

non serviam #1

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Editor's Word

This is the first "real" issue of *non serviam*, and the present theme, as will also be the theme of the next issue, #2, is as presented in #0:

By asserting oneself - by insurrection - one is an egoist, one who puts himself first.

For the next issue of *non serviam*, #2, I would therefore appreciate articles about "what egoism means" in general. Both questions of the type "is hedonism the real egoism", and articles pondering the status of egoism in ethics are appreciated. Psychological angles of attack are also appreciated.

Dissenting from this theme, I have a long and well-written article by Ken Knudson which I intend to publish in full. Given the length of it, it will be sent as a serial. It will also be available on the ftp site in not too long a time. I have, on the version here, left the page numberings for easier access to footnotes.

What is Selfishness?

Svein Olav Nyberg

I asked about "what egoism means". I should perhaps also have asked what egoism does *not* mean. For there are a lot of misconceptions about what egoism is. Religious literature incessantly warns us not to think about our own best interest, but the interest of the heavenly, of Man, and of just about everything else. But seldom is there found any advise to follow exactly this own interest. Why then these warnings against self interest, on and on, again and again? Surely not to counter any opposing system of ideas. For there have been close to none. What then is left to counter but - the individual himself! But to counter the individual is not a position that looks very good, so it has to be disguised, disguised as an attack on some "Deep Evil" lurking in self interest - in egoism. So the common view of egoism is far from formed by

observation of actual egoists, but by propaganda in its disfavour. I therefore find it fruitful to list what I consider the types most typically mistaken for egoists, both by critics of egoism and by "egoists" themselves:

THE PSYCHOPATH: The psychopath is characterised by a tendency of always being in the right and of manipulating others. He typically takes little heed of the interests of people he confronts. The reasoning displayed by those who identify psychopaths with egoists are usually of the type "He does not care for others - *thus* he must care only for himself ...", which sets up a dichotomy without any basis in reality. Identifying an individual pursuing his own interests with a psychopath is a powerful means of keeping individuals "in line".

THE EGO-BOOSTER: Somewhat related to the psychopath, in that he tries to make himself "big" in the eyes of others often at the expense of some third person. But the Ego-Booster cares a lot about the judgement of others. In fact - he depends on it. Getting approval from other people dominates his way of life. His focus is not on himself, but on something else - his self *image*.

THE MATERIALIST: The glutton, the carelessly promiscuous and the one who spends all his time gathering possessions is often seen as the egoist by people who have seen through the traps above. A friend of mine wrote in his thesis on Stirner that these were "vulgar egoists". They sure enough care for their own interests. But they only care for *part* of their own interest, giving in to some urge to be dominated by them. They either care only for the taste in their mouths right-here-right-now, or for the sensations in other bodily parts. They do not satisfy the whole chap, as Stirner wrote.

THE IDEALIST: Not too typical, but still - important. Can range from the proponent of Fichte's Absolute or Transcendental Ego, to the idealist missionary who has as his sole goal in this life to spread his own ideas. The former is not a proper egoist in that the "I" he is talking about is not the personal, individual "I" but - an abstraction, the mere *idea* of an ego. The latter is just the materialist mentality let loose in the realm of ideas.

THE FORMAL EGOIST: The formal egoist is perhaps the most elusively like to the proper egoist. For the formal egoist knows that an egoist looks to the satisfaction of the whole chap. Actually the formal egoist can know more about egoism than the egoist himself. For the formal egoist really wants to be an egoist - and he follows the recipe he has found to the last little detail,

and sets out to find even new nuances. There is only one thing missing, and that is his realisation that there is no recipe. Egoism is not a religious or ideological system to be followed by duty, but simply the being and awareness of oneself.

Now we have defined selfishness in the negative. How now about the positive; to what degree is egoism positively definable? First of all: What does it mean to "value oneself", and is this what selfishness consists in?

This problematic is in particular motivated by a comment from a subscriber, Jon Newton, in a discussion on whether egoism meant following some personal "axioms of value". First of all, Jon commented that though underneath all "axioms" of evaluation there had to rest the deeper Valuing Subject him[/her]self, that would in no way imply that the Valuing Subject - as a consequence of that alone - had to have a higher value than even the axiom.

Now, how is the above problematic solved, if at all? First, I think that declaring as an axiom that the Valuing Subject *is* of higher value, or to keep it in some other way as an "act of faith" would be a miss. This would be again - to place the act of evaluation as being mediated by the "axiom" or the "object of faith".

The Valuing Subject is the subject, and viewing something else - implicitly or explicitly - as the subject, is an act of alienation and untruth. This does, of course, tie in with the question of the value of truth, which I will address in an upcoming essay. But let us assume that the person in question sees this, and can value or non-value it as he wants. No generality is lost by this approach.

So the question is whether a person would or should value himself higher than anything or anyone else.

It might be tempting, like so many have done, to say some sentence to the effect that if X is a necessary ground for valuing,

then X must necessarily be valued - or even be the *highest* of values. In the case at hand, substituting "oneself, the (Valuing) Subject" for X would thereby yield the claim that one should value *oneself* the most.

But I do not think such an attempt via "a priori" judgement would get us very far if we were honest about it. For such an attempt would at best give us that I had a conditional value [derived, instrumental] from my values, and only for a certain limited period of time, given by these values. As an example, I could have valued the propagation of the species above all, and readily sacrifice myself when this goal did so require. All this without the contradiction an "a priori" argument like the above would require.

Instead, I propose we ask "What does it mean to value oneself the highest?" or "What does it mean to be an egoist?". Indeed, what does it mean to "value myself" at all?

One answer might be that to "value myself" means to value my existence.

But "existence"? Now what is really that? An empty, eternal staring into blankness is still "existence". But not what I would call very interesting, less even attractive. Something is missing. But what?

Now, to "value myself" would mean, I suggest, to value that which makes life valuable to me. That means that when I enjoy a good book - when I do what I value the book for - I do not sit there (ho-hum) valuing my existence, accidentally having a book in front of my eyes; rather it means that through the act of valuing the book, which is what I value, I do thereby value myself.

It is almost circular. I "value myself" when I value that which - I value. I *value myself* when I allow my own judgements of value qua (Valuing) Subject be what is in the end valued.

In contrast, "not valuing myself" would mean to negate my own value judgements qua (Valuing) Subject. It would mean to let a Fixed Idea get the better of me and leave *its* judgement as the final one instead of my own; it would mean to let the Fixed Idea brand *my* values as "sinful", "un-human" etc. and - bow to it.

That was the theory. Now what is the practice? Lots of unresolved questions. Good. That's one reason I created Non Serviam. But this gives a very different picture of the Egoist than what is normally being promoted throughout society. Society's "Egoist" is nothing more than just another example of what I'd call a "spooked man"; a man who instead of plainly following his own interests - i.e. his own values - follows a Fixed Idea that is accidentally branded "My Own Interests".

Society's "Egoist" is a caricature who does not pet cats since oh horror! - the cat might benefit from it too, who does not like other people other than as means to gaining material advantage - "for of course an Egoist can see no value in other people, his gaze is all directed at one person" - and who's got as his prime imperative "Do not give to beggars!"

As a contrast, let us take some *real* Egoist, as described by Stirner: He does not enjoy people when they are safely tucked away in category boxes, but gets charmed by the smile of a little baby. He pets cats for enjoyment, and loves to sit for a friendly chat with his friends - possibly over a glass of wine he has given to this friend.

Think about it. If Egoism is not about making life as enjoyable as possible, i.e. about realising one's values without interference from Fixed Ideas, what is it? Society's caricature would soon find himself in a logical mess if he thought about this. Not only would he fade away in a Scrooge-like asceticism, but he would begin to wonder why this bugger tomorrow who incidentally identified himself-now

with "himself-in-the-past" should ever get a little benefit from himself-now. He couldn't even get a glass of water for himself-one-minute-in-the-future.

As for ever being able to "axiomatise" my own value judgements. Is it possible? Stirner certainly did not think so. "I create myself each day anew" and "I am the creative nothing" are sentences that express this existentialist sentiment.

I lean towards the same judgement, and do in particular not see present-day reductionism as a solution to the problem. First of all, I do not think reductionism is universally valid, and secondly, even if it were, our mere biology would probably be of such a nature as to make our values incapturable through fixed axioms at the

level on which we normally live and breathe.

The above paragraph is of course merely my opinions. I think that most arguments count in their favour, and hence adopt these opinions as "mine" at the present time. I used to be of the opposite opinion, i.e. that reductionism was the truth, but after a discussion with a friend who found reductionism to be untenable, we switched opinions - both of us!

Anyhow, even given that for some period of my life my values were of the character that they could be axiomatised: Why should they? Would they ever express anything new in regards to my values? If they did, would not that mean they - contradicted them, and thus had become Fixed Ideas and - false?

Egoism

by John Beverley Robinson

There is no word more generally misinterpreted than the word egoism, in its modern sense. In the first place, it is supposed to mean devotion to self interest, without regard to the interest of others. It is thus opposed to altruism - devotion to others and sacrifice of self. This interpretation is due to the use of the word thus antithetically by Herbert Spencer.

Again, it is identified with hedonism or eudaimonism, or epicureanism, philosophies that teach that the attainment of pleasure or happiness or advantage, whichever you may choose to phrase it, is the rule of life.

Modern egoism, as propounded by Stirner and Nietzsche, and expounded by Ibsen, Shaw and others, is all these; but it is more. It is the realization by the individual that he

is an individual; that, as far as he is concerned, he is the only individual.

For each one of us stands alone in the midst of a universe. He is surrounded by sights and sounds which he interprets as exterior to himself, although all he knows of them are the impressions on his retina and ear drums and other organs of sense. The universe for him is measured by these sensations; they are, for him, the universe. Some of them he interprets as denoting other individuals, whom he conceives as more or less like himself. But none of these is himself. He stands apart. His consciousness, and the desires and gratifications that enter into it, is a thing unique; no other can enter into it.

However near and dear to you may be your wife, children, friends, they are not you;

they are outside of you. You are forever alone. Your thoughts and emotions are yours alone. There is no other who experiences your thoughts or your feelings.

No doubt it gives you pleasure when others think as you do, and Inform you of it through language; or when others enjoy the same things that you do. Moreover, quite apart from their enjoying the same things that you enjoy, it gives you pleasure to see them enjoy themselves in any way. Such gratification to the individual is the pleasure of sympathy, one of the most acute pleasures possible for most people.

According to your sympathy, you will take pleasure in your own happiness or in the happiness of other people; but it is always your own happiness you seek. The most profound egoist may be the most complete altruist; but he knows that his altruism is, at the bottom, nothing but self-indulgence.

But egoism is more than this. It is the realization by the individual that he is above all institutions and all formulas; that they exist only so far as he chooses to make them his own by accepting them.

When you see clearly that you are the measure of the universe, that everything that exists exists for you only so far as it is reflected in your own consciousness, you become a new man; you see everything by a new light: you stand on a height and feel the fresh air blowing on your face; and find new strength and glory in it.

Whatever gods you worship, you realize that they are your gods, the product of your own mind, terrible or amiable, as you may choose to depict them. You hold them in your hand, and play with them, as a child with its paper dolls; for you have learned not to fear them, that they are but the "imaginings of your heart."

All the ideals which men generally think are realities, you have learned to see through; you have learned that they are your ideals. Whether you have originated them, which is unlikely, or have accepted somebody else's ideals, makes no difference. They are your ideals just so far as you accept them. The priest is reverend only so far as you reverence him. If you cease to reverence him, he is no longer reverend for you. You have power to make and unmake priests as easily as you can make and unmake gods. You are the one of whom the poet tells, who stands unmoved, though the universe fall in fragments about you.

And all the other ideals by which men are moved, to which men are enslaved, for which men afflict themselves, have no power over you; you are no longer afraid of them, for you know them to be your own ideals, made in your own mind, for your own pleasure, to be changed or ignored, just as you choose to change or ignore them. They are your own little pets, to be played with, not to be feared.

"The State" or "The Government" is idealized by the many as a thing above them, to be revered and feared. They call it "My Country," and if you utter the magic words, they will rush to kill their friends, whom they would not injure by so much as a pin scratch, if they were not intoxicated and blinded by their ideal. Most men are deprived of their reason under the influence of their ideals. Moved by the ideal of "religion" or "patriotism" or "morality," they fly at each others' throats - they, who are otherwise often the gentlest of men! But their ideals are for them like the "fixed ideas" of lunatics. They become irrational and irresponsible under the influence of their ideals. They will not only destroy others, but they will quite sink their own interests, and rush madly to destroy themselves as a sacrifice to the all-

devouring ideal. Curious, is it not, to one who looks on with a philosophical mind?

But the egoist has no ideals, for the knowledge that his ideals are only his ideals, frees him from their domination. He acts for his own interest, not for the interest of ideals. He will neither hang a man nor whip a child in the interest of "morality," if it is disagreeable to him to do so.

He has no reverence for "The State." He knows that "The Government" is but a set of men, mostly as big fools as he is himself, many of them bigger. 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. He is a man without a country.

"The Flag," that most men adore, as men always adore symbols, worshipping the symbol more than the principle it is supposed to set forth, is for the egoist but a rather inharmonious piece of patch-work; and anybody may walk on it or spit on it if they will, without exciting his emotion any more than if it were a tarpaulin that they walked upon or spat upon. The principles that it symbolizes, he will maintain as far as it seems to his advantage to maintain them; but if the principles require him to kill people or be killed himself, you will have to demonstrate to him just what benefit he will gain by killing or being killed, before you can persuade him to uphold them.

When the judge enters court in his togger, (judges and ministers and professors know the value of togger in impressing the populace) the egoist is unterrified. He has not even any respect for "The Law." 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. It is to him the clumsy creation of them who still "sit in darkness."

Nor does he bow the knee to Morality - Sacred Morality! Some of its precepts he may accept, if he chooses to do so; but you cannot scare him off by telling him it is not "right." He usually prefers not to kill or steal; but if he must kill or steal to save himself, he will do it with a good heart, and without any qualms of "conscience." And "morality" will never persuade him to injure others when it is of no advantage to himself. He will not be found among a band of "white caps," flogging and burning poor devils, because their actions do not conform to the dictates of "morality," though they have injured none by such actions; nor will he have any hand in persecuting helpless girls, and throwing them out into the street, when he has received no ill at their hands.

To his friends - to those who deserve the truth from him, - he will tell the truth; but you cannot force the truth from him because he is "afraid to tell a lie." He has no fear, not even of perjury, for he knows that oaths are but devices to enslave the mind by an appeal to supernatural fears.

And for all the other small, tenuous ideals, with which we have fettered our minds and to which we have shrunk our petty lives; they are for the egoist as though they were not.

"Filial love and respect" he will give to his parents if they have earned it by deserving it. If they have beaten him in infancy, and scorned him in childhood, and domineered over him in maturity, he may possibly love them in spite of maltreatment; but if they have alienated his affection, they will not reawaken it by an appeal to "duty."

In brief, egoism in its modern interpretation, is the antithesis, not of

altruism, but of idealism. The ordinary man - the idealist - subordinates his interests to the interests of his ideals, and usually suffers for it. The egoist is fooled by no ideals: he discards them or uses them, as may suit his own interest. If he likes to be

altruistic, he will sacrifice himself for others; but only because he likes to do so; he demands no gratitude nor glory in return.

The union of egoists

Svein Olav Nyberg

A common misconception about egoism, and about the egoism of Stirner in particular, is that it is a reclusive, anti-social kind of behaviour. As far as Stirner is concerned, such commentators must have been asleep through that half of his book which is devoted to describing exactly the social interactions of an egoist, or more precisely - what social interactions are like when they are not mediated by ideals or "natural bonds".

Egoism is not anti-sociality, like some believe, but is better seen as a more mature kind of sociality.

Stirner is a dialectical philosopher, and as such his focus is on relations. As is with relations, it often comprises three elements, the two relata, and the relation itself, and hence the famous triad is a common occurrence in dialectical philosophy. So also with Stirner. Stirner's main triadic development is that of (1) The "natural" or material bond of the ancients, (2) The bond by ideas, our "equality before reason", into (3) the *willed* or *owned* relation.

In his book, Stirner starts the description of owned relations with relations to material objects and ideas. A willed relation to these are said to be that they are your *property* ("eigentum").

The opposite of the willed relation is, as indicated, the bond, the "ought" and the

"shall". These are simply relations that are not mine to dispose of, but which are given me from outside - outside also in the sense of coming from "my essence", something I must conform to and cannot dispose of.

A particular case of such a bond is when you are not to let go of an idea. In Hegelian terms: When that thought is seen as exempt from and sacred to "the power of the negative". Such an idea is called a fixed idea. It is, in Stirner's words "An idea that has subjected the man to itself" - an idea that you are not to criticise. [Recall that *Der Einzige* is "the power of the negative" to himself.]

Ideas are often expressed in the material world, as we call it. One such idea is that of "property". It should be noted that the common use of this word is that of conformation to an idea - a Fixed Idea - about what you can ["morally"] lay your hands on. By Stirner, however, property in this sense, "sacred property" or as he even calls it "state property", is not exempt from criticism and from - his laying hands on it. It is in the sense of idea already his property in his thinking it as such - in the intentional, willing act. However, factual possession, laying hands on it, depends also on "my might", as Stirner expresses it.

Now, once the relation of "Eigentum" - of "property" in the *Stirnerian* sense has been understood - and not before, can we proceed to the meeting of two Einzige, two Subjects. There are several ways in which two people can meet:

1. The Bond. This is a meeting of two people according to how they "ought to" behave towards one another. As such it is not a meeting which is *willed*, but rather a meeting according to the "ought". Examples of such are when the father and the son meet *in the roles* of father and son. "Father" and "son" they will always remain in a descriptive sense. But when they meet according to such roles, they meet by an "ought" and not by a "will". Roles are ascribed when the relation is seen as a static object.

2. The property. The relation can be a one-sidedly willed one. In this, the one is an Einzige whereas the Other has become Eigentum (for the one who is Einzige). Perhaps this is the state of things where we can say "Hell is the Other" (i.e. when that Other guy is Einzige and I am reduced to a role as Eigentum).

Moses Hess criticised "Der Verein der Egoisten" ["The Union of Egoists"] along the lines that in such a meeting, there would have to be one who dominated and one who submitted to domination. That is, Hess imagined that "The Union of Egoist" would be a relation of the kind (2) described above.

Now, (2) might describe a Hobbesian egoist. But can it describe *la dernière maillon de la chaîne Hegelienne* (as Stirner has been called)? No, that is a bit too crude. Stirner did himself reply to this criticism by pointing to examples: Two friends playing with their toys, two men going together to the wine shop. These do of

course not comprise an exhaustive list of unions, and our man Stirner does indeed speak of unions consisting of thousands of people, too, unions uniting to catch a thief or to get better pay for one's own labour.

More philosophically, Moses Hess describes a one-sidedness, and thinks it is a necessary one for an Stirner. What is then more natural than to apply a little dialectical reasoning to figure out what Stirner really *did* mean. I propose it is

3. The union. The relation is understood as a process. It is a process in which the relation is continually renewed by that both [/all] parts support it through an act of will. The Union requires that both/all parties are present through conscious egoism - i.e. own-will. If the one part silently finds him/her-self to be suffering, but puts up and - keeps the appearance, the union has degenerated into something else.

Only after development has come to the understanding of the union of egoists does Stirner come to the ultimately important relation - the relation of me to myself. In the section entitled "My self-enjoyment", Stirner sets up mere valuing of life against enjoyment of life. In the former view, I am an object to be preserved. In the latter I see myself as the subject of all my valuing relations.

In this sense, Stirner can rebuke the question "what am I?" and replace it with "who am I?", a question which has its answer in this bodily person who asks the question. This is the "nothingness" which Stirner speaks of as I. "Not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but a creative nothing."

My relation to myself is thus a meeting of myself as willer, a union with myself and a consumption –appropriation– of myself as my own.

A Critique of Communism and The Individualist Alternative

Ken Knudson

A NOTE TO READERS

I address myself in these pages primarily to those readers of "Anarchy" who call themselves "communist-anarchists." It is my purpose in this article to show that this label is a contradiction in terms and that anyone accepting it must do so by a lack of clear understanding of what the words "anarchist" and "communist" really mean. It is my hope that in driving a wedge between these two words, the communist side will suffer at the expense of the anarchist.

I make no claims to originality in these pages. Most of what I have to say has been said before and much better. The economics is taken primarily from the writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, William B. Greene, and Benjamin R. Tucker. The philosophy from Max Stirner, Tucker again, and, to a lesser extent, James L. Walker.

I hope you won't be put off by my clumsy prose. I'm a scientist by trade, not a professional writer. I implore you, therefore, not to mistake style for content. If you want both the content and good style may I suggest Tucker's "Instead of a Book". Unfortunately, this volume has been out of print since 1897, but the better libraries—especially those in the United States—should have it. If you can read French, I recommend the economic writings of Proudhon. "General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century" is particularly good and has been translated into English by the American individualist, John Beverley Robinson. (Freedom Press, 1923). Also in English is Tucker's

translation of one of Proudhon's earliest works, the well-known "What is Property?". This book is not as good as the "General Idea" book, but it has the advantage of being currently available in paperback in both languages. A word of warning: unless you are thoroughly familiar with Proudhon, I would not recommend the popular Macmillan "Papermac" edition of "Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon"; they seem to have been selected with irrelevance as their only criterion. Like so many other great writers, Proudhon suffers tremendously when quoted out of context and this particular edition gives, on average, less than a page per selection. Better to read his worst book completely than to be misled by disconnected excerpts like these. Finally the individualist philosophy, egoism, is best found in Max Stirner's "The Ego and His Own". This book suffers somewhat from a very difficult style (which wasn't aided by Stirner's wariness of the Prussian censor), but if you can get through his obscure references and biblical quotes, I think you will find the task worth the effort.

H. L. Mencken once observed that just because a rose smells better than a cabbage doesn't mean to say it makes a better soup. I feel the same way about individualist anarchism. At first whiff, the altruist rose may smell better than the individualist cabbage, but the former sure makes a lousy soup. In the following pages I hope to show that the latter makes a better one.

Ken Knudson
Geneva, Switzerland
March, 1971

COMMUNISM:
FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Communism is a 9 letter word used by inferior magicians with the wrong alchemical formula for transforming earth into gold.

–Allen Ginsberg,
Wichita Vortex Sutra

By way of prelude to the individualist critique of communism, I should like to look briefly at the communist-anarchists' critique of their Marxist brothers. Anarchists and Marxists have traditionally been at odds with one another: Bakunin and Marx split the First International over their differences a century ago; Emma Goldman virtually made her living in the 1920's from writing books and magazine articles about her "disillusionment in Russia"; in May, 1937, the communists and anarchists took time off from their war against Franco to butcher each other in the streets of Barcelona; and the May days of '68 saw French anarchists directing more abuse against the communist CGT than against the Gaullist government.

What is the nature of these differences? Perhaps the most concise answer to this question came in 1906 from a veritable expert on the subject: Joseph Stalin. He wrote in "Anarchism or Socialism?" that there were essentially three main accusations which (communist) anarchists leveled against Marxism:

1. that the Marxists aren't really communists because they would "preserve the two institutions which constitute the foundation of

[the capitalist] system: representative government and wage labour"; [1]

2. that the Marxists "are not revolutionaries", "repudiate violent revolution", and "want to establish Socialism only by means of ballot papers"; [2]
3. that the Marxists "actually want to establish not the dictatorship of the proletariat, but their own dictatorship over the proletariat." [3]

Stalin goes on to quote Marx and Engels to "prove" that "everything the anarchists say on this subject is either the result of stupidity, or despicable slander." [4] Today the anarchists have the advantage of history on their side to show just who was slandering whom. I won't insult the reader's intelligence by pointing out how all three objections to Marxism were sustained by Uncle Joe himself a few decades later.

But let us look at these three accusations from another point of view. Aren't the communist-anarchists simply saying in their holier-than-thou attitude, "I'm more communist than you, I'm more revolutionary than you, I'm more consistent than you?" What's wrong with Marxism, they say, is NOT that it is for communism, violent revolution and dictatorship, but that it goes about attaining its goals by half-measures, compromises, and pussyfooting around. Individualist-anarchists have a different criticism. We reject communism per se, violent revolution per se, and dictatorship per se. My purpose here is to try to explain why.