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Union of Egoists

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-Kevin I. Slaughter

What is a UnionOfEgoists.com?

This is an informational resource provided by Kevin I. Slaughter of Underworld Amusements and Trevor Blake of OVO, initiated in February and publicly launched April 1st of 2016. The website initially focuses on providing historical, biographical and bibliographical details of a few their favorite Egoist philosophers. It is also integrating the archives of egoist website i-studies.com, the former project of Svein Olav Nyberg, and the EgoistArchives.com project of Dan Davies. Further, it will be home to Der Geist, a Journal of Egoism in print 1845 – 1945. UnionOfEgoists.com will be the best resource for Egoism online.

What is a Union of Egoists?

"We two, the State and I, are enemies. I, the egoist, have not at heart the welfare of this "human society," I sacrifice nothing to it, I only utilize it; but to be able to utilize it completely I transform it rather into my property and my creature; i. e., I annihilate it, and form in its place the Union of Egoists."

– Max Stirner, The Ego and Its Own

What is Egoism?

"Egoism is the claim that the Individual is the measure of all things. In ethics, in epistemology, in aesthetics, in society, the Individual is the best and only arbitrator. Egoism claims social convention, laws, other people, religion, language, time and all other forces outside of the Individual are an impediment to the liberty and existence of the Individual. Such impediments may be tolerated but they have no special standing to the Individual, who may elect to ignore or subvert or destroy them as He can. In egoism the State has no monopoly to take tax or to wage war."

-Trevor Blake, Confessions of a Failed Egoist

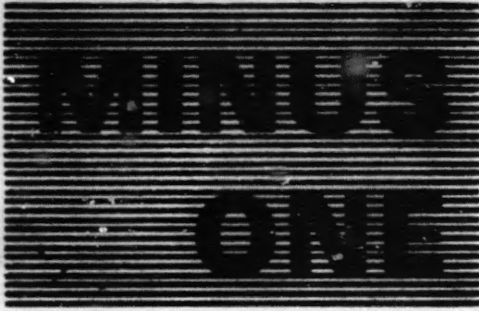
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0009

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AN INDIVIDUALIST ANARCHIST REVIEW

WAR IN VIETNAM

'Shoot first - pray later'

'South Vietnam is unquestionably the most vicious war in the world at the moment. Though it's an 'undeclared' war from the U.S. standpoint, she has 12,000 'mercenaries' advising President Diem's forces. The weekly toll of people killed runs at 500.'

**Troops
poised
to take
over city
of hate**

**Strangle stick
on girl, 15**

3,000 United States Federal troops have been sent to Alabama to deal with any further race riots in Birmingham.

INDIVIDUALIST-ANARCHISMPseudo-individualism

"Individualism" is one of those words like "anarchism" and "egoism" that have been abused out of both ignorance and intent. For many radicals it is a synonym for the "free-for-all" of the "capitalist" jungle, and some defenders of capitalism have tried to use it to justify economic exploitation and monopoly. A little intelligent thinking about the nature of capitalist society, however, with its ever-present boss-men and mass-men, is enough to upset this idea. What is individual about the armies of city gentlemen marching into and out of their offices at the same time five days a week and vegetating in the cage of their suburban conventions in between? And how individual are the herds of industrial workers standing before the machine god and repeating the same servile rituals throughout their lives? To ask these questions is to answer them.

Individualism

Individualism is something quite different to the caricatures common to both "Left" and "Right". In the words of John Beverly Robinson:

"It is the recognition by the individual that he is above all institutions and formulas; that these exist only so far as he chooses to make them his own by accepting them." ("Egoism").

Because he regards no institution or formula as having authority over him the individualist is logically an anarchist. And because he denies the validity of any authority outside of the individual the anarchist is logically an individualist. From this awareness is born an anarchism freed from the last vestiges of that altruistic idealism which cast out service to God and the State only to replace it with service to the Cause and Humanity. Individualist anarchism drives authority out of its last hiding place in "moral obligations" or "duty". Individualist anarchists are philosophically egoists.

Government

But if the individualist lives for himself then what is to stop him from trying to rule over others?

Two things, at least.

Firstly, if these others are as "self-willed" as he is, then they will oppose their wills to his and so frustrate his efforts.

Secondly, and most importantly, individualists know that authority is a relationship between ruler and ruled that binds both and destroys the independence of each. As Max Stirner well put it:

"He who, to hold his own, must count on the absence of will in others, is a thing made by these others, as the master is a thing made by the servant. If submissiveness ceased it would be all over with lordship."

If you do not want others to have power over you, do not try to get power over them. Agree to keep off each other's toes.

Individualist anarchists do not regard government as simply the product of a conspiracy on the part of a wicked few to oppress the innocent many. The many would not be governed if they did not want to be governed, if they were capable of self-government. Rulers and ruled are two sides of the same coin of a currency which individualists reject. Their way lies outside of both.

Co-operation

Does the individualist reject all co-operation between man and man?

The individualist agrees with Ibsen that "he is strongest who stands most alone", but he sees the value of co-operation to satisfy some of his needs. There is nothing contradictory in this, for only he who is strong enough to stand alone is capable of forming a genuinely free association with others. But such an association is not an end in itself - it lasts only as long as those who form it find it useful to them. It is not a sacred thing towards which its members have duties. It is their creation and their servant, nothing more.

Economics

In economics the individualist does not believe in collectivism, whether socialist, syndicalist or communist. For him, individual ownership of the means of production is the way to guarantee the product, or its equivalent, to the producer. In this area, as in all others, however, individualists are first of all pluralists and regard any system, no matter what its name, that would bind them to any one economic relationship and deny them a choice of alternatives, as authoritarian. The difference between the individualist and the collectivist approach to economics lies in the fact that the first would leave each individual free to provide for himself what he needs, whereas the second wants to make society the manager and provider of the means of life. Any system which makes the individual dependent upon the good or bad will of others is repugnant to individualists. It matters little to them whether the means of production are under the control of a handful of private monopolists, the State, a federation of syndicates or a Commune, if they have no independence or freedom of choice.

Revolution

But speculations about a future economy have only an academic interest. Individualist anarchists do not want to wait until the "morrow of the revolution" before they get any benefit from their ideas. It is today that concerns them, not a hypothetical future. Since the individualist starts from himself, he does not need others before he begins his "revolution". He welcomes anyone travelling a similar road to his own, but he does not need them in order to start his journey. The christian looks to the will of his god, the democrat looks to the will of the people, the marxist and the syndicalist look to the will of the revolutionary proletariat, but the individualist looks to his own will and relies on nothing outside of himself. Consequently he does not believe in a "dialectic of history", "the inevitable outcome of the class struggle", "the due process of law", or any other collective, group or supernatural force as the means of his liberation. Self-liberation is the only form of liberation that has any meaning for him. He has no time for millennial narcotics as a sop for present miseries and oppressions.

Violence

The question of the use of violence or non-violence in self-defence is one of expediency. Individualists will use one or the other according to the situation they are in. Any approach which tries to confine the individualist struggle to either violence or non-violence denies the diversity of individual temperaments and capacities and constitutes a moral strait-jacket. However, faced with the overwhelming means of violence possessed by the modern State, most individualists would favour passive resistance as the most expedient method of struggle.

End

Individualist anarchists do not want to be plus ones in the "statistical millions" of obedient citizens. They have counted themselves out from the herd and their anarchy exists in their strength to affirm themselves. They have severed their anarchism from all democratic and socialist myths. To hell with the "people want this", the "workers want that"! Let us live our own lives, follow our own interests, and be ourselves. The individualist will go his own way, even if he must go alone. He would not be much of an individual if he did not.

The above will be reprinted as a leaflet. Send in your orders now,-

AWAY FROM IT ALL

by Jeff Robinson

During the Spring and Summer of this year, I realised an ambition I had had for some time : to enjoy some peace away from the hurly burly of modern life. Although I live as much on the fringes as I can, economic necessity forces me to work for five days out of seven, for fifty weeks of the year, in the hectic, forced rush of one of the world's largest cities. I know of no way of contracting wholesale out of modern life other than becoming a beat or tramp or joining a community. The first two alternatives have no attraction for me while more about the third later. I had some money saved up and while it lasted my time could be my own although there are plenty of people, relatives and friends, who think my time should be THEIR own, and have all sorts of plans for me. The friends think I should spend my time urging the masses to revolt while the relatives think I should find pensionable employment, a loving wife and a small mortgaged house in some suburban vacuosity. All are agreed that living one's own life, in however temporary or incomplete a manner, is some sort of crime. In spite of all this, I resolved to "get away from it all" and live on my own, cheaply and simply, in some remote part of the country and spend my time doing the things that interest me. I don't consider that there is anything especially "individualistic" about this. Individualism is as individualism does -- or thinks or regards. But if this article inspires someone else to make a break and perhaps gives a few tips then it will have served a purpose.

I didn't specially want to go alone, for although I am quite capable of living by myself, I am as fond of company as anybody. Many people were enthusiastic about my plans and wanted to come too but when they saw that I really meant it they found reasons for not coming. Some while ago, when I was thinking of "contracting out" in more general terms I became interested in the idea of going to live in a non-conformist community. In this connection I answered the advertisements that appear from time to time in the radical press from people intending to start communities. In every case it was the same : I would receive an enthusiastic letter from the organisers who would acquaint me with their plans and after that -- silence. The enthusiasm had worn off and the "organisers" had lost interest. In retrospect I can see that it was a good thing that these communities never got started for none had any chance of success. In one case an actual majority of the people wishing to join were old age pensioners - understandable when one considers the loneliness and poverty that are the average pensioners lot. In no case was it proposed that the community be run on an individualistic basis - and doubtless many of the would-be "communitarians" had theories about how the others should behave. Very few people had any useful trade or property to contribute and as the communities were to be run on a communistic basis i.e. things held in common, it is obvious that life in them would soon resolve itself into, not the few living off the many, which is the situation in capitalist society, but the many living off the few. All this gradually made me realise that if you want to do something you have to do it yourself. Some individualists adopt this maxim for philosophical and egoistical reasons. I adopt it because I have learnt from experience that usually it is the only way to get things done.

I decided to go to the Cardigan Bay coast of Wales because some friends at a College there assured me that there were plenty of vacant cottages available at low rents. Also some people in London told me that they knew of places in Wales where cottages could be had for a song though when I pressed them for details they could never narrow the location down to anything smaller than a couple of counties. In spite of these assurances accommodation turned out to be a problem. There WERE cottages available, not just cheap but free - crumbling roofless ruins that a self-respecting beatnik wouldn't look at. Most parts of Wales are holiday areas and the spare accommodation has been either allowed to fall into ruin or else prettied-up, decorated with old horse brasses and other modish things and then let out at 10 guineas a week to rich week-enders from the Midlands cities. By sheer good fortune, however, I found a place that suited my requirements although it wasn't a cottage but a caravan. It stood alone on a slope, high above a little coastal village and with a tremendous view - the whole sweep of the Caernarvonshire mountains and much of Cardigan Bay.

It was relatively cheap, comfortable, remote from touristy places and with easy access to wild country. As regards this last point it was wonderfully well situated. A tiny path began in the field above the caravan which led to a sunken lane which in turn led upwards for miles, plunging through deep woods or winding up steep mountainsides until it petered out in a high, marshy plateau absolutely deserted except for lonely lakes and the remains of prehistoric cairns and hut circles. Although the plateau was wildly beautiful, much more so than Snowdon or the other spots tourists flock to, at no time did I see anyone else there.

I did a lot of reading, having had a box of books sent up, some writing (including a novel that ended at chapter 3), and a good deal of walking and locality exploring. On some days I fasted and tried to do some Zen meditation beside one of the little lakes on the plateau. While I am sure that the self-discipline did me good, the achievement in Zen terms was absolutely nil. The only time I have been close to the Zen frame of mind was years ago, before I had ever heard of Zen, when some innocent, unexpected little thing, a pause in conversation, the shape of a cloud, the relationship of crockery or cutlery on a table, would burst open some mental window and I would see the thing with an intensity and certainty experienced at no other time. Within minutes the feeling would die. It always came unexpectedly and could in no way be coerced. Hence I think that the works of Watts, Suzuki etc while valuable from the viewpoint of intellectual study and their making known the joys of Zen poetry, art etc, are hindrances from the point of view of the layman's "spiritual" development.

Most of the local people thought I was some sort of nut although they were much too polite to say so. Sometimes I would see people pointing at me when I went shopping in the village. To have made known my real reasons for being there would have been futile so I let on that I was a writer - well I did get to chapter 3. Although Welsh villagers are pleasanter people than the average bunch of city dwellers one ~~can~~ see that all their inclinations are to the modern life of cities. Every house has its TV aerial and car and I never met a local person in the mountains. Tell a Welshman that his mountains are hideous and he will shout "Cymru Am Byth" and punch you on the nose but he never visits them and were the words "Use Bloggs Soap" out in gigantic letters on every mountainside I don't think many of The Welsh would be worried.

I wasn't worried at being thought a nut. In cities individual nuttiness is often overlooked in the crowd. I have never wanted to flaunt my individualistic beliefs - wear funny clothes or an enormous beard - in fact, in some circles to do so is a sign of conformity. I am naturally fairly quiet and unassuming. I learnt to overcome feelings of discomfort at being thought a nut by one of my pastimes - walking in the country. Although I plan my routes so that they go along footpaths as much as possible it is sometimes necessary to walk along roads. To walk along a main road with no pavements and with cars swishing by every few seconds is a good way to overcome worries about what people think. Cars have hooted, insults have been hurled, sometimes a sneering face is glimpsed for an instant as it flashes past and rubbish, including lighted cigarette ends has sometimes been thrown. And unless you're wearing Boy Scout uniform or something the cops will stop and question you if they see you. I was once questioned by patrol men who saw me peering into a hedge at a bird's nest. By modern cop standards anyone peering into a hedge must be a burglar, Peeping Tom or axe-fiend.

I am sorry that parts of this article are so critical of other people. But one of my reasons for writing it, as I said earlier, is to give people who want to do something similar some idea of what to expect and other people were not exactly helpful. But once away from them, and away from all that, there is a chance to see clearly and integrate with the person you must live with all your life - yourself.

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DONATIONS

N. Spratling 1/6; J. Dohn Lewis 7/-; J.P. Schweitzer 10/-; S. Marletta 10/-; J.J. Martin £1/12/6; F. ~~Stingray~~ £2; W.D. Bell £1; N. Collins 5/-; L. Otter 10/-; K. Walter £2; D. ~~Purkiss~~ £14/7.

It would really be a pity if Nature produces each individual as a unique being, only so that Society may reduce humanity to a collection of similarities.

Jean Rostand.

(GO AHEAD AND LIVE! Edited by Mildred J. Loomis. Philosophical Library, Inc. 15 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y. 4 dollars.)

There have always been individuals who have counted themselves out of the current values and practices of their times. Some, like Thoreau, have preferred the "solitary Life"; others have risked the extremities of illegalism; some have been content to make an "inner emigration", remaining in society but not of it; others have sought in community life oases in a "desert of men". And some have tried to escape the mechanized rat race of technological society by going "back to the land" and becoming as self-sufficient as possible. This is the "green revolution" of the homesteaders, spearheaded in the U.S.A. by the School of Living founded in 1934 by Ralph Borsodi.

"Go Ahead and Live!" presents the ideas and experiences of the School of Living in a popular form. It is based on the efforts of a young American couple (whose names are fictionalized) to shake off the air-conditioned nightmare of conventional life and find creative fulfillment. It consists of letters from, and interviews with, members and sympathisers of the School of Living and covers subjects ranging from the breast-feeding of babies to the intricacies and iniquities of usury. Sometimes the tone is rather reminiscent of the over-breeziness of the how-to-win-friends-and-influence-people type of tract, but these deficiencies are more than compensated for by the contributions of such writers as Don Worthen and Laurence Lebadie. It is good to see the latter making hard covers at last.

For anyone who would like an introduction to the green revolution this book is worth reading.

S.E.Parker.

X X X X X X

(MANY MATERNITIES AND SOME CHANGELINGS. By Karl Walter. Privately published by the author.)

Karl Walter is an octogenarian and a lifelong anarchist who has lead a varied life in many parts of the world. His book is in two parts: "Many Maternities" consists of short poems of an autobiographical nature and takes up the bulk of the book, and "Some Changelings" consists of translations, including the Pervigilium Veneris" and some Odes of Horace. The former, the autobiographical part, is the most interesting. There are poems recalling the poet's parents and childhood, impressions of places, old love affairs are tenderly remembered, the whole being a long odyssey of a sensitive and active mind.

The author makes full use of tone, rhythm and rhyme, as well as imagery. All his poems have meaning, both overall meaning and a meaning in the context of each individual word. This makes a welcome change from the sort of stuff that is so prevalent today, which consists entirely of images, usually of no great clarity or vividness, and with no relationship with each other, nor with any overall theme. The resulting effect on the reader is as fleeting as a line of tiny, vaguely-glimpsed butterflies, except that butterflies are beautiful. It is a pity that in a world where philosophy and psychology are continually stressing the difficulties of human communication that so many modern poets should eschew most of the few means of communication that are possible and instead deliberately concentrate on the feeble and ephemeral.

Karl Walter, older and wiser, avoids such pitfalls and presents a balanced and impressive book. What it lacks, however, are both a preface and an autobiographical note with which the reader could relate the incidents in the poems with the actual unfolding of the poet's life.

X X X X X Jeff Robinson.

Books Received: OSWALD, By Kerry Thornley. New Classics House, Chicago.
To be reviewed in a future issue.

LOVE

A feeling, nothing more
 No life, no ever after
 No promise, no going on
 Just short, sharp union
 Happiness
 Darkness
 Despair

LIFE

Feeling when there is nothing there
 Thinking when the mind is blank
 Breathing when there is no air
 Seeing when the sight is gone.
 Being.

Leasley Olley

x x x

LLYN EIDDEN-MAWR

This solitude: a silver bell
 Tolls faintly in enormous void.
 Its rhythms clear, unechoed tell
 Location, purity deployed,
 In catalyst, clean mountain air
 Which wears the rocks, haphazard strewn
 Till I like they show core laid bare
 As granite mounts to hillocks hewn.
 No other selfs as company bleat
 With myth, illusion, lie or tact
 The self that armourless stands here
 In single, fundamental fact.
 So toll bell toll and loudly clang,
 Show truthfully we are, I am.

Jeff Robinson

x x x

POEM

i am tall my inches lounge
 tiring the beer in my glass
 & beyond me rain enfolds
 a vague mystery of love

miles cry distance apart
 but its comforting to know
 that my rain in time will fall
 this much only can i give now on you

Neil Spratling

x x x

THERE WAS A WHEEL

There was a wheel, and then he fell asleep.
 When he woke up the mystiques and the prophets
 Had come along again: death. A flower-salesman
 Who once had a name. How can I sign my poem?
 My parents don't like poetry. It frightens them.
 Then why do they wake me up? My name's Ariel.
 Tomorrow it will be DESTINY or Napoleon.
 Too bad to mar and wreck machines, say the
 machines.

Tracy Thompson

INTERVIEW

A job as a cook?
 (Shall I smile or look wise,
 do the talking, or let her?)
 We like good, plain cooking,
 and are a very happy home.
 (Should I have worn
 warm, sloppy boots,
 or cold, polished shoes?)
 Of course, you understand
 we want someone who is going to stay.
 Our last cook was here for twenty years.
 (Better not mention
 walking out of the last six jobs
 without giving notice.....)
 You have references, of course?
 Thank you for coming.
 We'll write to you.
 Good-bye.....

PERSPECTIVE

Things have always been
 "Worse than ever before".
 The world has always been
 "At the cross roads"
 and
 "On the brink of disaster".
 It has always been
 "Time to act".

I have been waiting a long time now
 for the end.

WHY CAN'T I THINK OF A TITLE?

The world is divided into three halves:
 those who believe in the Social Revolution
 those who don't anymore
 and those who don't give a damn either way.

Pat Parker

X X X

SANITY

When the president
 ordered the gardener
 to tell the general
 to inform the pentagon
 to give the word
 to blow up the world
 the gardener turned
 round and told
 the president to
 get stuffed.

Dave Cunliffe.

NOTICE TO READERS IN THE LONDON AREA

A meeting for all interested in individualist anarchism
 will be held on Sunday, September 12th., at 10 Churton Street
 (Basement Flat), Victoria, S.W.1., at 8 p.m. (Off Vauxhall Bridge
 Rd., Nearest Station: Victoria)

MAX STIRNER AND EGOISM

Francis Ellingham

3. "Conscious Egoism"

(Page references are to Stirner's "The Ego and His Own", translated by S.T. Byington, Libertarian Book Club, New York, 1963)

So far, I have argued that Stirner's peculiar concept of "egoism" is, in effect, a concept of spontaneity - although, being confused by the fallacy of psychological egoism, Stirner never saw this. When he called all men "egoists", what he was really saying was that their behaviour is essentially spontaneous: "Involuntary, not due to conscious volition", to quote the Oxford Dictionary. From now on, I shall assume the correctness of this interpretation.

I shall also assume that Stirner was right. There is actually no such thing as conscious volition. True, we are often conscious of making decisions which sometimes (but by no means always) seem to affect our subsequent behaviour. But where do these conscious decisions come from? We cannot say they are due to previous decisions, because the question of their origin would at once arise, and we should find ourselves in an infinite regress. We can only conclude that the workings of the conscious mind are essentially spontaneous, and that far from controlling the natural self, the conscious mind is only a manifestation of it. The so-called "faculty of volition" is a myth of bad philosophy.

But what, it may be asked, is the use of Stirner's doctrine? What practical difference can it make to our lives?

The answer is, none - unless we really believe it, or, as Stirner would say, are "conscious" of it. It is no use merely assenting to it intellectually. Most people assent intellectually to the proposition that they are mortal. Yet it is possible for an intelligent, educated man to spend a lifetime not really believing that he will ever die. Then, one day, the fact of his own mortality may come home to him. Really hit him. And the shock may alter his whole outlook on life, so causing profound changes in his behaviour. He is now what might be called a "conscious mortal".

Stirner's doctrine is intended to shock and transform us in the same way. It is meant to give us such a psychological jolt that our lives will never be the same afterwards. We have always been "egoists", in Stirner's peculiar sense, without believing it. Now we are to become "conscious egoists":-

"Thousands of years of civilisation have obscured to you what you are, have made you believe you are not egoists but are called to be idealists ("good men"). Shake that off!...All your doings are unconfessed, secret, covert, and concealed egoism. But because you are unwilling to confess to yourselves, that you keep secret from yourselves, hence not manifest and public egoism, consequently unconscious egoism - therefore they are not egoism, but thralldom, service, self-renunciation." (P.164)

That is, we have been brought up to think of ourselves, not as being essentially spontaneous, but as being able to control ourselves by our conscious mind. We feel called upon to use this mythical faculty of self-control in order to choose a good life rather than a bad one. But we must shake off this false view, because, although all our doings are in any case spontaneous, if we are not conscious of this, they are unspontaneous. This is only an apparent, verbal contradiction, not an actual one. As we saw in the first article, what we call "unspontaneity" is not the opposite of spontaneity, but a kind of spontaneous schizophrenia - the pathological condition of a mind torn between its natural urges and its conscious ideals. And this unhappy state of spontaneous "unspontaneity" is what Stirner means by "self-renunciation": not the renunciation of selfish desires, but the mad opposition of the conscious mind to the natural self.

Thus the practical consequence of Stirner's doctrine, if we really believe in it, is nothing less than sanity. "Self-renunciation" is madness, arising from a false view of the self, and it afflicts almost everybody: "I regard

.....almost the whole world of men, as veritable fools, fools in a mad-house." (P.43) "Conscious egoism" arises from the correct view, and is the natural, harmonious behaviour of a completely integrated personality. Let us now try to see in more detail what this "conscious egoism" involves.

First, "conscious egoism" involves a release from all feelings of obligation - religious, moral or whatever. It puts paid to the psychological tyranny of church, state, family, party, society. It destroys the hypnotic power of every authoritarian institution, by undermining the basis of that power: the belief that the self is not essentially spontaneous, that it contains a "higher", controlling element:-

"You despise the egoist (i.e. the conscious egoist) because he....has his eyes on himself where you would like to see him act to favour an idea (e.g. Christianity, humanness). The distinction between you is that...you cut your identity in two and exalt your "proper self"...to be ruler of the paltrier remainder, while he will hear nothing of this cutting in two..." (P.30)

If there is no "proper self" to rule the remainder, if the conscious mind is only a manifestation of the natural self, then what sense can we make of any authority? It may sometimes be prudent to obey them, but there is nothing sacred about them. On the contrary, they are essentially stupid and cruel, because they order us to control our behaviour by means of a faculty we do not possess. Away, then, with all superstitious reverence of authority! "I have my law in my whole nature," wrote Stirner, "in myself." (P. 161)

Here I think we should note that Stirner's concept of a law in one's whole nature has nothing to do with what is known as "scientific naturalism". Some philosophers (notably Spinoza) have held that the whole universe is a single, causally connected system, whose laws are discoverable, at least in principle, by scientific investigation. Human beings are regarded as parts of this system, and all their behaviour is held to be determined by natural laws. In this view, as in Stirner's, all notions of obligation are merely the products of ignorance and superstition. But although scientific naturalism (if it is worked out consistently) may lead to an amoral philosophy very like Stirner's, its basis is quite different, and ~~is~~ not, I think, so secure. Scientists now doubt whether all natural phenomena are linked in one causal chain, and even if they were, it is not clear how scientific investigation, even in principle, could ever prove this. But Stirner makes no appeal to science at all. The law in one's nature is discoverable, not by science, but rather by introspection: one simply looks at one's self and sees directly that it cannot be "cut in two", and consequently has no ruling part. That the self follows its own law means, therefore, not that its behaviour is scientifically predictable, but that it just cannot help itself - that its behaviour, whether predictable or ~~not~~, (not) cannot be other than it actually is:-

"One is not capable of anything that one does not really do. Could a man blinded by cataract see? Oh, yes, if he had his cataract successfully removed. But now he cannot see because he does not see. Possibility ~~and~~ reality always coincide. One can do nothing that one does not, as one does nothing that one cannot." (P.329)

But the release from all sense of obligation is only one side of "conscious egoism", and the negative side at that. What positive consequences, it may be asked, follow from this new view of human nature? How does the "conscious egoist" in fact behave, once freed from his psychological chains?

Naive critics assume that he must behave very badly, ^{meanly,} showing the exact antithesis of all the fine qualities which religious, ~~moral~~ and legal codes are supposed to foster. The "conscious egoist" does not feel bound by morality, therefore he must be a compulsive cheat and liar. He has no respect for the law, therefore he must be utterly anti-social and irresponsible. He rejects religion, therefore he must behave like an incarnation of the devil himself.

Nothing could be further from Stirner's own idea of a "conscious egoist".

In the following passage he makes it perfectly clear that the "bad" man - the antithesis of the pious, moral, law-revering man - is in his view just as crazy:-

"Thus self-renunciation is common to the holy with the unholy, to the pure and the impure. The impure man renounces all "better feelings", all shame, even natural timidity, and follows only the appetite that rules him. The pure man renounces his natural relation to the world ("renounces the world") and follows only the "desire" which rules him. Driven by the thirst for money, the avaricious man renounces all admonitions of conscience, all feelings of honour, all gentleness and all compassion; he puts all considerations out of sight; the appetite drags him along. The holy man behaves similarly. He makes himself the "laughing-stock of the world", is hard-hearted and strictly just; for the desire drags him along. As the unholy man renounces himself before Mammon, so the holy man renounces himself before God and the divine laws." (P. 60.)

In other words, any attempt to interfere with the natural and spontaneous functioning of the self, for "good" or "bad" purposes, is madness. Whether one strives to turn oneself into a saint or into a millionaire, the fundamental mistake is the same: the opposition of the conscious mind to the natural self, the absurd idea that "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." For while it is true that "I have my law in my whole nature", it is also true that I - that is my conscious mind - cannot change that nature. I can only accept it: "Just recognize what you really are, and let go your hypocritical endeavours, your foolish mania, to be something else than you are." (P.164)

Thus the sign of a "conscious egoist" is not a ruthless, domineering personality, but a certain docility, a readiness to face facts and accept them. If "possibility and reality always coincide", what sense is there in rebelling against reality? And if it is impossible to change one's own nature, is it not foolish to try to change other people's? Actually it is the moralist who is domineering, since he tries to force his crazy notions of "duty" on to others, and "despises shrewd people's rule to take men as they are." (P. 328)

We have now reached the great paradox of Stirner's philosophy. The "conscious egoist", far from being the terrible monster imagined by ignorant and prejudiced critics, is actually what masters of the spiritual life have called "mortified" or "non-attached". Since he understands himself, all the insane ambitions and pretensions ("holy" or "unholy") of his conscious mind have died a natural death. And since he understands other people, he finds himself treating them with the spontaneous gentleness and compassion of the true saint.

In the next article I hope to show that Stirner's philosophy has much in common with Taoism and Zen Buddhism, and thereby to clarify further both the negative and the positive sides of "conscious egoism".

In Francis Ellingham's article in the last issue (No.8) the words "disinterested in the normal sense" at the end of the first sentence on the page numbered 9, should have read: "egoistic in the normal sense".

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