times in the past.

Page 143: "Incidentally... he ought to have merged the Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics in the Neo-Platonist... Instead of that, he merges these doctrines directly into Christianity."

Marx and Engels are 'tailoring' the facts. Early Christianity, notably in the figure of St. Augustine, was greatly influenced by Neo-Platonism, so Stirner only, as it were, moved a step forward in his criticism. Why concentrate on Neo-Platonism when the dominant ideology was Christianity? Christianity encompassed in its folds the previous "isms" through the teachings of the early Church Fathers.

Page 180: "St. Max... declares that, although it is easy to become emancipated from the domination of one's own family, nevertheless, 'refusal of allegiance easily arouses pangs of conscience', and so people retain family affections, the concept of the family, and therefore have the 'holy conception of the family', the 'holy'."

Marx/Engels say the bourgeoisie are to blame for the concept of the family and that the proletariat can actually abolish the family. Rubbish! Stirner was, and is, psychologically here, as elsewhere, much more profound than Marx. It is not only class or property relations, but a whole group of "spooks" that hold together the nuclear family as a fixed idea – which is more insidious than any simple material conditioning.

Page 224: "The worker in the pin factory performs only one piece of work, only plays into the hand of another and is used, exploited by that other."

Marx/Engels use this quote from Stirner to back up a most spurious interpretation. One page 225 they continue: "Thus, here Stirner makes the discovery that the workers in a factory exploit one another, since they 'play into the hands' one another; whereas the factory-owner, whose hands do not work at all, cannot, therefore, exploit the workers."

I may be wrong, but my reading of this Stirner quote in Byington's translation, implies just the opposite. It is the employer, into whose hands the worker has played, who is being condemned. I do not think that Stirner's criticism is being directed at the worker, although I stand open to correction on this point.

Page 247: "The communists do not preach morality at all, as Stirner does so extensively. They do not put to people the moral demand: love one another, do not be egoists etc., on the contrary they are very well aware that egoism, just as much as selfless-ness, is in definite circumstances a necessary form of the self-assertion of individuals."

What nonsense! The basic ideology of Marxist communism, from the ethos of The Party to the ideals of the Proletarian Revolution, is soaked in moralic acid. This is what makes communism such a powerful, quasi-religious movement, and woe unto any heretics or self-asserting individuals! I think that events in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland, over the last half century, has confirmed this last point most tragically.

As for Stirner preaching morality even a cursory reading of *Der Einzige* shows that Stirner, as a conscious egoist, condemns morality as being just another "spook". Likewise he would have presumably condemned immorality on the same grounds. Logically one can only be immoral if the premise of morality is first accepted as something to rebel against. I would describe Stirner as amoral if one must try to pin a label on him.

Page 323: "But in reality the proletarians arrive at this unity only through a long process of development... a means of making them take shape as 'they', as a revolutionary united mass."

Here we have an early example of the famous Marxist "historical necessity" interpretation of events which Marx conveniently lifted from his mentor, Hegel, to prop up his own philosophy. In actuality all Marx/Engels have done is to replace the Judeo-Christian idea of the "saviour" leading the Chosen People into the Promised Land with a modern variant: the Proletarian Revolution bring about the Communist Society. There is basically no difference.

Page 393: "He (Stirner) thinks that no one can compose your music for you, complete the sketches for you paintings. No one can do Raphael's works for him... it was not Mozart himself, but someone else who composed the greater part of Mozart's *Requiem* and finished it, and Raphael himself 'completed' only an insignificant part of his own frescoes."

I find this section of *The German Ideology*, especially the part about Mozart, the most absurd and obnoxious of the whole book. Marx/Engels, in saying that Mozart's *Requiem* was finished by someone else, are using an extremely weak peg on which to hang their argument. What about the superb operas, symphonies, concertos, et al, that came from the fertile mind of Mozart's genius? Their stupid, infantile example can hardly be representative of the works of this outstanding musical genius. I dearly love Mozart's music and, seeing that Stirner never mentions him, I cannot see why Marx/Engels mention him, albeit in a most despical way, to bolster their argument.

Exactly the same criticism applies to their use of Raphael. Raphael mastered all aspects of painting and, although some of his later frescoes were completed by his assistants, due to pressure of work, no one but Raphael was responsible for painting *The School of Athens*, *Disputa*, *The Cartoons* etc., the two masterpieces first mentioned being frescoes in the Stanza della Segnatura of the Vatican Palace.

Marx and Engels are, in this section of their book, showing their bigotry and ignorance for what it is.

Page 438: "The transformation of individual relationship... (Page 439) within communist society, the only society in which the genuine and free development of individuals ceases to be a mere phrase..."

This whole section contains countless contradictions. While Marx/Engels have tried, unsuccessfully, to dispose of Stirner's "unique one", now they try to support individuality as it would supposedly exist under an ideal, communist society which is a patent contradiction. Communism, like all ideologies, by its very nature reduces its adherents to the level of anonymous cyphers in an amorphous group – the modern counterpart of the Pauline "Body of Christ".

Conclusion: I find the Marxist critique of Stirner's so-called "Hegelian" concept of history rather ironic. Whilst it is true that Stirner implies that ideas (spooks) have been the motivating force in history, it is actually Marx who gives the Hegelian interpretation. He turns Hegel on his head by stating that historical necessity and dialectical materialism are the true view of events. So all Marx has done is replace one "Geist" with another making the material/economic interpretation his fundamental idea rather than Hegel's "Resort". I think that recent events in Soviet countries refute Marxist determinism once and for all.

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Not truth, but error has always been the chief factor in the evolution of nations, and the reason why socialism is so powerful today is that it constitutes the last illusion that is still vital.

Gustave Le Bon

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Book Review

A "REACTIONARY" UTOPIA

S.E.Parker

(*The Resurrection of Aristocracy* by Rudolph Carlyle Evans. Loompanics Unlimited 1988. Price \$12.95)

The Resurrection of Aristocracy is a prophetic attempt at delineating a coming utopia. It will not be a utopia of equality, freedom and universal brotherhood – the kind which has been assiduously peddled for thousands of years by a variety of political and religious seers. Mr. Evan's utopia is frankly "reactionary". In it the masses know their place – which is at the bottom of a social pyramid ruled by a new aristocracy composed of warriors who have won their dominance by means of their military ability and ardour. Modern industrial society will have been abolished and rural romanticism will reign. There will be no birth control, surplus population being killed off by warfare and an absence of any welfare facilities. Sex before marriage will be taboo, women will be shy, tender and sympathetic and their place firmly in the home. Not only this, but the common people will be "unselfish" and the nobility "will regularly consume wine to

the point of stupefaction without any ill effect". In short, all human beings will be a violent, healthy ("herbal medicine will return to prominence"), thoroughly moralized lot whose lives will be lived in the way Mr. Evans dreams should be. It is a utopia to make feminists furious, socialists scream and sceptics like myself smile incredulously.

I have written "dreams" advisedly because despite all the author's disdain for the present age's neglect of unpleasant realities his proposed utopia is merely a compensatory dream whose connection with these realities I find it difficult to discern. This comes out most clearly when he deals with how his ideal world will be achieved. Here he retreats into vagueness and apocalyptic fantasy. He offers no cogent evidence anywhere in his book to show that the sudden catastrophe he claims is coming is coming nor does he show how, if it does come, it will result in the ideal society he desires. What he presents is simply a modern version of the second coming of a saviour resting on nothing more than an expression of faith.

Like Mr. Evans I have no liking for the democratic and egalitarian myths to which so much lip service is given today. I do not deny, nor do I denounce, the existence of dissonances, divisions, distances, unequal abilities and functioning hierarchies, but I deal with the realities of power as they are and do not fantasize them away by assuming that a never-never land of refurbished feudalism will replace them. I find it strange that people such as he, who profess a tough-minded attitude to human affairs, can still fall into trap of utopian dreaming.

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LETTER

I regarded your article on me (Race and Ego No 10) as altogether fair and something I had anticipated. I only want to make the general observation that I am not alone in doing metaphysics; you too are forced onto a metaphysical level. No idea is more philosophically abstruse than the ego.

That is, there is no idea more concrete or intuitively certain than that I exist – I am more certain of that than even that there is a world "out there". On the other hand, when I start trying to prove or in any sense relate to the idea that there is a person S.E. Parker, and to prove that idea absolutely, I immediately get into metaphysics. I cannot prove your existence, nor can I prove your ethical worth – why you should be – or why for that matter there is any point writing you or reading *The Egoist*. We cannot communicate except by descending or ascending (as the case may be) to a metaphysical level.

I think what I'm trying to do is to distinguish two ideas of the ego:

1. The ego as self-consciousness.
2. The ego as self-assertion.

Self-consciousness cannot pass beyond the individual; when I am asleep there is no me. On the other hand, my self-assertion can be passed through my genes and can be possessed by a large group, which I call an ego group.

What is the other explanation for race? It could only be that race is somehow a "moral" entity, that it "should" exist. I know of no convincing moral explanation or justification for or of race. Mussolini said it all; things will be this or that way because I will it.

These are some speculations. Again, thanks for the (altogether fair) account of my viewpoint.

Richard Swartzbaugh

(I have said, for the moment, all I want to say on the subject of "race and ego". As for Mussolini, if by "will" he meant actually the "power to accomplish" then he was correct. But his "will" was not the unlimited will that is implied in his statement. When he was executed by communist partisans their combined wills proved greater than his will. He may have willed things to be otherwise, but his end showed that he was of distinctly limited will. The egoist conception of will is not a Nietzschean one. SEP)

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"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them" might be good sense in a world where all men were alike, possessed of identical needs, desires and tastes. If anyone thinks it applicable in a world of individualities, let him try it out in his daily living. If he attempts to apply it literally, he will speedily discover the arrogance of the assumption that other men are like himself, that what pleases him will be acceptable to them. If he endeavours to disregard the letter but carry out the spirit of it, he will soon be engulfed in the fathomless task of determining what others, actuated by the Golden Rule, would do unto him with a view of having him do so even unto them! And at the best it is not so practical as the familiar "Put yourself in his place". Good suggestions, both of them, but as adequate rules of conduct, such as the Golden Rule is on every hand assumed to be – childish, utterly childish!

Adeline Champney

A REPLY

Francis Ellingham

John Gillard (issue 9) misunderstands my letter in no 8. My fault, perhaps, but I did not write of a void being *created* when the desire for pleasure is blocked. I wrote of a (pre-existing) void opening up.

That void—an awareness of being nothing – is always at the back of our consciousness. But we won't face it: we try to cover it up, by pursuing pleasure. When that pursuit is blocked, pain arises – bitterness, anger, boredom, loneliness, etc. which indicates the uncovering or *opening up* of the void.

By the word "pleasure" I mean "gratification" one of the primary meanings in *The Oxford English Dictionary*. I know that "pleasure" can mean "one's will, desire, choice" (its second meaning in the OED), but is that relevant? Mr. Gillard seems to confuse those two quite distinct meanings of "pleasure", and thus to equate the desire for pleasure (as gratification) with the desire for power – the ability to carry out one's pleasure (as will). But surely the desire for power is merely one form of the desire for gratification: to exercise power is gratifying, which is why we want it.

Mr. Gillard seems to regard the desire for pleasure as being "more fundamentally" the desire for self-unity. But that desire, surely, is just a reaction to the pain of self-division – the conflict between opposing forms of the desire for gratification. It is itself one of those opposing forms. Therefore it only increases the conflict and perpetuates the division.

So, is there *any* "strategy" for achieving self-unity? Who will be the strategist, if not the already disunited self? More clearly: the inventor and director of the strategy will be just one fragment of our divided consciousness, one form of desire. A fragment will never bring about unity. People who lose themselves in "creative art" are just as blind to that fact as those whose ways of covering up the void are less respectable.

Self-division can end, I am suggesting, only when we face the void. We do that naturally when the brain, seeing the futility of trying to cover it up, says to itself: "I'll just look at this thing, and find out what it is". The brain is then aware of it, and of the urge to cover it up, but without a "strategy", without effort, without any movement of thought. Then we know no division.

COMMENT

John Gillard

It seems to me that Mr. Ellingham is indulging in a petty quibble over the use of the word "created". It is evident that I did not use "created" in the literal sense, but in the popular sense such as "I was late for work this morning because an engine breakdown created a delay".

He argues that "it is useless to make any effort to get rid of self-division" (first letter). Then he says (second letter) that "self-division can end...only when we face the void... when the brain... says to itself: 'I'll just look at this thing and find out what it is.'". He claims that this can be done "without any effort, without any movement of thought". But *facing* and *looking* demand *effort*, the effort of *focussing*. It is, therefore, wrong to say no effort is needed. Although he claims that "a fragment will never bring about unity", it is to this "fragment" that he looks to make the effort of non-effort.

Again, his writing a letter and expecting to convince reader of the validity of his case by so doing, requires not only "Movement of thought" on his part, but on the part of the reader as well. So, in order to accept the position of non-effort which will end self-division effort is required from both him and his readers. "Non-effort" is, in fact, nonsense since we are only alive because of the effort, the exertion of our forces, that we make, whether consciously or unconsciously. To cease making an effort is to die.

Mr Ellingham is, however, quite right when he writes to exercise power is gratifying, which is why we want it. The power-pleasure drive is *inseparable from us* and individual happiness or unity is dependent upon how well we understand and act upon this fact.

I also think that it is true that an awareness, however dim this may be, of vulnerability and powerlessness in the face of our instinctual drive to excel and/or dominate can be experienced as a "void". And this is why people become addicted to the feelings of pseudo-omnipotence that recourse to alcohol, drugs, sex, war, being constantly on the move, spectator sports, fame, riches, commercial, political, religious, artistic and psychiatric allegiance can create.

Mr Ellingham is, however, mistaken when he suggests that the solution to this often intractable dilemma is simply to do nothing, to make no effort, for this is just another ruse of the relatively powerless. The answer is to carry on in the world, making mistakes, testing out your personal convictions and aspirations against those of others. You will often be bitterly disappointed, but you could eventually gain something that is equal to approval from other people

– self-knowledge. Once you start to acquire this you have a foot on the path to self-unity, real power instead of the false power of “non-action” or the frantic pursuit of external sources of power.

As for people who attempt to lose themselves in creative art, I was not discussing those who attempt to lose themselves in anything, but those who are interested first and foremost in being themselves. By expressing their creative drives in writing, science, philosophy and so forth they may become more self-aware and unified.

In conclusion I would like to add that I am indeed indebted to Mr. Ellingham for presenting me with this opportunity to clarify my thinking on these important issues.

(This controversy is now closed. Editor)

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DEATHS

Stephen Marletta

My old friend and collaborator, Stephen Marletta, died at his home in Glasgow, Scotland, on January 26th 1989. He was 81 years of age. Stephen had been a generous supporter of, and an occasional contributor to, Minus One, Ego and The Egoist for over 25 years. On the day of his death he wrote me a typically lively letter which he gave to his nephew to post for him.

William J. Boyer

News has come of the death a year ago of Bill Boyer who lived Thoreau fashion in the woods of Wisconsin, USA. He and I had some rumbustious debates by letter in the past, leading to my breaking off contact with him at one period, but as we grew older we ended up exchanging friendly letters on our birthdays which were on the same day of the same month.

I will be writing in more detail about these two egoist “old guard” in the next issue.

S.E.P.

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NOTES AND NOTIONS

S.E. Parker

I have recently published in leaflet form a new edition of John Beverley Robinson’s classic essay on Egoism. It is suitable for photocopying (A4 folded into A5) and an excellent introduction for anyone interested in the egoist philosophy. Readers can obtain a copy by sending an A5 size stamped and addressed envelope to me at the address on page [5]. Overseas readers should send an addressed A5 envelope together with an international postal reply coupon.

The September 1988 issue of Heraclitus, an Australian journal published by “some Sydney libertarians, Pluralists and Critical Drinkers”, contains a good article on Max Stirner by my old “comrade in arms” of the sixties Dave Miller. Copies can be obtained from Heraclitus, PO Box 54, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010, Australia. There is no price, but a donation would no doubt be appreciated.

The Scorpion is a magazine ritually denounced as “neo-Nazi” by sensitive souls, despite the fact that it often publishes articles critical of national socialism. In the latest issue “Loki”, in his regular column, hilariously comments on those “nationalists” whose intelligence disintegrates when the question of “race” is raised. I have many disagreements with the philosophical position of The Scorpion, but I find it one of the more interesting of contemporary publications. The current issue, No 12, costs £1.60 from The Scorpion Press, Schellweider Str 50, 500 - Koln - 80, West Germany.

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Most people feel more comfortable with a planetary than with a solar view of life. Always to receive light, warmth and motion from elsewhere, and in conjunction with others, is easier than being oneself light warmth and motion.

Herbert Stourzh

The saying that no age ever knows its truly great men has no doubt afforded consolation not only to the neglected few, but also to the host of lesser beings who find in this maxim a convenient excuse for their own obscurity. It is nevertheless a true saying...freedom for all (if only theoretical freedom) means inevitable restriction for the few, who may have something to say, but cannot make themselves audible amid the myriad-throated crowd. Where everyone gets a hearing, no one is heard.

Oscar Levy