

non serviam #14

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“To My Sweetheart”

With an Addition to Bartlett

Wm. Flygare

On this 150th birthday of *The Ego and His Own* (1844, dated 1845), what intrigues me is the dedication. What was Mary's contribution to John-n-Mary's only issue - a book?

Stirner (42.2; p358) speaks of using life up like a burning candle. In the John-n-Mary romance –a roman candle– their wedded life (1843-1846) ended in her long-life life-long rancour against a "sly" man whom she "neither loved nor respected." In affairs of the heart, as well as in practical affairs, both were losers, the woman more than the philosopher who had two worlds to live in.

It would seem, then, that the inspiring young Mary deserves a gratitude that the older embittered one would be loath to accept, her wound a secret she would not tell.

The Ego and His Own appears a vast commentary to the Goethe poem alluded to at the beginning and end. Its absence in publications of *The Ego* is unfortunate. In Stirner's time this poem was "a favourite with everyone" (Schopenhauer's *Councils and Maxim* #5) but it is little known now. Like Smith, Stirner is "in love," certainly with the "tyranny of words" (43.3; p.389). Unlike elsewhere in his work, there are poetic parallels and flights, external pattern, redundancy, etymological word-play,

elations, and hyperbole, his pen often shouting as if against the loud-voiced among "The Free Ones". These features have made the work most variously read and can detract. *Parler sans accent*. But as to the diagnostic content: Stance is circumscribed by circumstance. In their desperate drive for impossible certainty and acceptance, and hope to qualify, the driven drive the driven, mental straight-jackets nicely laced. In adolescence, the rarely curable brain-smudge received in childhood festers into visions and conversions that lead to "normal" madness and its "stealthy malice" (7.2; p.46). Now instead of talk *about* the prophylaxis and solace offered by *The Ego and His Own*, Stirner himself: I have tried to ferret out his key observations in sober and concise form as "an addition to Bartlett" since Bartlett's "Familiar Quotations" is one of a number of well-known reference works which neglect this exorcist of "spooks", some of whose phrases deserve to be "familiar." Reference is to a yet unpublished paragraph-numbering system and to pages in Reclam 3957(6), the only currently stable publication:

What have we gained, then, when for a variation we have transferred into ourselves the divine outside us? Are we that which is in us? As little as we are that which is outside us. I am as little my heart as I am

my sweetheart, this "other self" of mine. (4.20; p.34)

... out of confidence in our grandmothers' honesty we believe in the existence of spirits.

But had we no grandfathers then, and did they not shrug their shoulders every time our grandmothers told about their ghosts? (5.1&2; p.36)

... over each minute of your existence a fresh minute of the future beckons to you, and, developing yourself, you get away "from yourself," that is, from the self that was at that moment. (5.13; p.39)

Man, your head is haunted ... You imagine ... a spirit-realm to which you suppose yourself to be called, an ideal that beckons to you. You have a fixed idea! (7.1; p.46)

... it is only through the "flesh" that I can break tyranny of mind; for it is only when a man hears his flesh along with the rest of him that he hears himself wholly, and it is only when he wholly hears himself that he is a hearing (vernehmend) or rational (vernünftig) being. (10.12; p.68)

Because the revolutionary priests or schoolmasters served Man, they cut off the heads of men. (14.24; p.68)

Many a man renounces morals, but with great difficulty the conception, "morality." (15.12; p.96)

... every effort arrives at reaction ... a *new master* set in the old one's place, and the overturning is a - building up. (17.32&35; pp.120&121)

... if a "tie" clasps you, you are something only *with another*, and twelve of you make a dozen, thousands of you a people, millions of you humanity ... I answer, only when

you are single can you have intercourse with each other as what you are. (21.34&36; p.148)

I do not want to have or be anything especial above others, ... but - I do not measure myself by others either, ... The equal, the same, they can neither be nor have. (21.52; p.152)

It is not thinking, but my thoughtlessness (lit., thought-rid-ness), or I the unthinkable, incomprehensible, that frees me from possession. (23.15; p.169)

What the craving for freedom has always come to has been the desire for a *particular* freedom ... The craving for a *particular* freedom always includes the purpose of a new *dominion*. (24.13&14; p.176)

But the habit of the religious way of thinking has biased our mind so grievously that we are - terrified at *ourselves* in our nakedness and naturalness; it has degraded us so that we deem ourselves deprived by nature, born devils. (24.21; p.178)

I am present. (24.22; p.180)

Thousands of years of civilization have obscured to you what you are ... Shake that off! ... and let go your hypocritical endeavours, your foolish mania to be something else than you are. (24.30; p.181)

You want to be "in the right" as against the rest. That you cannot; as against them you remain forever "in the wrong". (26.12; p.207)

What is the ordinary criminal but one who has ... sought despicable *alien* goods? ... You do not know that an ego who is his own cannot desist from being a criminal, that crime is his life. (28.6; p.221)

Everything sacred is a tie, a fetter. (31.24; p.239)

For only he who is alive is in the right. (31.24; p.239)

I never believed in myself; I never believed in my present, I saw myself only in the future ... a proper I ... a "citizen," a "free or true man" ... an alien I ... An I that is neither an I nor a you, a *fancied* I, a spook. (31.5; p.247)

But I love ... because love makes *me* happy ... because loving is natural to me, because it pleases me. I know no "commandment of love." (39.15; p.324)

I sing because - I am a singer. But I *use* (gebrauche) you for it because I - need (gebrauche) ears. (39.37; p.331)

That a society (such as the society of the State) diminishes my *liberty* offends me little. Why, I have to let my liberty be limited by all sorts of powers and by every one who is stronger; nay, by every fellow-man; and, were I the autocrat of all the R.... , I yet should not enjoy absolute liberty. But *ownness* I will not have taken from me. And ownness is precisely what every society has designs on, precisely what is to succumb to its power. (41.7; p.342f)

We are equal *only in thoughts*, only when "we" are *thought*, not as we really and bodily

are. I am ego, and you are ego: but I am not this thought-of ego; this ego in which we are all equal is only my *thought*. I am man, and you are man: but "man" is only a thought, a generality; neither I nor you are speakable, we are *unutterable*, because only *thoughts* are speakable and consist in speaking. (41.15; p.348)

Henceforth, the question runs, not how one can acquire life .. but how one is to dissolve himself, to live himself out. (42.6; p.348)

Possibility and reality always coincide. (42.3; p.368f)

No sheep, no dog, exerts itself to become a "proper sheep, a proper dog". (42.47; p.372)

I receive with thanks what the centuries of culture have acquired for me; I am not willing to throw away and give up anything of it ... But I want still more. (42.53; p.372)

All truth by itself is dead, a corpse; it is alive only in the same way as my lungs are alive - to wit, in the measure of my own vitality. [...] The truth is a - creature. (43.64; p.398-399)

No idea has existence, for none is capable of corporeity. [...] What, am I in the world to realize ideas? (45.5&13; pp.408&411)

The Ego and Its Own

The Choice of a New Generation

Svein Olav Nyberg

*Knowledge must die, and rise again
as Will and create itself anew each
day as a free Person.*

–The False Principle of Our Education

Those of us who have reached adulthood during the eighties have not avoided noticing all the literature and the ideas about self-love that has been around. Even the nursery-eyed girls with the concerned looks sometimes stutter that they think you should be allowed to love yourself as much as you love your neighbour. Most of this literature and most of these ideas come from psychology. Wayne Dwyer reasons that since loving your neighbour as yourself will not amount to much love of the neighbour unless you love yourself first, you should therefore love yourself. Psychologically, the link is claimed that other-love is impossible without self-love. So we should think we are at a magic time in history; the omni-present Society gives us permission to love ourselves.

But there are those of us who are not such well-bred rats conditioned to do whatever we are told benefits our neighbour. We do not love ourselves to please our abstract or concrete neighbours, but just love ourselves, plain and simple. Our kind of people see these trends as nothing other than the old hogwash in a new disguise. Not only shall you sacrifice yourself to the good of your neighbour, but you shall do so under the illusion that you do it for yourself. We penetrate deeper, we go into philosophy.

Philosophically, also, it has been a decade of praising the self. Why, has not the

notorious Ayn Rand sold more books and increased her organized following more than ever? Has not the libertarian community accepted selfishness as a rule? Again, ever more illusion! Randian self-love is the love of Man your Essence within you, and the hate of the Evil un-Man in you, lurking at the boundaries of the Omni-Good Rational Thought. Libertarian ideas, furthermore, are in this respect nothing more than the ghost of departed Objectivists.

It is amidst all this confusion that a young man of today will find himself as he picks up his first copy of *The Ego and Its Own*. Usually, as in my case, he will have a background in libertarian thought, and smile at the thought that "Here we have the guy who is even more consistent than Rand. Wow, these ideas will be useful for my libertarianism!" As the reading of the book proceeds, the young libertarian will look at the pages in amazed horror; is not this Stirner guy just picking libertarianism logically apart before his very eyes? Oh horror! No, this must surely rest on a misunderstanding. Stirner never knew modern libertarianism, did he? So, he is really running loose on something else. Yes? But, no, realisation dawns that libertarianism –after all a very logical and aesthetic system which even works - given a faint "best of society" premise– is without the foundation our young libertarian wants. Rights are spooks, his head is haunted and his pride is hurt.

There are now two possible lessons to learn; either to learn from Stirner to speak to others about selfishness - universalize that we are all (and implicitly *ought to be*) selfish, and to use this as a new basis for

libertarian idealism, or - to delve into oneself to find one's *own* cause.

Now, what is not supposed to be my cause! From society we learn that selfishness consists in filling your wallet and emptying your balls as best as you can. From religion we learn that our *true* interest lies in the contemplation of ideas and renunciation of the body. But these are both very one-sided goals, and do violence to *me*. They are both follies of one and the same type - formal egoism. Formal egoism is what arises when you conceive of yourself as an object, a sum of predicates, and not as beyond predicates - as an *Einzig*. Modern man hypostatizes -makes objects of- everything, including himself. For a modern man the choice is only *which* object among the objects is to be chosen as the ultimate value. So why not the object he knows as "me"? But when you serve the interests of an object, you need a recipe, a guideline - some rules. These might be explicit, or they might be, as for most people, implicit. The formal egoist then serves the himself-object as best he can according to the predications of what selfishness means -and, mind you, he might even have so much success as to attain some predicated goals that he thinks a selfish man should attain- but he never gets to the bottom of *his* interests. He is formally indistinguishable from the selfish man, but in reality never attains anything more than being a boy scout at satisfying the himself-object.

Stirner is a good teacher of lessons. In *A Human Life* he shows the dialectical development towards a full understanding of one's own cause. One starts out as a child who thinks that all that matters is -matter. Thereafter the procession goes to the realm of the Mind -ideas- where all importance and values are to be found in the relation to the idea. Only thereafter does it dawn that there is something

beyond all the material and spiritual objects, yet more immediate, namely **I**, myself.

It is easy to come to the protest "Now *what* is the I?" As Stirner answers, I am not a "what" but a "who". Grasping this distinction, and why Stirner emphasises it, is essential to understanding Stirner, and is why *The Ego and Its Own* is so different from any other book about selfishness.

A question that seems to have puzzled both the older and the younger generation is "If Stirner was such a self-loving man, why did he bother to write a book that gave him so much trouble and so little reward?" I do not propose to answer this question in specifics, but instead look at how he has developed his theory of relations to other people.

Stirner has been described as a man who has taken the full consequence of being-alone in the world, and sometimes even a solipsist. I take these descriptions as coming from people not fully knowledgeable about Stirner. Stirner does not advocate the life of the Sole Ego on the hill, out of contact with other people. Rather, he seems to derive much enjoyment from the company of his peers, and even babies with their competent smiles. But it is easy to be intoxicated by a book such as Stirner's, and fail to read what is written. What Stirner actually writes about, is that there are basically two (opposite) forms of interaction, namely that of standing as an *I* against a *You*, versus meeting one another qua predicate-filled objects. The understanding of this demands that one understands the difference between the *Einzig* that one is, and the objects we are conditioned by culture to see ourselves as.

The meeting of the I against the You actually comprises more than half of

Stirner's book. This, I propose, is the key to why he wrote the book. All around him he saw, and met, people whose only mode of interaction was qua object-to-object. He met "good citizens", "Christians" and even "Humans", all playing out a social role according to the predicate of the day. But meeting one another with that veil of predicates removed was a scarcity, as it is today.

Meeting *Einzig* to *Einzig* is scary. The you stand there all for and by yourself with no predicate to hide behind. That is why people continually choose to interact via predicates - object-to-object. But this is

nothing different from the mad-man at the asylum who is unable to face the world as anyone but "Napoleon". We live, as Stirner put it, in a mad-house among mad-men.

This is why Stirner wrote his book: It is a therapy for all of us who out of the fear of seeing ourselves as pure and nakedly ourselves. A therapy so that he might speak and otherwise interact with us as the *Einzige* we are, and not as a thousand "Napoleon"s.

Do you dare accept the therapy offered by Stirner?

“And what we're trying to communicate –the ultimate secret, the philosopher's stone, the elixir of life– is just the power of the word *No*. We are people who have said *Non Serviam*, and we're trying to teach other's to say it.”

[...]

“Sink me, nobody of this tub agrees with anybody else about anything, except maybe what the fellow with the horns told the old man in the clouds: *Non Serviam*.”

“I don't know Latin,” I said, overwhelmed by his outburst.

"*I will not serve*," he translated.

–From Shea & Wilson's *Illuminatus*