

# non serviam #13

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## Editor's Word

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This issue of Non Serviam is an end and a beginning. This issue (#13), and issue 14, do together contain the last issue of Sid Parker's "Ego", whose place in the world is now taken over by Non Serviam, and it is also a proper demarcation of the

establishing of Stirner in Cyberspace. As you will see from Sid's preface below, this is the 150th year that Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum has existed. It is also one of the first years that the English version of the book is available electronically [FTP [etext.archive.umich.edu](http://etext.archive.umich.edu), and change directory to /Pub/Politics/Non.Serviam]. The texts below are invited "appreciations" of Stirner's book, written for the commemorative issue of "Ego". If it appeals to you, you might be interested in knowing that Sid Parker will not lay off totally, but continue with some 1-2 A4 page "viewsletters", and will send these to interested persons writing to him at 19 St. Stephen's Gardens, London W2 5QU.

## Preface

S.E. Parker

Although the first edition of the Ego and His Own (Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum) bore the date 1845, it in fact appeared towards the end of October 1844. This year is therefore the 150th anniversary of its publication.

Otto Wigand, its Leipzig Publisher, was well aware that such a work might feel the weight of the disapproval of the Saxon Censorship Board and resorted to a ruse which he hoped would enable the book to be distributed even if the censors condemned it. As soon as the copy he was legally obliged to deposit at the Government Office was receipted Wigand set about delivering the remaining copies to booksellers so that any confiscators would find his warehouse empty. To a large degree he succeeded. Nonetheless, the

censors still managed to seize 250 copies of the 1000 printed. After a few days, however, the confiscation order was withdrawn on the grounds that Stirner's book was "too absurd" to warrant censorship. In other words, the censors could not understand it! The Ego and His Own was also banned in Prussia, Kurkessen and Mecklenburg Schwerin, but although these bans were never lifted, this did not stop copies being obtained and read by anyone interested.

Since then The Ego and His Own has been reprinted many times and has been translated into many languages. Throughout its existence it has provoked outrage and won admiration. All too often, however, both the outraged and the admiring have tried to fit Stirner's views

into the conceptual imperatives of this or that ideology. He has been labelled many things, ranging from anarchist to fascist. No doubt passages can be found in his book that appear to lend support to each of these extremes, but the more one understands what it is that Stirner is *actually* saying, the less these labels can be fixed. The contributors to this commemoration fortunately do not indulge in such a futile game. They are content to record their own reactions to *The Ego and His Own* and its value for them.

Contributors ...

**WM. FLYGARE:** "This 1/5.6 billionth: Swedish-American. Boston '17-'46. Chicago '46-'51. Kyoto '51-the end. BA & MA (philosophy and buddhism) plus attempts at music and theatre to learn my inabilities. Drafted into English teaching '51-'90. Some minor publications along the way. Highly independent ... and dependent, enjoy being alone without loneliness, my being remarried ('65), with two daughters (25 and 28), two cats, a love-bird, and a plum-tree. Eclectic: atheist in fact, animist in fancy, affinity for persons, allergic to people. Own house ('69 at last) with a window overlooking 'rooves' onto green hills and a variety of skies. Retired to studying, versing, digesting my haps, and being glad for my failures-n-good fortune."

**FRANK JORDAN:** "A life-loving, aesthetically minded outsider, passing from a 'Nietzschean' into a fully conscious 'Stirnerite'."

**SVEIN OLAV NYBERG:** "Born 1966; PhD student in mathematics; editor of *Non Serviam*; almost as selfish as the two cats that own him; has been interested in Stirner for the ten years he has known about him."

**S.E. PARKER:** "Born 1929, Birmingham, England. Now retired after thirty three years with British Rail. Has worked his way through the Young Communist League (1944-1946), the British Federation of Young Co-operators (1946-1947), and virtually all the different varieties of anarchism (1947-1982), to emerge as his own man, the penny of conscious egoism having finally dropped. Editor and publisher of *Minus One/Ego/ The Egoist/Ego* 1963-1994."

**PAUL ROWLANDSON:** "Currently earns a living as a lecturer in a pseudo-academic subject at a University College on the North West Frontier of the United Kingdom."

**JOHN C. SMITH:** "Needs no introduction."

# Last and First Words

John C. Smith

The Ego and His Own didn't exactly take the world by storm when it first appeared in 1844 and hasn't since. But its publication certainly caused a stir among the Young Hegelian circle in which the author moved. Karl Marx, for one, was so provoked by Stirner's book that he, together with Engels, devoted some two thirds of their book, The German Ideology, to vilifying Stirner, seeing him as a dangerous challenge to their creed of social salvation.

In this country it is hardly ever mentioned in polite society. Any new edition is largely ignored by literary editors. Yet it is reprinted regularly and never lacks readers. Some, like the anarchist Herbert Read, for example, have to admit "One book in my youth I have never wholly forgotten. To say that it had great influence on me would not be correct, for influences are absorbed and become part of one's mind. This book refused to be digested - to use our vivid English metaphor: it stuck in the gizzard, and has been in that uncomfortable position ever since. I refer to Max Stirner's Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum, The Ego and His Own as it was called in the English translation, published in 1913." (The Contrary Experience)

The main religio-political ideologies, Christianity and Marxism, have failed to provide an answer to the world's ills. The human selfishness they were meant to triumph over has triumphed over them.

Christianity, which promised individual salvation (freedom from the sin of selfishness) and brotherhood, has lost out to commerce. Shopping has replaced going to church. New temples, indoor shopping malls which are *usually* ugly and unnecessary, have sprung up all over

Britain. The early Christian churches at least served a useful communal purpose and were beautiful to look at.

In the Soviet Union the very understandable desire for personal reward undermined and eventually overthrew the state socialist system. There have been the inevitable attempts to explain this away by Marxist purists asserting, as did G.K. Chesterton about Christianity, that Marxism has not failed because it has never been tried. But, of course, it *was* tried, the theories that were espoused in Russia before the 1917 Revolution being more or less the same as what these apologists would call "real socialism."

It need hardly be said that the lesser religions of anarchism and national socialism have also failed to deliver the goods. Anarchism, offering individual autonomy and group solidarity, is also concerned with a perfect society free from the sin of selfishness. It is, ostensibly, a morally purer religion than either Marxism or national socialism since anarchists reject, in theory, involvement in existing political and social structures. They also complicate matters by insisting on self rule for the individual. This has ensured that anarchism has never enjoyed a mass following.

Except for the fact that national socialism originated as a scheme for the salvation of white Europeans it is, as Roger Scruton has pointed out, very similar to Marxist socialism. Its famous promoter, Adolph Hitler, was more than a bit bonkers. This, along with a similar obsession with a selfishness-free society, ensured that it has suffered the same fate as that of Marxism.

If the *collectivist* panaceas have been tried and seriously found wanting, what about the 'individualist' answers? Of these, existentialism of the kind propounded by Jean-Paul Sartre in his earlier, non-political phase appears to have the most in common with Stirner's ideas. Sartre rejected the Christian God and the Hegelian Absolute, his central doctrine being that man is what he makes of himself and "an insistence on the actual *existence* of the individual as the basic and important fact instead of a reliance on theories and abstractions." (Readers' Companion To World Literature)

As Stirner himself was more concerned with the projectionist rather than what was projected he would not have found too much to disagree with in this, but a closer examination of Sartre's position reveals that he and Stirner are worlds apart. For instance, Stirner confidently abandoned God whereas Sartre found it "extremely embarrassing that God does not exist ... man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend on either within or outside himself." (Existentialism and Humanism)

Sartre later sought to overcome this "embarrassing" forlornness by committing himself to the collectivism of Marxism while still clinging to the shell of his individualist existentialism. He hovered uncertainly between the two for the rest of his life. Stirner never made this mistake. He stubbornly, famously and usefully refused to be anything other than himself.

The fact is, as Stirner himself could have pointed out, all of the foregoing answers

are based on a flawed analysis - the lack of understanding of the difference between "egoistic" and "egotistic". Recently, Brian Walden observed that the utopian mentality reveals a faulty perception of individuality. And more recently Matt Ridley commented that most utopians are hopelessly naive about human nature: "I believe that ... human beings are and always have been driven by three cardinal ambitions –for wealth, for reputation and for status– and that you ignore such facts at your peril. Look no further than Russia for proof. Marxism fails precisely because it indulges a fantasy that human beings will abandon these three and replace them with the greatest good of the greatest number."

Nevertheless, Ridley has left out something important. It is the perennial appetite for self-delusion –to be other than what you are– that mostly fuel these power drives. Most people, as Nigella Lawson observes, "need to escape the resented meagreness of their own existence ... They want magic and mysticism. They want to have others – other worlds, other beings– dictate what is, what they are and not to have any responsibility for themselves." Given these facts it is not therefore surprising that Max Stirner's impassioned defence and celebration of *his* individuality is unique. Based as it is on the revolutionary stance that self interest is the basis of *all* human endeavour The Ego and His Own may not be that last word on the subject of human selfishness, but it contains some essential first words without which we would be even more in the dark than we are.

# Stirner, Youth and Tradition

Paul Rowlandson

Young people are subject to the psychological malady of 'militant enthusiasm'. It strikes between the ages of 16 and 25, the time of life when we are most keen to sacrifice our all for a Cause, the particular cause being determined by the fashionable enthusiasms of the day. That is why young men are useful in armies - they are easily fired up to go over the top. They are useful too, in religious organizations, because they will go out and proselytize in the rain, or sign away their lives to religious orders.

Stirner described this period, when the boy has become a youth: "One must obey God rather than man ... from this high standpoint everything 'earthly' recedes into contemptible remoteness; for the standpoint is the heavenly."

As a youth in the late 60s and early 70s I was influenced by the passions of the time.

As a child I was packed off to the fire and brimstone "washed in the blood of the Lamb" Congregational church in Oak Vale, Liverpool, by my parents, who themselves never went to a church except for weddings and funerals.

I remember a visiting preacher throttling a live chicken in the pulpit to make a point I had long forgotten. It was a church parade day and I was a member of the church scout troop, which I hated. Some of the Church elders must have thought that the preacher had overdone it because I remember we were asked by some of them what we thought of the chicken-throttling. I can't remember being upset by it, which is surprising. It was shortly after this incident

that I was sent off to the local Anglican church for some civilized religion.

I wasted a lot of time during my school years by my involvement with CND, the Young Communist League, the Syndicalist Workers Federation, and other radical organisations. I took part in various silly demonstrations, including the then obligatory Aldermaston marches and some sort of anti-Vietnam war demo from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square.

Most of my reading was of the radical sort - Marx, Alexander Berkman, Proudhon, Anarchy magazine, Direct Action, Solidarity, and such. I left school with two 'O' levels as a result.

The young mind is bombarded by other people's thoughts. From childhood to adolescence we absorb ideas and viewpoints from other people, whether in person, through print, or through radio and television. The selection of what goes in is more or less random, within certain limits, varying according to time, culture and geography.

Christianity was perhaps the major ingredient in my case, as it was (and still is, though less so) with most English youths.

It is an easy thing for an uninformed mind to contrast the "idealism" of Christianity with the "injustices" of the world. I remember thinking how like Christianity Marxism was, and how hypocritical of Christian society to deny us the benefits of communism.

However, there was a growing realisation of a divergence of interests, an awareness

that I had reservations and doubts about the activities and enthusiasms with which I was then engaged. For example, as a teenager I was a pirate radio enthusiast, which I found hard to reconcile with my anarcho-communist beliefs. There were several other discrepancies. I was a strange sort of anarchist for I always had a high regard for the Police, and frequently found myself uncomfortable with my comrades' description of them as 'pigs'.

I have always been an enthusiast for quirky or idiosyncratic publications. As a youth I favoured the iconoclastic. As an older man I now seek the reactionary, the traditional, the ultra conservative publications. Revolutions pleased me then, Tradition pleases me now.

The most unusual journal I ever came across was Minus One (the precursor of *Ego - Ed*). I subscribed immediately. Here was something different.

I very soon thereafter acquired from Minus One a copy of the Libertarian Book Club 1963 edition of *The Ego and His Own*. Even the physical attributes of the book are extraordinary. It is a substantial book, printed on high quality paper, bound in signatures, with a plain thick green cover, and a plain typeface. It looks and feels a serious book.

My reading of *The Ego and His Own* had a powerful and continuing influence. Here was a mind I connected with straight away. Its effect was that of a mental spring cleaning. The "wheels in the head", the ideas and opinions which I had accumulated, lost their power, although, as Stirner says, "Daily experience confirms the truth that the understanding may have renounced a thing many years before the heart has ceased to beat for it." Nevertheless, the effect was that I now

possessed the wheels in the head rather than them possessing me.

Stirner takes no hostages. The demolition is thorough: "the Good cause, God's cause, the cause of mankind, of truth, of freedom, of humanity, of justice, my people, my prince, my fatherland, even the cause of Mind, and a thousand other causes."

For a time I was cause-less, but eventually started restocking. I acquired some causes of my own, but this time they belonged to me. I could run with them or discard them as I wished.

It is probably as difficult to go without causes as it is to do without interests. A cause is, after all, simply a compelling interest grown large. But one of the benefits derived from reading Stirner is the ability to prevent their possession of their owner. My final authority is myself.

There are occasions in life we think of as watersheds. Nothing is ever quite the same again. My discovery of *The Ego and His Own* was such an event. It became impossible to think again in the way I thought before I read the book. There is no other book like it.

Pope John Paul II once commented that the faithful have a right not to be disturbed by the speculations of the so-called radical theologians. Should the man or woman in the street be exposed to Max Stirner? I think not. People will go to almost any lengths to avoid thinking for themselves. *The Ego and His Own* would no doubt unhinge many of them, which might make life more difficult for the rest of us.

Fortunately there appears to be a small elite which can absorb and benefit from Stirner without going off the rails - those who can see through not just the Emperor's new clothes but the old ones as well.

# In Praise of Max

Frank Jordan

What is arguably the most iconoclastic work of philosophy ever written was published in the year 1844. This work was entitled *The Ego and His Own* (In original German: *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum*). The author of this seminal work called himself Max Stirner, which was a pseudonym of Johann Caspar Schmidt. Stirner was a member of the Young Hegelians, but the ideas he put forward in *Der Einzige*, his one major work, easily outstripped and went far beyond anything that his friends and contemporaries had to say in their criticisms of the various idealistic trends in society, as they understood it.

Whether the subject be God, Spirit, Family, Morality, The People, The State, and so on, all of these Stirner ruthlessly and logically breaks down and shows they are nothing more than idealistic 'spooks,' falsely created in substitution for the true needs of the ego, and usually interpreted in altruistic fashion. Only Nietzsche, in his many writings, approaches anywhere near the same 'dizzying' extremes and idol-smashing that is a constant theme in Stirner's book. The main difference between the two thinkers, I believe, is that Stirner's book is a complete statement, consistent within itself, whereas Nietzsche's insights have to be dug out from beneath his overall works, and they are usually aphoristic in style and content.

The impact of Stirner's book provoked a most virulent attack against it by no less a thinker than Karl Marx, along with Engels. In their massive work, *The German Ideology*, they devoted two thirds of it to attacking line by line, and blow by blow, Stirner's book. They constantly refer to him

as 'Saint Max', 'Don Quixote', and other rather absurd appellations, all to try to exorcise him and his book. But, in the end, they fail miserably, after having tried every intellectual trick they had in their mental store, hoping to promote Marxist socialism and discredit Stirner's pure egoism.

Various theorists have proven, quite consistently, that Marxism as it eventually developed would not have been possible without Marx and Engels psychologically reacting against the egoistic philosophy of Stirner in the way that they did. As recent history shows, Marxism can now be seen as a failed attempt at trying to mould the individual psyche into a social-procrustean bed of ideology.

Beside the effect Stirner had on Marxism, various other thinkers and theorists have tried to adapt the views expressed in *Der Einzige* to bolster their own causes. For examples: anarchists, fascists (especially the case of Mussolini), the situationists of the swinging Sixties, surrealist and dadaistic artists like Max Ernst, psychologists like Erich Fromm. Even the very popular science fiction trilogy of Wilson and Shea called *Illuminatus* acknowledges a great debt to Stirner throughout the plot. And we must not forget the existentialist tag Stirner has been given!

Ultimately, of course, despite the diverse thinkers who are attracted to, and 'turned on', by Stirner, the uniqueness of *The Ego and His Own* stands like a lone mountain which cannot be levelled down to fulfil some else's rather shallow and hollow-sounding ideals.

As long as men can, and will, think and act for themselves there will always be a place for Max Stirner's uplifting and stirring book. His work speaks from the position

of a *unique one* to all other receptive *unique ones*.

I thank you, Max Stirner.

*sometimes 'tween man and man  
like shed  
rain on a parch'd plain  
in a language imperfect ployless elemental  
like bread  
intellect-play at bay  
something as 'tween man and dumb-animal  
is said*

—Wm. Flygare 90.197