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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

« MINUS ONE »

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UNIQUENESS AND FINITUDE

Scepticus

It is paradoxical that people consistently fail to understand what Stirner meant by referring to the individual as "unique". We are familiar with the predictable objection that one would have to be a solipsist to legitimately predicate "uniqueness" of oneself, since - if one freely acknowledges the independent reality of other living entities - one THEREBY automatically relinquishes any grounds for characterizing oneself as incomparable.

Unique simply means that there is only ONE being in the entire universe that is formulating these thoughts and communicating them by transferring them to paper. Since the word unique means "sole" as much as "incommensurable", there can be no valid objection to describing ANY creature as unique, even though it seems so very SIMILAR, anatomically and psychologically, to myriads of others. After all - similarity and identity are NOT synonymous.

The experience of our own uniqueness is not necessarily accompanied by feelings of arrogance - or, to go even further, megalomania. If I say "I am unique", I am not comparing myself with others and claiming I am superior, merely using a convenient word to speak of ME. The word "unique" is, admittedly, used in an attributive sense, but it is also (simultaneously) employed in a purely descriptive sense.

That we are finite means, for many people, that it is somehow inappropriate to call ourselves "unique". They maintain that we are only perishable creatures, "representatives of Humanity" who must meekly accept our insignificance and "place in the world". But if my life is something that will cease utterly at some moment, this does not destroy or in any way diminish my utter singularity. After all, what determines the (experiential, egoistic) "worth" of an existence is not its duration but its content. So, it is quite right that we should say "I am the Unique One", because this is, quite APART from any philosophical speculations, a statement incontestably true. I have yet to meet MY "Doppelgänger".

There are many folk who are depressed at the thought of their inevitable demise. These people often give their allegiance to some religious system, which promises them personal immortality. (This, we are told, is a "natural spiritual desire", not "egoism") As against this, the conscious self-regarder affirms his mortality, is not disturbed by or ashamed at it, and realizes that his "cosmic insignificance" is only a phrase used by others to intimidate him. What significance I possess is my business, since others are only talking from the outside, they are not co-tenants of my skull and my mortal frame.

(Cont. on page 14)

LAURANCE LABADIE

James J. Martin

Henry Menck died in 1787

The death of Laurance Labadie on August 12, 1975, in his 78th year, removes from the scene the last direct link to Benjamin R. Tucker, virtually closing the last episode in the socio-economic reform impulse known in the 20th century as "Mutualism", a blending of the ideas of Josiah Warren, P.J. Proudhon, William B. Greene and Tucker, in the main, augmented by embellishments of some less-well-known students attracted to it over the years. Laurance was its most polished exponent in this era, and one of his most prized possessions was a photograph which bore the following dedication:

I take pleasure in presenting this photo to Laurance Labadie, the only young person that I recall who, being the offspring of an anarchist, finds his greatest satisfaction in continuing the battle, even though the cause is lost. More power to his elbow!

Sept. 6, 1936

Benjamin R. Tucker

Laurance was a descendant of French and Indian people who had lived in the Great Lakes area of the US since the 18th century. I remember looking through several thick albums of family photographs many times, noting the repeated appearance generation after generation of short, stocky men with pronounced Indian physiognomy. Laurance was proud of both his ancestral strains, but he was the last of the line. He never married and the sole survivor is a daughter of one of his two sisters.

Laurance was the most unusual self-taught and intellectually disciplined person I have ever met. He learned to write and think over a long period of years of perfecting his skills in solitary study, and polished by a substantial correspondence with many people. This latter is the most fiercely logical and precise letter writing I have ever known about, produced with an exceptional economy of words and lacking in padding of any kind. He also turned out a lengthy string of essays, in the several hundreds, almost all of which remain unpublished. In addition to this he turned out a series of beautifully printed and bound brochures which he set, printed and bound himself, working in the basement shop in the old family home on Buchanan Street in Detroit, Michigan, which had previously been developed by his father Joseph A. Labadie, colleague of Tucker on Liberty and one of the first class exemplars of the tradition of self-publication in the last century of US history.

However, Laurance was not a writer or even remotely related to the pedagogical world of talk and print; he was a skilled worker, one of the very first rank of tool makers in Detroit for many years, with an accumulation of related skills which gained for him the reputation of prime craftsmanship in anything he undertook. Laurance kept a few examples of his tool-making prowess, which can only be described as exquisite.

He left high school to go to work in the automotive industry, starting at the old Continental Motors out on East Jefferson Avenue in Detroit in 1918, and subsequently worked for Studebaker, Ford, and Chevrolet, being part of the prestigious experimental team at the latter for some time beginning in the 1920s. It was ironic that

although Laurance worked in the automotive industry for a generation, he never learned to drive an automobile.

Laurance retired early, shortly after World War II, at which time I first became personally acquainted with him. For some years he was much interested in the people connected with the homesteading impulse associated with Ralph Borsodi and Mildred Jensen Loomis, and in the early 1950s was closely associated with the psychologist Theodore Schroeder. Laurance subsequently left Detroit and moved to Suffern, N.Y., where he bought the original Borsodi School of Living property, and where he lived for a quarter of a century. While Laurance was moving to the East Coast, I was moving to the West. Our correspondence continued for some years, and tailed off in the late 1960s, being replaced by lengthy telephone conversations.

I consider it a high privilege to have known Laurance Labadie for thirty years. He was the first person to express a high opinion of what became my book *MEN AGAINST THE STATE*, at a time when such enthusiasts could have been counted on the fingers of one hand, with fingers left over. We spent considerable time mulling over many things in the earlier years, though I never developed his expertise in economic theorizing. He had a reputation for irascibility, which was partially deserved, as he not only never suffered fools gladly, he never suffered them at all, period. More than one jellyhead learned not to use the English language carelessly in matching ideas with him. Laurance used to remark that in conducting an argument which was gradually being lost, it was characteristic of such persons to use bigger words as they got into deeper water. For those who tried to bamboozle him with windy bilge, the results were even more horrendous.

But I always thought of him as a very kind and exceedingly generous person, and a consistently interesting associate despite our steadily diverging ways and interests over the decades. It is a real commentary on the profound intellectual cowardice of this last generation that his literary output was almost entirely unknown and that his published work, other than that which appeared a very few times in journals of tiny circulation, was entirely of his own hand. In America, unwanted critics are rarely killed, or even jailed; they are simply deprived of an opportunity to be heard.

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LETTER

L.L., too, could have made use of the microfiche of on. But like most others - he seemed addicted to ink on paper. J. Z.

Mark A. Sullivan's article (NO 35) gave me some wry amusement. I have neither the inclination nor the patience to go through its many absurdities, but there are one or two points I would like to comment on.

Firstly, note his two definitions of self-government, i.e. "autonomy" :- "one's unique consciousness of the world" and "one's unique self consciousness". Is it necessary to point out they are not the same? Then, his conception of a "free society" with rules and contracts but without the means to enforce them. This surely requires an optimistic view of humanity bordering on sheer fantasy.

He quotes John Beverley Robinson's naive views on economics, which rely on the translation of "labour" as "manual labour", to the exclusion of any other kind of labour. He then gives a meaningless definition of Property as "the privilege of getting more than is given". Rubbish.

The amusement was the spectacle of Mr. Sullivan quoting Stirner in support of his views (they are too incoherent to be called "theories"!).

(Cont. on page 18)

THE POLITICS OF WHIM:

A Review of 'Leaving the Twentieth Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International', Translated and Edited by Christopher Gray (Free Fall Publications, London, 1974)

Chris. R. Tame

While at University I once put up a notice in the student union building asking anyone interested in Ayn Rand, Max Stirner and individualist-libertarian thought in general to contact me. The only people to do so were a small group who described themselves as "anarchists" and "situationists". At the time my impression of "situationism" was that of simply another wierdo avant-garde artistic group akin to the Surrealists, and since my fortunately brief acquaintance with these particular individuals confirmed them to be more of those coercive socialists who have the staggering audacity to call themselves anarchists, I was disinclined to concern myself further with them or "Situationism".

Reading "Leaving the Twentieth Century", a collection of Situationist essays, amply confirms my earlier judgement. Indeed, there are a few books the enforced reading of which I would consider a suitable punishment for my worst enemies, and this work would certainly deserve a premier place amongst them. It constitutes a surely certifiable case of the "Higher Nonsense" that seems to emanate so frequently from Continental politico-aesthetic cults (e.g., Dada, Surrealism, Structuralism, etc.). In fact, a psychological study really should be done on the type of mentality which can produce the sort of horrendous verbiage we find in "Leaving the Twentieth Century", on the aberrations which result in a prose which combines stifling turgidity with a degree of abstraction and conceptual reification that frequently takes one from the realm of pretentious obscurity to that of starkly incomprehensible insanity.

Unfortunately, however, the Situationists do have further significance. For it is not only their influence upon such groups as the English "Angry Brigade" (perpetrators of a number of absurd and futile bombings) and a segment of so-called "revolutionary" youth which makes some consideration desirable, but, as we shall see, the evidence they provide regarding some of the motivational factors behind Marxist and socialist ideology.

So what do the Situationists believe?

They are apparently in complete agreement with basic Marxian economics, its analysis and critique of commodity production and wage labour. But their main aim at the moving target of capitalism centres not on its material shortcomings - its unprecedented and unrivalled provision of material goods has made this tactic somewhat untenable nowadays - but on its alleged psychological and cultural ones. In this they build on the critique of "alienation" so important in the work of the young Marx, a critique currently being abstracted from the now less attractive and plausible superstructure of "scientific socialism" to enjoy fresh popularity in the analysis - and on the banners - of various "new" radicalisms.

The bulk of the Situationists' writings is, then, a critique of "our alienated social life" (p.13), the "poverty of everyday life", the "penury amidst abundant consumer goods" (p.50). Their analysis is, however, identical in essentials to that of Marx, Marcuse, Fromm, the whole Frankfurt school, Ernest Becker and the now myriad swarm of "alienationists". It differs only in certain matters of emphasis (e.g., their critique of art and the city), in certain suggested

social 'therapies' (the famous "construction of situations"), and some of the terminology. The term "Spectacle", perhaps their most famous terminological innovation, is simply a synonym for "alienation". As the editor Christopher Gray states in his commentary, "Spectacle" means

"...a circus, a show, an exhibition - a one-way transmission of experience; a form of 'communication' to which one side, the audience, can never reply; a culture based on the reduction of almost everyone to a state of abject non-creativity: of receptivity, passivity and isolation. Now they (i.e., the Situationists) saw that the same structure applied not only to cultural and leisure 'activity', not only to political organization (whether that of the ruling classes or that of the so-called 'Left') but this experience of passivity, isolation and abstraction was the universal experience imposed by contemporary capitalism: an experience radiating from its basic alienation, the commodity. Henceforward, consumer capitalism was to be simply the society of the spectacle. (p.7, emphasis in the original)

Throughout this book, then, we are confronted with a ceaseless and tedious polemic against "this mechanical civilization" and "its inevitably catatonic leisure" (p.18). (1) Contemporary civilization is characterized by its alleged "exhaustion...squalor...stagnation" (p.54). Everywhere "the same boring spectacle of the same boring alienation spread(s) over the whole face of the earth" (p.44). And thus we are informed that

"Life in its entirety is suspended in a negativity which erodes it and defines it formally. To talk of life today is like talking of rope in the house of a hanged man. Since the key of the will-to-live has been lost, we have wandered through the corridors of an endless mausoleum..." (p.54)

It is this sort of 'analysis' (to honour it with a title it does not deserve) which constitutes the foundations of Situationism's 'new' revolutionary theory. As they themselves declare:

"Revolutionary theory can only be based on a critique of everyday life in capitalist society; it must broadcast a different conception of happiness. The left and right are in agreement as to the nature of poverty: shortage of food. They are also in agreement as to the nature of happiness. This is the root of the mystification that has wrecked the workers' movement in the highly industrialized countries. Revolutionary propaganda must offer everyone the possibility of a radical change in their way of life, a change that they will experience right away. In Europe this task entails a far more specific conception of what true wealth would be - only in this way can the poverty of cars and television sets become truly intolerable to the exploited." (p.128)

What are we to make of all this, of such complaints as the following?

"...(M)ajor breakthroughs in the conquest of nature...have failed to make the slightest difference to the nature of everyday life." (p.8)

"A new form of mental illness has swept the planet: banalization. Everyone is hypnotized by work and by comfort: by the garbage disposal unit, by the lift, by the bathroom, by the washing machine. This state of affairs, born of a rebellion against the harshness of nature, has far overshot its goal - the liberation of man from

material cares - and become a life destructive obsession. Young people everywhere have been allowed to choose between love and the garbage disposal unit. Everywhere they have chosen the garbage disposal unit. A totally different spiritual attitude has become essential - and it can only be brought into being by making our unconscious desires conscious and by creating entirely new ones. And by a massive propaganda campaign to publicise these desires." (pp.18-19, emphasis in original)

That the "banality", the "catatonia", and the existential "exhaustion" the Situationists feel around them is really primarily within themselves and their own sense of life is, of course, a consideration that never occurs to them! But is it not in fact clear that once more we are in the company of Huxley's "perennial philosophy", the insane wailings of a diseased intellectual tradition which for centuries - millennia - has disparaged earthly existence and materialistic pleasures? However, even if the Situationists were right, and their sense of meaninglessness and banalization was shared by the vast majority, would that mean it was the correct and appropriate response to reality? Or would it rather mean that the masses have been so bludgeoned and conditioned by the advocates of the anti-life nexus of values that they are unable to see and experience the true meaning of their lives and labour? But, of course, real analysis, real questioning and rational inquiry, has no place in the work of the Situationists. Indeed, no rational argument is ever advanced in support of their feverish denunciations. Just why, for example, are consumer goods - televisions, cars, washing machines etc - "impoverished objects" which have "stopped us living" (p.49)? No answer. One wonders too what the average "worker", the deified hero of the Situationists, would reply when glibly informed that his purchases, his consumer durables, are "phony" needs, "habits that were never needs in the first place but were quite blatantly manufactured by contemporary society". (p.44) In the face of such perverse obtuseness, such stunningly irrational 'argument' (also a very common one among the many critics of advertising), it seems quite useless to point to the most natural and 'un-phony' desire - need - of human beings to make their lives more comfortable by employing time, labour and inconvenience saving appliances. By what standard, then, do the Situationists sit in judgement upon the supposed 'phoniness' or 'Genuineness' of contemporary life styles and the products of modern industry and technology? If perhaps it is because such products were unknown - incomprehensible even - to our Stoneage ancestors, or those even of a generation before, it seems a strange and arbitrary return to puritanical asceticism to indict them for 'phoniness' on those grounds. Anyway, it is strange to see the newness, the "blatant manufacture", of contemporary consumption patterns and life-styles being condemned by those who previously told us of the desirability of "making our unconscious desires conscious and...creating entirely new ones". (p.19, emphasis mine) (And just how do the Situationists know that contemporary habits are not true to our "unconscious" desires?) Strange too from people who - as we shall see - in their next breath inform us that their envisioned future society will be one of the "satisfaction of the demands of the passions, (giving) individual desires whatever they need to use" (p.159). Who then are the Situationists to reject the "demands of the passions" of the contemporary workers, their alleged heroes? But even if the present consumption patterns and life-styles were completely the result of social influence and persuasion why is this particular conditioning of any less moral acceptability than the "massive propeganda campaign" (p.19), the "revolutionary propeganda" (p.120) urged by the Situationists to alter the desires

and tastes of the masses? Clearly, logic and consistency are also unnecessary bourgeois commodities for the Situationist.

But reading the puerile drivel of the Situationists can serve as an insight into more than the lunacy of merely this one collectivist cult. Modern Marx scholars have shown how it was the young Marx's critique of alienation which laid the foundations for the whole edifice of the mature system of "scientific socialism". (2) It is in this context, therefore, that the Situationists' analysis of "social alienation" can, I believe, help throw light upon the nature and motivation of Marx's analysis and upon the motivation behind much Marxist and collectivist thought in general.

Of what, in fact, when one penetrates the abstruse and abstract terminology of Marx (and the other "alienationists"), do we really find the complaints against "alienation" to consist? Are they not simply a sustained metaphysical whining against a universe which doesn't allow one to have one's cake and eat it, a universe in which individual effort, choice, labour and the division of labour are necessary: a desire for the "redemption" of man from the "realm of necessity"? (3) The Situationists' vision of "the permanent transformation of the world" (p.106) most vividly underlines this (age-old) yearning for an effortless existence where every whim is miraculously fulfilled. Indeed, they quite accurately describe their own ideology as "the collective politics of desire" (p.159, emphasis in original.) It is a vision of a world characterized by the "satisfaction of the demands of the passions, (giving) individual desires whatever they need to use" (p.159); of the "free construction of the whole space-time of individual life" (p.126). In such a world the "new rights of man" will be "the right to the material equipment necessary for the realization of their desires, the right to creativity, the right to the conquest of nature; the end of time as a commodity, the end of history-in-itself, the realization of art and the imaginary" (p.160). It will be, they declare

"an economy based on desire. This could be formulated as: technological society plus the imagination to see what could be done with it" (p.44)

"It will be a world of art made real...It is the construction of situations: the free creation of immediate experience itself". (p.45)

And so we are told that

"Day dreaming could become the most powerful dynamo in the world. Modern technological expertise, just as it makes everything considered 'Utopia' in the past a purely practical undertaking today, also does away with the purely fairytale nature of dreams. All my wishes come true---from the moment that modern technology is put to their service." (p.135)

The descriptions of the Situationists are far more understandable than Marx's turgid Hegelianisms. "At heart everyone wants to be God" (p.132) is a far clearer but quite synonymous rendition of Marx's "genuine resolution of the conflict between man and Nature ...the true resolution of the strife between existence and true being, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity". How much clearer is the yearning for effortless 'godlike' existence in the Situationists' frank praise for "the magic of the imaginary, (where) things exist only to be picked up and toyed with, caressed, broken apart and put together again in any way one sees fit" (p.135) than in Marx's convoluted

abstractions concerning the "consummated unity in being of man and Nature, the true resurrection of Nature, the thorough-going naturalization of man and the thorough-going humanism of Nature". How much more honest (if no more convincing) is the Situationist's open adulation of "the primitive-irrational play instinct" (p.146) than Marx's obfuscating conceptions of "free conscious activity" and "self-activity". It was, of course, easier to maintain a suitably intellectual and 'scientific' dignity by confining oneself to obscure Hegelianisms. And Marx was also well aware from the earliest of the dangers of allowing his writings to descend to the mundane level of concrete detail in their conception of the future society, to the Fourieresque idiocies this would have inevitably involved. The Situationists' lack of caution, however, leaves one in no doubt as to the childish yearnings that lay behind the critique of "alienation". Consider their concept of "unitary urbanism", for example:

"Everyone will live in their own cathedral. There will be rooms awakening more vivid fantasies than any drug. There will be houses where it will be impossible not to fall in love. Other houses will prove irresistibly attractive to the benighted traveller..." (p.19). (4)

We can indeed be grateful to the Situationists, then, for their unambiguous revelation of what they themselves term the "prime importance of subjectivity" (p.135), their vivid demonstration of the psychological roots of so much (although by no means all) Marxist and collectivist thought. (5) These roots can so frequently be found to lie in a pathological revolt against reality, against the necessities and requirements of human existence. Such varieties of socialism are indeed a "politics of whim", and the more one explores their many political and intellectual manifestations the more one finds Ayn Rand's passionate indictment confirmed:

"The secret of all their esoteric philosophies, of all their dialectics and super-senses, of their evasive eyes, snarling words, the secret for which they destroy civilization, language, industries, and lives, the secret for which they pierce their own eyes and eardrums, grind out their senses, blank out their minds, the purpose for which they dissolve the absolutes of reason, logic, matter, existence, reality —is to erect upon that plastic fog a single holy absolute: their Wish." (6)

What sort of politico-economic structure is it, however, that the Situationists propose to achieve their "permanent transformation of the world"? We are glibly informed that "(t)oday, planned economy allows one to foresee the final solution to the problems of survival" (p.139), despite the fact that every planned economy throughout history has manifestly failed to produce anything except tyranny, misery, poverty, chaos and stagnation. (7) But it hardly seems necessary to belabour the point that the Situationists possess not the slightest grain of knowledge regarding the realities of economy, industry and technology. Politically, however, the organs of such planning—indeed, the sole political structure—are to be "Workers Councils":

"(W)e see an organization as being revolutionary if it pursues effectively, drawing on the experience of the proletarian revolutions of this century, the international and absolute power of the workers' council". (p.106, emphasis mine)

"(R)evolutionary Workers' Councils which concentrate in themselves all the functions of decision execution, and federate with each other by means of delegates responsible to the base and revocable at any moment." (p.125)

Such Councils, we are informed, will be distinguished by "direct and total democracy; strictly mandated delegates subject to immediate recall; the abolition of hierarchy and of all detached specialization; the permanent creative participation of all ordinary people". (p.153) And that's pretty much it. After a couple of centuries of the abject failure of such glittering generalities and nebulous concepts to result in practice in anything remotely resembling a free society one feels justified in asking for just a little more concrete description of the politico-economic mechanisms of the 'new' society. But apparently not, for the Situationists inform us rather of "the simplicity of organization managed directly by everyone and for everyone"! (p. 157, first emphasis mine) Now if history and the record of every collectivist experiment large and small proves anything it is the staggering—in fact insurmountable—difficulties and complexities of such a proposed organization. What happens to those individuals who do not wish to be "planned", who don't like the jobs assigned to them by their fellows, or who wish to produce, trade and associate freely and non-coercively with others outside the purview of the "absolute power of the workers' councils"? No answer. The Situationists rightly identify and reject as a ruling class the "socialist bureaucracy" of the Soviet bloc, the "bureaucrats of Moscow and Peking". But what guarantees do they offer to prevent the development of such "new classes", bureaucracies and elites in their envisioned society? No answer. Such issues are simply masked by a mantle of empty "dialectical" abstractions. Like such socialist and Marxist "individualists" as Stephen Lukes, G.A.Cohen, and Ellen M. Wood, advocates of a "dialectical" synthesis of individual and community (8), the Situationists ceaselessly speak of a "community whose interests are identical with those of the individual" (p.147), the "participation of each individual in the self-realization of everyone else" (p.131), and the "true harmonization of life in common" (p.130) in a "collective takeover of the world" (p.15). Thus they inform us that "(t)he private and the public cannot be crudely opposed to each other for the very good reason that both sectors are equally alienated. The task of the new revolutionary movement will be precisely to transcend their antagonism" (p.38)

But the fact is that there can be no such thing as a "collective takeover of the world", a "liberation which is at once individual and collective" (p.156), a dissolution of "all forms of separation ...between public and private" (p.22).

"Society", "collective", "public", are only convenient terms to designate individuals in the aggregate. They are not entities, have no bodies, minds, interests are real existence. Aims, action, thought and interest reside only and wholly in the individual. The "transcendence" of the "separation" between individual and collective is, then, a literally meaningless abstraction. As long as individuals possess free will (the capacity for autonomous thought), differences in ideas, tastes, desires, and character, then "separations" (but not necessarily conflict, one hastens to add) will never be "transcended"—and quite rightly so! Such a "transcendence" would only be possible in an ant-hill of will-less, mindless automatons, not in a human society. And since only

individuals exist "planning" can only be of some people by others, the sacrifice of ~~some~~ always benefits others, and there are no such things as "collective" decisions, participation, management or "collective" anything else. Such floating abstractions regarding the alleged synthesis of individuals and community can only (and always have been) a mask for the domination of some individuals by others.

So what happens when an absolutely total unanimity does not frign in the "Workers' Councils", when "separations" do not magically disappear, and some individuals find the "plans" and "democratic" decisions of others not to their liking? The answer is clear—the return to "the right to impose the popular will, by force if necessary" (p.73). (9) And so much for all the fine phrases about "permanent liberation" and "total freedom", for we are back once more with that most basic of all "separations", that between the rulers and the ruled. *The most basic is that where the ruled unilaterally, individually & in groups separate themselves from the rulers - to do their own things for to*

But, of course, it should have been obvious from the start that the Situationists do not have the slightest genuine concern with freedom. Their mask is far too transparent to conceal that familiar, vicious and authoritarian face beneath; that same old desire to dominate, rule and coerce other people. If "(y)oung people everywhere have been allowed to choose between love and the garbage disposal unit" it is all too obvious that the Situationists would be quite overjoyed to remove the freedom to make such a choice! In fact we even find them rejoicing in a deterministic image of man, in contemporary experiments in brainwashing and conditioning. Thus they quote approvingly Serge Tchakhotine from his The Rape of the Crowds by Political Propaganda, his conclusion that "(h)enceforward people can be forced to act in ways predetermined without their knowledge" (p.11), and comment gleefully:

themselves, external-ly, autonomously, voluntarily & tolerantly. PIOT, 7.2.1997.

"It is the whole humanistic, artistic, and juridical conception of the inviolable and unalterable personality which is condemned. Ourselves, we are only too happy to see it go. However, there should be no mistake about the fact that we are going to be caught up in a race between free artists and the police in experiment with and developing the use of these new techniques of conditioning." (p.12)

In other words, the only "total freedom" in a Situationist society would appear to be that of the "free artists" to condition the masses in order to secure the 'right' choices! (10) Freedom is Slavery! Slavery is Freedom! And for any "counter-revolutionaries" who might prove recalcitrant enough to resist such conditioning, the simple "humane" solution of "liquidation" is prescribed:

"There can be no negotiation with the enemies of freedom, there's no quarter which can be extended to man's oppressors. The annihilation of counter-revolutionaries is the only 'humanitarian' act..." (p.149) "The working class shouldn't hesitate to liquidate anyone who gets in the way of their desire for total freedom". (p.152)

The heyday of the Situationist International is now fortunately over. But their influence, and the influence of identical and similar ideologies, lives on. To combat an enemy—to eradicate a plague—one must first understand it, however. Hopefully, this thought might help sustain a few dedicated individuals through the tedium and nausea of reading Leaving the Twentieth Century. It is

indeed fortunate for the human race, however, that there now exist truly radical individualist and libertarian movements which are actually dedicated to leading it out of the Twentieth Century—into the Twenty First, into a new world of greater freedom and prosperity and not, as would the Situationists, back into the Dark Ages of slavery and poverty.

Notes:

- (1) Hardly a very accurate description, I would have thought, for the myriad energetic leisure activities which so typically distinguish capitalist societies: from surfing to hot-rodding, karting, car customizing and numerous other bike and auto-sports; from rock and 'pop' dancing and performing to the dozens of sports and martial arts. But, in the world of the "Higher Nonsense" such mundane concrete examples, such issues as proof and disproof, are beneath consideration, of course.
- (2) See, among many other works, Robert C. Tucker, Philosophy and in Karl Marx (Cambridge University Press, 1961) and The Marxian Revolutionary Idea (London, Allen and Unwin, 1970); David McLellan, Marx Before Marxism (London, MacMillan, 1970) and The Thought of Karl Marx: An Introduction (London, MacMillan, 1971); Eugene Kamenka, The Ethical Foundations of Marxism (London, Routledge, 1962).
- (3) For a detailed examination of this issue see my forthcoming essays "The Myth of Alienation", "The Nature of Communism", and "The Political Hydra: The Varieties of Socialism".
- (4) Since the most recent anti-capitalist fashion is to stress the finitude of natural resources and capitalism's alleged waste-fulness, one wonders if the Situationists would now feel a trifle embarrassed over their advocacy of this somewhat cavalier treatment of those resources.
- (5) Thus, see my forthcoming essay, "The Political Hydra".
- (6) Ayn Rand, Atlas Shrugged (New York, Random House, 1957), pp. 1035-6. For an analysis of the work of Herbert Marcuse—which is remarkably similar in essentials to the Situationists—that draws the same conclusions regarding the desire for a "liberation from reality", see Prof. George Walsh, "Herbert Marcuse, Philosopher of The New Left", Pt.4, The Objectivist, December, 1970.
- (7) On the failure of the largest experiment in "planned economy" see Prof. Anthony Sutton's three volume study, Western Technology and Soviet Economic Development, 1917-1965 (Stanford University Press, 1970-1974); for wider theoretical analyses, see John Jewkes, Ordeal by Planning (London, MacMillan, 1948); F.A. Hayek, ed., Collectivist Economic Planning (New York, A.M. Kelley, 1967); Trygve Hoff, Economic Calculation in the Socialist Society (London, William Hodge, 1949); Ludwig von Mises, Human Action (London, Hodge, 1949, pp. 649-711, and Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis (London, Jonathan Cape, 1951) pp. 111-220.
- (8) See Stephen Lukes, Individualism (London, 1973); G.A. Cohen, "Marx's Dialectic of Labour", Philosophy and Public Affairs, Spring 1974, Vol.3, No.3; Ellen M. Wood, Mind and Politics: An Approach to the Meaning of Liberal and Socialist Individualism (Univ. of Calif. Press, 1973). For a detailed analysis and critique of such collectivist "individualists" see the forthcoming essays by Judy Englander, "Individualism, True and False", and myself, "The Myth of the Social Self".
- (9) This phrase is used in their approving account of the Paris Commune.
- (10) Exactly the same conclusion is reached by that other prophet of socialist "liberation", Marcuse. In his essay "Repressive Tolerance" he advocates a "democratic educational dictatorship of free men" (!), an elite of the wise and good to guide the ignorant masses. For an account see Walsh, op. cit., p. 11.

THE AFFLICTIONS OF THE CRITICS OF THE EGO.

Brand.

"What is a self?" asks Karl Marx. "Is it not an abstraction from a whole complex of social relations, of selves in relations?"

Would there be relations without the selves? If the self is an abstraction, what does Karl Marx use to build his State? The relations or the selves? Which is the concrete, and which the abstraction? Without the selves there are no relations, no State, no....nothing.

"The I is a we, a colony of cells, an orchestra of inherited instincts," says Victor Basch. "The particular I has no value... It exists only by and in other Is with whom it forms a nation, a society, a State."

The individual doesn't claim to be the I of the cell, but the I formed by a colony of cells. That an I is formed by hereditary instincts doesn't change it one iota.

It is still my I, formed by all the instincts that go into it.

It is still unique, and transitory, as no other I is like mine.

I am a world in myself, a unique world, in differing circumstances.

As I am my exclusive I, under any circumstances and at any time, therefore let us ask:

Do the cells exist on account of the body? The musicians on account of the orchestra? The bricks on account of the house? The eggs on account of the omelette? Individuals on account of the State?

Who was there first?

The individual, being a body, cannot be split up, added to, or subtracted from, because then he would no longer be a whole individual.

The State and society can be split up, added to, and subtracted from, because they are not bodies - they are only artificial compositions, abstractions.

Try to fuse together many I's in order to form a super I, a State, a society. It can't be done. The individual cannot be dissolved.

Chain together millions of individuals to form a State, or a society. They still remain different worlds, a conglomerate of enslaved, crushed individuals, perhaps alike, but still whole worlds in themselves.

Destroy the individual and there is no more State or society.

Destroy the State, dissolve society, and the individual survives, because individuals are the irreplaceable ingredients that go to form a State or a society.

A collection of obedient, tyrannized individuals is only a flock of sheep.

"The individual," says Bakunin (And what is he doing here among the enemies of the individual? Giving comfort to the authoritarians?) "is a product of society, and without society man is nothing."

Let's see....And without individuals society would be something? It would not exist, nor would the State. According to anthropological discoveries made in Abyssinia only a few months ago, man seems to be more than 3,000,000 years old. He originally lived without an organized society during most of these years and practically in isolation since there were so few human beings. And these primitive human beings survived. Society, the State, and other forms of human relations - how old are they? 20,000, 50,000, 100,000 years? Again the individual is the real thing.

"Society has been first," says Kropotkin (Has he, too, got lost among the enemies of the individual?)

Let's make it clear that Stirner is not against society, nor does he preach isolation, since the "union of egoists" is also a society. He is only against certain kinds of societies, the forced, the codified, the authoritarian societies. To these he opposes the free, voluntary which is the union of egoists.

"The society of animals preceded that of man," adds Kropotkin.

Of course, since many animals were in existence hundreds of millions of years before man developed. And since animals must have looked for protection under trees or in caves against bad weather (joined afterwards by primitive man) there they found themselves in company. In a word, for physical and psychological comfort they found themselves in society with other animals.

But did such a "society" have morals? Did it have laws to tyrannize them? Did it have sanctions? Were there police forces, collectors of taxes, military service, jails, the curse of capitalists, commissars, priests, gods, states, churches?

No, they were simply societies of free egoists, meeting mostly accidentally, since they had to wander around looking for food, and in most cases, perhaps, the same animals never met a second time.

Stirner is not against altruism. Who thinks he is an altruist, let him be. It doesn't bother Stirner. He thinks, first, that in most human actions real altruism is rarely met, because unconscious egoism is always discovered under it; second, that to appeal to altruism is the wrong way to try to achieve the emancipation of all individuals; third, that conscious self-interest based on free contracts is really the best and surest way for building a free, harmonious, and just society for everyone. *One only for everyone? Or, to each his own? J.Z.*

"The I of today," says Sidney Hook, "is different from the I of yesterday...because the I is a different I in different conditions.. The I is an abstraction, because there is not an absolute I...In one I there are concentrated many I's."

What a discovery!...And so my body of today is no more my body of yesterday? And whose body is it? Who represents my I of yesterday, represents it today, or will represent it tomorrow?

Am I no more I because every minute a few million cells die in me, and are replaced by new millions of cells?

An I in me, in you, dies every instant, and still we are me and you and nobody else. And it can never be otherwise.

We are ever dying, yet ever living, as I and you until our bodies disintegrate and vanish into nothingness. The nothingness of a dead I, a dead individual.

There are only ^{transitory} ~~transitory~~ I's, each one born with each individual, and disappearing with each individual.

The absolute I? A fantasy! Stirner doesn't claim an absolute I, because that would be another spook, a creature born from the thought of an individual, pretending afterwards to be a body above him, something "sacred", a divinity.

There exists only the transitory I of me, of you - not two, not various. But if they are not absolute, they are unique.

And in spite of all the hatred the authoritarians feel towards the rebellious and iconoclastic individual, nobody can exterminate him or her...and survive.

The individual is here to stay, And so is (the) individualism.

No individualism, no anarchy. Because then there would be no real freedom - only a flock of tamed, enslaved individuals, no matter what you called it.

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UNIQUENESS AND FINITUDE (Cont. from page 1) *Scepticism*

We are born into the company of men and shaped by them before we appreciate the intellectual rape that is occurring - known as the "process of education". We are told that what little dignity we possess is borrowed from "Humanity", and that it is our duty to perpetuate the species and always defer to the judgement of our fellows. Our life is not our own, since we are but the receptacles of the "spirit of Man". We must not question the conceptual scaffolding upon which human society rests, since this is the ultimate, most despicable kind of disloyalty and ingratitude. Similarly, we must entertain an unquestioning reverence for "Life" - if, for example, we see a film showing a geriatric ward, and we see some poor old creature kept alive (and suffering) by the ruthless "compassion" of doctors with fastidious consciences, we are not to question that, since to disconnect those machines would (we are told) constitute "murder of a human being". And that being on the bed, that ego - are his or her wishes in the matter consulted? Not a bit of it - "Man" must endure, whatever the agonising price paid by the poor sacrificial victims concerned.

So the net of generalities and categorizations descends, tightens - in a "liberal democracy" no less than a "dictatorship". Revolutionaries sacrifice themselves for "the cause", reactionaries resist, and the conscious egoist smiles, content to let the ideal-fetishists furnish him with cheap - entertainment. He knows he is under no obligation to either himself or anyone else to exist, to become a breeding machine, etc., and, if he finds living not to his taste, he sees no divinity within his bosom that must be zealously preserved until "Nature" allows it to "shuffle off this mortal coil". The insupportable gravity of most "solid citizens" has no effect upon him, and no one imprisons HIM in the gaol of generalities, the Alcatraz of abstractions.

S.E.PARKER AND SOLE EGO STIRNER

Francis Ellingham

The following is my reply to S.E.Parker's criticism in MINUS ONE No. 35:

Either there ^{are} many separate egos or there are not. If, as Parker maintains, there are, Stirner's words "I am not an ego along with other egos, but the sole ego, taken literally, are false. They can only be true if taken as a figurative way of saying something else.

Marx took them literally, concluding, understandably, that Stirner was a solipsist. True, large parts of "The Ego and His Own" seem inconsistent with solipsism. But then are solipsists ever consistent? (An eminent logician once told Bertrand Russell that she was a solipsist - and was surprised there were not more of them?) Parker takes the words figuratively. Very well, let us see if his interpretation holds water.

Stirner's words, Parker writes, mean that "to him he was the sole subject, all other individuals being regarded by him as objects whose relationship to him was one of utility." According to Parker, then, "I am the sole ego" is the figurative equivalent of two statements: (a) "to me I am the sole subject" and (b) "to me others are objects for my use".

Now (a) is surely a mere truism. It can only mean something like "from my viewpoint I, and I alone, am I" - logically flawless, but trivial. In any case, Stirner (as far as I am aware) never actually makes such a statement. We may therefore disregard (a).

But (b) is not trivial, and is often asserted by Stirner. It means, in effect, "I do not feel morally bound to treat others well (with love or humanity), but I treat them as I like, as if they were my property." This is clearly a way of saying "I reject social morality".

On Parker's interpretation, then, Stirner uses the astonishing words "I am the sole ego" merely as a figurative way of saying, in effect, "I reject social morality". But why? Parker has no answer.

Part of what Stirner is trying to convey (he sometimes uses words in several senses at once) is clearly his feeling of uniqueness. His complete sentence runs: "But I am not an ego along with other egos, but the sole ego: I am the ego."

But there is still a mystery. "I am a unique ego" and "I am the sole ego" are two very different statements. Why in the world would a staunch believer in the existence of many separate egos use the latter as a way of asserting the former?

No doubt Stirner began with the belief, inculcated by society, that he was a separate ego among many others. But the fact that, at the end of his book, he specifically rejects that belief surely needs more explanation than we get from Parker. I think Stirner must be interpreted quite differently.

Stirner had come to feel, I think, that he really was the sole ego. His words "I am the sole ego" are meant literally. But they are not the expression of a philosophical theory, like solipsism - or Fichte's "subjective idealism. They are an expression of an

ecstatic state of consciousness, in which everything is felt to be one's own. Such a consciousness no longer feels a separation (though for utilitarian purposes it can still make a distinction) between "myself" and "the external world": everything is felt as "mine", and therefore as "myself". Hence I am the only self, or "sole ego", which is everything, the universe.

This is not to regard the universe as a supra-individual transcendence: I could hardly transcend myself. Nor is this to equate or identify two separate entities, "me" and "the universe": there is only one entity, the ego - not the theoretical, "absolute" ego of Fichte, but my ego, the transitory ego (the universe is always changing, nothing is permanent), the real ego, myself! Marx never understood this because - like Fichte - he only lived in a world of theories, of "spooks", not in reality.

True, Stirner insists that he speaks of a finite ego. But that is in contradistinction to the "absolute" ego of the philosophers, not to the real, universal ego which - this is the whole point - is what I have been conditioned to think of as my finite ego. As Erwin Schrodinger put it in "My View of the World":

"Inconceivable as it seems to ordinary reason, you and all other conscious beings as such - are all in all. Hence this life of yours which you are living is not merely a piece of the entire existence, but is in a certain sense the whole; only this whole is not so constituted that it can be surveyed in one single glance."

This life of mine which I am living is surely what Stirner called "my finite ego". If not, I confess I have no idea what he was referring to. And what he was on the way to saying, though he never quite said it, was that the "absolute" ego is a fiction, whereas the real finite ego is, paradoxically, infinite. I would add that Schrodinger was not a mere "mystagogue" but a physicist who won a Nobel Prize for his work in quantum mechanics.

Parker says my use of the word "universe" turns it into yet another "spook". In reality it is his "separate entity" that is the spook: his Newtonian conception of the universe as "a collection of separate entities" - a concept essential for belief in the existence of separate selves - is hopelessly out of date. Bertrand Russell, in "My Philosophical Development", wrote:

"Newton works with four fundamental concepts: space, time, matter, and force. All four have been swept into limbo by modern physicists. Space and time, for Newton, were solid independent things. They have been replaced by space-time, which is not substantial but only a system of relations. Matter has had to be replaced by a series of events. Force...has been replaced by energy; and energy turns out to be indistinguishable from the pale ghost which is all that remains of matter."

Even before modern physics, F.H. Bradley, in "Appearance and Reality", wrote:

"If, seeking for reality, we go to experience, what we certainly do not find is a subject or an object, or indeed any other thing whatever, standing separate and on its own bottom. What we discover rather is a whole in which distinctions can be made, but in which divisions do not exist."

That statement, though written by a philosopher, is now in full

accord with science. "The world cannot be analyzed correctly into distinct parts; instead, it must be regarded as an indivisible unit." Who wrote that? Some "mystagogue"? No - Professor David Bohm, in "Quantum Theory", a standard textbook on the subject.

If Parker could produce a separate entity, then, he would cause a revolution in the scientific world. And since he cannot produce one, either his interpretation of Stirner, or Stirner himself, must go out of the window.

I am not, of course, saying that the words "I am the sole ego" are verifiable by science. Those words are mystical, in the strict sense that the reality behind them cannot be grasped intellectually, but is to be experienced directly. The condition for such experience is a state of psychological integration. And, as Herbert Read, in his essay on Stirner, pointed out: "Stirner's doctrine is, in fact, a plea for the integration of the personality."

That Stirner was a mystic, or turning into one, may seem less fantastic if we can find a recognized mystic expressing the mystical consciousness in similar terms. Here is such a mystic - Thomas Traherne - describing, in "Centuries of Meditation", how the world appeared to him as a child:

"The city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in Heaven. The streets were mine, the temple was mine, the people were mine, their clothes and gold and silver were mine, as much as their sparkling eyes, fair skins, and ruddy faces. The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the World was mine; and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it."

In another passage, Traherne wrote:

"You never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars; and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more than so, because the men are in it who are ^{very} one sole heirs as well as you."

The similarity of that language to Stirner's is sure too extraordinary to be a mere coincidence.

S.E. Parker himself, in a review of R.W.K. Paterson's book on Stirner, has written: "A French critic once remarked that he arose from reading 'The Ego and His Own' feeling like a king" - which, Parker implies, is how the reader is meant to feel. But that is how Traherne felt. That is the mystical consciousness. That is the ecstasy of total integration and liberation. That is Truth, or God, or whatever you like to call it. That is the real Self, which no word can express, but which, as Alan Watts has written, "is no vapid abstraction: it is very simply and truly yourself." ("The Book", p. 140.)

On the last page of "The Ego and His Own" Stirner comes nearest to saying "I am God": "They say of God, 'Names name thee not.' That holds good of me: no concept expresses me, nothing that is designated as my essence exhausts me: they are only names. Likewise they say of God that he is perfect and has no calling to strive after perfection. That too holds good of me alone."

Of me alone, of me the sole ego!

In Robert Heinlein (*Stranger in a Strange Land? At the end.*), 1st. July, 1975
a similar passage occurs: "I am God & you are God -

But then, who isn't?"

J. Z.

AND ANOTHER REPLY...

S.E.Parker

The main issue in this controversy has been whether or not what Stirner wrote in THE EGO AND HIS OWN supports the interpretation put forward by Francis Ellingham. I do not think it does and in MINUS One 35 I challenged him to show how "Stirner approaches 'the universe' in any other than a thoroughly nominalistic and utilitarian manner". This he has not done. In fact, all that he offers as evidence for his view is to repeat the sentence he quoted in his first article: "But I am not an ego along with other egos, but the sole ego: I am unique". I have nothing to add to my interpretation of this in No. 35.

Whatever value to theoretical physics Schrödinger's views may have on the microcosmic level, they are quite clearly bunkum on the macrocosmic level, the level on which human beings as human beings live and have their being. Whatever Schrödinger, or Russell, or Bradley, may say I shall go on treating the chair on which I sit, the pavement on which I walk, and the train in which I travel, as if they are not only "matter", but also separate from me - in other words I shall go on regarding the notion of "me" and "not-me" as meaningful. As for David Bohm's statement, it would be very interesting to see just how much analysing of the world he could carry out if he persists in thinking it "indivisible". It seems to me that Ellingham has a strong tendency to fall for the mystagoguery of scientists as well as that of mystics.

As for Ellingham's "distinction" between "sole" and "unique", see Scepticus's excellent article in this issue - or the Little Oxford Dictionary.

As for the remainder of his divagations and diversions, I have no intention of pursuing them. I leave to readers to make up their own minds whether they can accept his version of Stirner's view or mine - or perhaps consign us both to the limbo of redundant word-spinners!

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FROM PAGE 3:- He understands Stirner as well as Marx-Engels did, i.e., not at all. Why is he so concerned to get a "general emancipation of individuals from authority"? My interest would be best served by being the Authority. I was also amused by his arrogance - "most people live lives....automatically programmed to fulfill superficial socially imposed needs - so as to keep any self-consciousness from ever surfacing". Has he any evidence to support this contention? Or perhaps he has friendly chats with the Chief Programmer?

As G.K.Chesterton said "To preach egoism is to practice altruism" - notwithstanding how the bird sings.

Paul Rowlandson,
Liverpool.

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