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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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Minus

One

No. 39, 1977.

12p

SPECIAL NOTICE: Since there already exists a publication called EGO I have reverted to MINUS ONE as the title for this review. This means that EGO No.1. will now become MINUS ONE No. 38. I am sorry for any inconvenience this may cause. S.E.P.

ANARCHY AND HISTORY: An Existentialist View

N.A.W.

Why am I an anarchist? There are as many paths to anarchism as there are philosophies, because each philosophy, separating the individual from institutional affiliations, throws him back upon his own critical capabilities and forces him to encounter himself reasoning and willing. But, the path of some philosophies to anarchism is more direct than others. The closer a philosophy is to the individual's concrete experience, the easier it will be to draw out its anarchist implications. And those philosophies that subordinate philosophy itself to experience, making thought a living expression of the "man of flesh and bone", are not only anarchist by implication, but in essence, or anti-essence. I am an anarchist because I prefer to use ideas, rather than to be used by others in the name of ideas. I am a renegade against the powers and authorities that have nurtured me and that continue to maintain me, but that, despite their intention, have permitted me to recognize their own absurdity. Many may be ruled by the carrot and the stick, but all who are not renegades are ruled by the idea that they have a meaning beyond themselves and the particular effects that they have on others and that others have on them.

In our century, the individual's insertion into history has replaced his union with the Absolute as the dominant means of attaining transpersonal meaning. But, which history is my own? I am told that I am a member of a class by the Marxists, a fragment of Western civilization by the academic elite, a Jew by the Zionists, a white by the blacks (and the racist whites), a man by the women (and the chauvinist men), an American by the imperialists (and the anti-imperialists), and who knows what else? I refuse to make any of these histories my own. Their competition for my allegiance neutralizes each one of them. I can rid myself of each one; I can make each one my own. The conflicts among the authorities not only make me doubt the specific claims of each one: they make me doubt that I need transpersonal meaning at all. I find that I can express myself more fully in a union of egoists, renouncing history, than in any "community" dedicated to fabricating a history and using me as the raw material for its project.

But, try as I may to rid myself of social designations and to throw off the accumulated domination that they represent, I remain a renegade. I cannot be indifferent to the attempts of others to give me a place in their histories, to use me to give them transpersonal meaning. And worse yet, I cannot remain unmoved by the efforts of others to win the loyalties of my friends. The pressures are more often bribes than punishments, and are not exerted by people who will to dominate me, but by people who want me to confirm that their lives have historical

meaning. Let them feed me! I will bite their hands off when I have the chance! Not that I take any special pleasure in biting. I have better things to do unless I am offered a juicy bone. Such is the renegade: an individual who bites the organizational hand that feeds him.

The renegade-anarchist, the renegade-individualist, is against history, not indifferent to it. Mystics can be indifferent to history because they believe that they have transcended the flux of temporal existence. But, the very being of the anarchist is the flux, with all of its possibilities, uncertainties and most of all conflicts and ambivalences. Embrace of the flux is not a commitment, but a consequence of ridding oneself of transpersonal meaning, particularly historical meanings. What is history but the corporation manipulating markets in accordance with its growth curves, the State plotting wars to attain hegemony, the nation concocting a common tradition, and the church (or its "scientific" substitutes) administering plans for salvation? The anarchist repudiates collective pasts and collective futures. The past is made up of the traces of friends and enemies, while the future is a horizon of possible alliances, divisions and projects. The absurd existence asks for all of the values that can be appreciated, re-created and created in their integrity; not for prudent selection of values, chosen to accommodate the mission of a group in its political wars. I demand to be myself at the same time that I demand to be nothing less than all a man, everyman, every human being. I have the power to make everything human my own through appreciation and imaginative recreation, but in each action I must realize only some values, excluding others. I do not accept this dissonance prudently, sculpting myself into a human type with historical specificity. Against history, I reject Ortega's dictum that "I am I and my circumstances." I am, rather, myself, my circumstances and the perspective that I choose to take on them. And since I want nothing less than all of the values, my perspective is a multiplicity of viewpoints, often mutually contradictory.

Each anarchist develops his own classification of the types of anarchism in order to distinguish his commitment from others. Some divide communalism from individualism, others anarcho-syndicalism from anarcho-capitalism. I prefer to distinguish critical anarchism from dogmatic anarchism. The dogmatic anarchist trusts that with the elimination of self-consciously willed authority, human beings will exist in a "natural" society, principled by co-operation, mutual benefit, love or free exchange. They have their own theories of history, their own doctrines of human nature, each of which stands above the concrete person, regulative over his doubts, ambiguities, ambivalences, contradictions and agonies. Critical anarchists turn against themselves, stripping and ridding themselves of abstract identities and transpersonal loyalties until they encounter themselves as beings at war, making impossible demands on experience. I will to be all, but were my will to be satisfied, I would be nothing. I am my biography, which I continually strive to surpass.

The nineteenth century anarchists believed in a rationally-intelligible natural harmony of interests. The twentieth century State imposes a willed and contingent coincidence of interests through conditioning. The renegade, perhaps, takes advantage of the coincidence in order to undermine it ... not in the name of an historically unfolding harmony, but in quest of an absurd plenitude, in which contingency and accident are not signs of weakness, but are weapons against the monopolization of destiny.

ALIENATION - OR MYSTIFICATION?

Scepticus

If there is one word which you can hear repeated at practically every meeting of revolutionary political, mystical and occult circles, and other groups, it is this strange word "alienation". We are confidently informed by a veritable legion of pundits (anthropological, sociological, psychological, etc.) that contemporary man is "profoundly alienated". From what, precisely? There are a number of things, it seems - we are alienated from "Nature", "each other", "our true self", "Reality". When Karl Marx introduced the term into political discussion, did he realize that he was providing the gurus and saviours of the twentieth century with a very profitable *raison d'être*? Further, what of the individual who has the impertinence to deny that we are alienated - or at least has the guts to call in question this sacrosanct concept which has seduced so many gullible folk in the past few years?

Is there any sense in which it is permissible to talk of ourselves as "alienated"? Originally, the word simply meant "belonging to another", from the Latin word "alienus". Thus, alienation can (legitimately) mean a state in which we are lacking in self-possession, mastered physically by other men or emotionally and intellectually by ideas. So far so good. This is what Stirner is talking about - not to be sidetracked from, diverted from, a state of self-possession and self-enjoyment. This accepts that we are particular individuals, with likes and dislikes, but that we can become dominated by things which diminish our ability to think, feel and will as we choose.

It is obvious that the believers in alienation use the word in a far more extended sense than the above. For them, it is not so much a case of possessing and enjoying our mundane identity, our everyday "I", as of transcending this "superficial" self, of discovering some hypothetical "true self" which - we are told - is buried "beneath" our ordinary self. This real self must be "actualized", and this is done by developing a strong contempt for our self as it is now. The person who accepts this idea of alienation, therefore, is a discontented, very unhappy soul. Just as the Christian seeks liberation from sin, the man seeking this chimerical "authentic self" wants to emancipate himself from "existential inauthenticity". How you can know there is this inaccessible yet priceless "true self" if you are not it, God only knows! Then we are told that we must not only bring to the surface this peerless "true self", but it is also necessary to demolish the belief in the separate self as such, since this "intellectual construct" alienates us from the "undifferentiated Harmony of Nature". The worshipper of the "authentic self" also detests urbanization, technology, the use of the thinking mind, since - he feels - all these things estrange us from the "warm spontaneity" of a "purely intuitive, non-verbalized outlook". To think, therefore, is to immediately and inevitably alienate ourselves from "Reality", leading to a state of great existential and spiritual "impoverishment". We must eschew reliance upon the cold, clinical "discriminating" mind, which takes the "unity of Nature" and starts differentiating, categorizing, trying to imprison the flow of "primal experience" in the stockade of concepts. To overcome alienation, therefore, we must try and dissolve the sense of personal identity, to recognize that we are not apart from the cosmos, that "All is One".

Apart from remarking that the sense of personal identity is not a product of thought, but is pre-conceptual, I would say this: Why do the followers of the "alienation" outlook assume that "Reality" is

fundamentally harmonious? If the universe is basically such a pleasant little place, how could anyone ever become alienated? Equally dangerous is the idea that we have a "true self" in the "depths" of our psyche - this is a generalization. Even allowing for the fact that men may have some sort of existential "potential" within them, this will be different for every man and can never be something limitless. In any case, what a disdainful attitude to adopt towards people, continually rejecting a large part of what they do, say and think, just because it doesn't correspond to one's cherished notion of what an "unalienated" person is like. Thus develops, so insidiously, a subtle form of schizophrenia, in which one is always seeing oneself as two people, the true and the false. But, if there is a real "me", who is aware of it? You get involved in an infinite cognitive regression, whereas it is much simpler (and in conformity with experience) to accept ourselves as we are: recognisable continuity of individuality in the process of mental and bodily change we know as "life".

I earlier compared the modern obsession with alienation to the medieval obsession with sin. The idea of "not being who you really are" (the root concept of all those who accept the idea of alienation) leads to a radical distrust of oneself, one's thoughts and motives. The individual is intimidated by this idea until he begins to despair of locating this elusive "true self". Perhaps he will have the gumption to scrutinize the idea and then discard it as an exploded myth - although this is unlikely, since a rejection of the alienation idea leads to one being labelled "reactionary and complacent" by one's former associates. So long as the unwavering, unchallenged belief in the objective reality of "alienation" continues, so long will man be possessed and convulsed, anguished and angered, by this hazy idea of a "true self" which it is their existential and evolutionary task or duty to realize. But, just as the medieval heretical sect, The Brethren of the Free Spirit, destroyed the idea of "sin" by claiming that Man, being in the image of God, participates in the divine perfection and is consequently immaculate and sinless, so we can dismiss the idea of "alienation", asserting: "We are who we are. There is no essence which has to be actualized since each man is unique, there being no such thing as a "real self" underlying the "false self", a mysterious essence which is identical in all men". The very notion of "alienation" (used in a completely general, unspecified sense) is simply another version of the old idea that ~~must~~ subordinate ourselves to an abstraction, must consecrate ourselves to the task of crucifying ourselves in order to emerge from the business as someone and something else. But the individualist leaves crucifixion to the god - he is only mortal, after all!

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COMMENT ON ELLINGHAM AND SCEPTICUS

Mark A. Sullivan

In the running debate between Ellingham and Scepticus (I assume yourself), I tend to agree with Scepticus. Coincidentally, I have also practiced meditation, albeit irregularly, and am familiar with the feeling of "deepening" which I regard also as a state of self-awareness, clarified by the relative absence of conceptual objects which usually occupy one's awareness. If we regard the self as that which experiences rather than the content of experience, then it seems possible that every self is essentially of the same nature, just as all water is H₂O. But the H₂O in New York is not the H₂O in London. Similarly one's self

is distinguishable from another by the space and time it finds itself in, i.e. by the content of its experience. Thus, even in one person the self of today is not the self of tomorrow, rather it recreates itself (its self) every moment as it experiences or consumes itself every moment (Stirner). Whether this is one Self expressing in various billions of selves, or separate mortal selves, I do not know. But it is evident that Stirner believed in the mortal self, and my experience, so far, leads me to the same conclusion - at least as a working hypothesis for living my life.

The hypothesis of the separate mortal self boils down to this: I can only experience my self - I take your word that you, too, experience your self. There is no evidence that we are the same self, or we would have, simultaneously, the same experiences. Of what use is the Overself? Is it a big databank in the sky? There may be an ultimate reality, but it would not be a unified self or conscious ego.

The beauty of separate mortal selves is that I can appreciate the existence of another who sees the world in ways similar to myself. I may come to love such a person, or even love someone who is not so similar to my self. Indeed, if there was one Monocero over all, it would make life a narcissistic attempt to find this Ego in everyone else including oneself.

Two hands can clap, two hands can clasp. What is the sound of one hand clapping? the Buddhist asks. What is the warmth, the comradeship, of one hand clasping? The Ego is dead, long live the egos. And, to paraphrase Bakunin, if the Ego existed, it would be necessary for the egos to abolish it. Maybe it still is.

(Editor's note: This controversy is now closed. I am not "Scepticus".)

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x) Is he still striving towards Buddha's Nirvana or, by now, striving towards political, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ economic & social individual liberties, once again? Is his "Storm" over?

REVIEWS

J.Z. 20.8.1997.

S.E.Parker

From Greece comes a new and well-produced anarchist individualist review called Utopia. Among other items it carries translations of my leaflet "Individualist Anarchism: An Outline" (Previously translated into French, German, Spanish and Swedish and now out of print) and "The Critics of the Ego" by Brand which was first published in MINUS One. If you can read Greek, copies can be obtained from A.J. Canellidis, 7, Panagitsas Street, Kifisia, Athens, Greece. (Enclose postage)

From Italy comes Bofapapa published by Il Circolo Culturale L'Uomo Libro of Sondalo. It contains an article by Barachin on anarchist individualism plus other articles and some poems. Copies from Partesana Renzo Barachin, Piazza XXV Aprile Nr. 5, 23035-Sondalo-(SO), Italy.

From the USA comes The Dandelion a new libertarian quarterly. The first issue contains the first of two articles by Carl Watner discussing the views on property held by Lysander Spooner and Benj. R. Tucker, plus short items by its editor Michael E. Coughlin. A one year subscription

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In the early 1950's, during the heyday of my romance with "Anarcho-communism", I used to "soap-box" at Speaker's Corner in London's Hyde Park. I was not very good as an open-air speaker and usually confined myself to opening the Sunday afternoon meetings of the then London Anarchist Group. The only tangible result of my efforts was a photograph of me that appeared in a lavishly produced book called Gale Day in London (1953). This was accompanied by a limerick by a well-known artist of those days which read:

There was a young student of Kent
With a strong political bent,
He talked in the Park,
From morning till dark,
Two listened but very soon went!

An amusing jingle but quite inaccurate! I have never been a "student" since I have worked since the age of fourteen. I am not from Kent, but from Warwickshire (Birmingham to be exact). I talked for about half an hour at the most - and the two featured in the photograph were waiting for me to begin and soon grew into more.

The same photograph, minus the limerick, was reprinted in the "quality" Sunday newspaper "The Observer" with a caption which stated that I was as typical a London sight as Big Ben and the Horse Guards! So much for my attempts to rouse the masses to revolt.....

These memories were brought back by reading the indefatigable Jim Huggon's latest publication Speaker's Corner: An Anthology. This features contributions from such diverse figures as Jim Huggon himself, Karl Marx, the Reverend Lord (or Lord Reverend) Donald Soper (whose contribution is a particularly nauseous piece of Christian piety), Antonia Raeburn and that doyen of all Hyde Park orators, the late Bonar Thompson ("I have seldom listened to a speech of mine without learning something"). A special bonus is the reproduction of an entire issue of Bonar's own review The Black Hat.

Philip Sinsom, who was himself no mean soapboxer, contributes a Foreword in which he recalls his own thirteen years of oratory and the lessons he learned from it. Amongst other things, he states that I gave up open-air speaking because I became "overwhelmed with individualism". This is not so. I gave up speaking in Hyde Park round about 1953-54. I became an individualist in 1961.

"Speaker's Corner" is still busy, but the "great ones" have gone. There is no one left who can compare with Bonar Thompson (free lance), Tony Turner (Socialist party of Great Britain) and Fredrick Lohr (ex-pacifist, ex-anarchist, heretical Roman Catholic). More and more it becomes a stamping ground for cliché-ridden African politicians and crude exhibitionists (not to mention the various species of Christian and other religious lunatics). The tourist's cameras click, the occasional TV crew films a speaker or two, the rent-a-mob gathers from time to time to march for or against some dictator or other, and a few survivors from the old days struggle on. Those days, unfortunately, have gone. This book is a memorial to the people who gave them life.. (£1.75+25p postage from Kropotkin Lighthouse Publications, c/o Housman's Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N.1.)

(S.E.Parker)