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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. 40
1978

THE POET AND THE BOGEYMAN: OR, THE CASE OF HOLBROOK VS. STIRNER

S.L.Parker

Five years ago I noted attacks made by the communist novelist Jack Lindsay and the humanist poet and critic David Holbrook on the philosophy of Max Stirner (MO 31). The latter has now returned to the attack and in his new book, "Education, Nihilism and Survival", he devotes a chapter to using Stirner as a bogeyman with which to frighten his readers.

In this he is ably abetted by the publisher's "blurb" which is splashed all over the front and back covers of the book. Its anonymous author writes:

".....even under the label 'Humanities', and even with the best will in the world, many young people are being taught an implicit nihilism. In cultural studies they are being seduced into the tail-end of French nihilism, in the wake of the depressing Sartre - with Nietzsche in the background, and behind him again the sinister figure of Max Stirner. In the sciences they are swallowing an implicit philosophy based on an 'objective' empiricist paradigm which is out-moded. This makes it seem that the universe is only 'matter in motion' and is therefore one in which man's moral being has no place. The only response is despair and absurdity - while many suppose that the only philosophy of life must be egoistical nihilism, that is, living at the expense of others, such as Stirner advocated."

I can well understand that many people will find Stirner's egoism a frightening thing. His call to self-liberation is no mealy-mouthed carping at this or that restriction placed upon the individual by authority. It is a call to throw off submission to all authority and to affirm one's self-sovereignty to the fullest extent of one's power. X To those who wish to remain members of a herd, who feel the need for allegiance to something or someone - State, God, Humanity, Society - that is above them. Stirner's philosophy must appear as the ultimate menace.

X Nevertheless, individual secessionism & extraterritorial & autonomous voluntary association -

But if Holbrook wants to use Stirner as a bogeyman he could at least base his attack on Stirner's own works - in particular, "The Ego and His Own". Instead he bases it upon the interpretation of Stirner given by R.W.K. Paterson in his book "The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner". This is an interesting and erudite study, but is seriously flawed by both the author's underlying hostility to the ideas he purports to be examining impartially and his insistence throughout in portraying the conscious egoist as a desolate individual living in a frozen world. Neither Paterson nor Holbrook seem aware that Stirner wrote a joyous book.

alism, as opposed to territorial statism, is not discussed in MINUS ONE.

By relying on Paterson's thesis Holbrook never gets to grips with Stirner at all. And lacking Paterson's scholarship he manages to turn even Paterson's thesis into a caricature. He also drops himself into some glaring contradictions. For instance, on page 102 he quotes Paterson to the effect that Stirner held "there can be no relations, either for co-operation or opposition, between individuals". On page 103, however,

far less are the monetary, cooperative, financial, military, micrographic & other practical approaches towards total self-liberation & individual sovereignty & minority autonomy of the extraterritorial kind. 1957, 7-8. 20.8. 1997.

he assures us that "the philosophy of the Unique One" means "a refusal to become involved even with those you enjoy". Now, how one excludes relations with other individuals can at the same time enjoy other individuals I cannot understand. To enjoy someone or something I must have some kind of relation with them or it. And if Holbrook had taken the trouble to look at "The Ego and His Own" he would have seen that Stirner does not exclude relations with other individuals, but wishes to have a consciously egoistic relationship, not a self-denying, moralistic relationship.

It is at this point that the moralist's ton-toms start sounding frantically. For Stirner says that these egoistic relationships are those of use, of regarding the other as an "object". "Kant have mercy on use!" cry the moralists, "these egoists would deny that we should regard each other as ends-in-ourselves, and simply regard each other as 'interesting or uninteresting objects'". And they proceed to adorn themselves in (verbal) sackcloths and ashes and bewail the terrible fate facing mankind.

Of course, in delineating what they imagine would happen if conscious egoism were generally practiced (an unlikely event), moralists like Holbrook turn a resolutely blind eye to the pernicious effects of moralism, its staggering ineffectiveness in preventing the things it is supposed to prevent, and its provision of all manner of abstract justifications for bloodbaths of a magnitude beyond the scope of any evil egoists desire or capacity. When morality was firmly rooted in the belief in the Christian God what did that avail the infidels and the heretics who fell in their thousands before the fury of the faithful? When those great champions of a liberated humanity, Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin, based their future moral order on the benevolent working of History, what hesitation did they have in "eliminating" those individuals who stepped out of line? Even amongst humanists who prate of the sacredness of human personality I have witnessed a baleful bleat at the granting of meeting facilities to totalitarians of the Right, while at the same time defending the granting of the same facilities to the totalitarians of the Left - and one knows what that kind of attitude means when translated into political power! I sometimes think that even if the picture painted of us egoists by such pious scaremongers as David Holbrook were true we could not possibly hope to compete with the moralists in the atrocity-market. All too often, as De Casseres, pointed out, morality disguises the sentimental butcher. And, indeed, are not the very phenomena Holbrook deplores the product of many centuries in which moral precepts have been hammered into the heads of us all?

⑤ If their theories had been right their God: historical development of dialectical materialism, would not have decided them as inquisitors & executioners. J.E. 20.9.72.

Stirner remarked on the mercilessness of moralists and Holbrook's approach to him illustrates this to perfection. Holbrook is a heated defender of "man's subjectivity" and "human personality". Yet when he comes to consider Stirner as a "man" and to describe the sources of his philosophy, he promptly resorts to the very reductionism he professes to condemn.

Holbrook does this by indulging in some trendy psychological analysis. Now this is risky enough with individuals one knows. When those to whom it is applied are historical figures the proportion of speculation to fact rises enormously. And when, like Stirner, very little is known about the subject's personal life, the attempt to analyse at a distance of over a hundred or so years becomes ridiculous. Not deterred by such things, however, Holbrook proceeds to label Stirner a "schizoid individual" who devised a "paranoid-schizoid intellectual system" because - you've guessed it - the kind of childhood he had. The concrete evidence he offers? None. All that he thinks is necessary to validate his "diagnosis" is a few phrases he has taken

as if only one kind of morality or ethics or rights existed or has been proposed or as if all were equally valueless. (Continued on page 8) J.E. 20.8.72.

ANARCHISM, INDIVIDUALISM AND "SOCIETY" - SOME THOUGHTS

Scepticus

Recently, in conversation with a politically-minded acquaintance, I mentioned that I was an admirer of Max Stirner, who he immediately classified as a "radical individualist and early anarchist theorist". He then asked me what anarchist or revolutionary group I belonged to and was astonished to discover that the only society that I am a member of is the National Society of Non-Smokers! "If you admire Stirner, who was so concerned with transforming society, how can you be so politically apathetic? This complacency is inexcusable."

against!

The controversy about exactly what Stirner was still continues. It says something for "The Ego and His Own" that reading the book has led different people to conclude that Stirner was, on the one hand, an anarchist and, on the other, a fascist (a term which originally meant a nationalist and state-worshipper before folk forgot the meaning and used it to condemn anyone whose political ideology they found unacceptable). Can Stirner be legitimately described as an anarchist? The most familiar identification of Stirner is as an "anarchist-individualist". This presumably means a person who rejects the idea of any authority outside himself being "legitimate", such authority - whether political, economic, moral or whatever - simply being the declaration of power (physical or intellectual). Thus, the anarchist-individualist does not participate in revolutionary or radical movements because his fundamental concern is not with substituting the authority of morality for the authority of politics (the aim of evangelical, collectivist anarchists). As Stirner says, there is all the difference in the world between those who want a revolution, those, that is, who want to transform existing social conditions, and those who want an insurrection for and through the individual, this activity not being accompanied by utopian and pious hopes that the millenium will be achieved by such purely individual action. Further, whilst the traditional anarchists (the admirers of Godwin, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, Tolstoy - to name but a few) see the institution of government as an unqualified evil, the anarchist-individualist shrugs his shoulder and is honest enough to admit that the development of professional governors is historically inevitable. At this, non-individualist anarchists will be seen to frown, contemptuously dismissing the Stirnerian as a "right-wing petty bourgeois". For them, the worship of the State has been effectively and effortlessly replaced by the worship of "society", and it is still to be the collectivity which calls the tune. They certainly want to abolish a situation in which the individual is helpless in the face of the State's economic and political strength - they want, instead, to have a situation in which the individual (for his own good, naturally!) voluntarily subordinates himself to the "general interest", and is determined by moral considerations. Although I don't necessarily adopt the view of the misanthropist, I do feel the the anarchist view of "Man" is uncritically optimistic. We are told that it is only the repressive apparatus of the State that lead to crime and social friction. Abolish the State-apparatus and we shall all embrace our former enemies and offer incense before pictures of Prince Kropotkin! In an anarchist society the prison will be replaced by a municipal centre for "rehabilitation", no doubt, or else the refractory person will be ostracized by everyone else. All in all, non-individualist anarchism is (like all other political theories) still infatuated with general ideas like "society" and "humanity". Everything must correspond exactly to the theory - or else!

Unquestionably, traditional anarchism tends to regard "society"

E.g. the same books, papers, TV-shows, films, clothing, sports, etc. etc. for all?

and social activities as the be-all and end-all for men. Never once do the anarchists of the collectivist school ask themselves "Why do I unquestioningly assume that the maintenance of "society" is necessary or desirable? Why do I assume that the standardization of human needs and desires will bring about 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'?" Such disturbing questions would lead to them being excommunicated, so it is a case of adopting the line of least resistance, toeing the party line. Above all, orthodox anarchists must demonstrate that individualism is, in the final analysis, merely a product of the reactionary mind. Take Kropotkin who says "Unbridled individualism is a modern growth, but it is not a characteristic of primitive mankind." This is anarchism's contribution to anthropology, sociology and psychology: the claim that "Man" is basically fraternal, gregarious, altruistic, and that it is principally the fault of industrial and technological society that we are all so "egoistic". We must accordingly replace this "atomistic" conception of the unique self with a more "unified" view, in which each individual is seen as inseparably connected with all others, so that we can all agree with the learned divine that "No man is an island". Once again, glorious simplification: the idea that it is only the structure of society (mainly, government) which is responsible for the ills of life, and that we must strive to replace the present form of society - divisive, inequalitarian, monolithic - with a society in which there will be flexibility, the recognition of the individual's right to autonomy (within "socially desirable" limits, of course), plus a reassuring belief in the fundamental goodness and sociability of "Man".

It would obviously be impossible to try and live a life of grass-roots self-sufficiency in our modern urban society. That much any reasonable man will admit. But does this mean that we should completely identify our welfare with this much-discussed "general welfare"? What happens if there is a non-correspondence between what I desire and what the collectivity requires? Whatever anarchists may say about tolerating diversity in their ideal society, it is still a case of the individual having to submit to the others. Now, unlike present society, whether capitalist or communist, this submission might not be legally required or legally enforceable, but all the more so would it be morally required and morally enforceable! What we would have is the replacement of an external supra-individual power (law, State, bureaucracy) by an internal supra-individual power (conscience, ethics, a "sense of decency and responsibility"). Indeed, I would suggest that traditional anarchist theory is the direct descendant in some ways of Protestantism and Puritanism. In both cases, the idea is that the individual shall be directed exclusively by his conscience, and shall be privileged to work with all others of like mind for the establishment of a kingdom of heaven on earth. Therefore, it is necessary to chasten the ego; to weaken the individual's pride in himself as a separate entity.

The anarchist individualist is therefore only an anarchist in the etymological sense - only, that is, in the sense that he rejects the idea of "arche", which literally means "something ruling" (related to "arkhos": "ruler"). Thus, it is not sufficient to just abandon the idea of government as the ruler, putting in its place "society" as the ruler. The Stirnerian says "Refuse, categorically, to acknowledge any 'ruler', any kind of impersonal absolute that is to stand over the individual and determine him. Even my own egoism is not an absolute principle, since I don't regard it as my evolutionary or biological duty to be an egoist, that is simply my choice". The State makes obedience to its principles our first task, the anarchist would make obedience to the principles of his ideal "society" our first task, →

MY POLEMIC WITH E. ARMAND

Enzo da Villafliore

(Two issues ago MINUS ONE carried a report on the death of Enzo Martucci. During the long years of his advocacy of anarchist individualism Martucci quite frequently clashed with the French individualist E. Armand. The following is a translation of one of his first polemics with Armand. It appeared in Armand's journal 'l'endehors' in 1925. Martucci was then 21 and used his real name of da Villafliore)

Disorder, chaos, confusion - unbridled freedom of instinct - individual arbitrariness - absolute triumph of force and audacity - dynamic life - polymorphism - the overturn of all values - negation of law, authority, morality - the apogee of variability and impulse: here are the elements of my anarchy.

This anarchy, that is to say this future form of free life in which the individual will affirm himself in the measure of his powers, presupposes the co-existence of solidarity and of war, and I consider both of these as means to be used by the individual according to whether one or the other is more useful to satisfy his requirements. Armand, on the contrary, believes that violent conflicts will disappear in an anarchist world because

"There is always an interest for anarchist individualists in understanding for themselves and in resolving their conflicts by mutual concessions - the application of the principle of reciprocity. There is no desire for exclusive possession of any given thing which surpasses the interest that the individualists have in maintaining between themselves the state of comradeship.

"Agreement, I repeat, is preferable to the extermination of the friend who no longer wishes to give way. It is preferable, from the purest egoist point of view, to the process of extermination, first of all because that would deprive me of a comrade and is there any object in the world that could compensate me for the loss of a comrade?....."

As for me, I regard Armand's considerations as excessively optimistic, not to say almost christian. First of all, it is not always possible to conciliate diverse egoisms which are in conflict and to manage a solution of these conflicts by means of mutual concessions. There exist, in effect, antithetical interests, invincible antipathies, sentiments of hatred, desires for vengeance, all things which prevent a peaceful understanding. It is not always possible to possess successively or alternatively the thing desired by each of us because there are instances in life where a man is guided,

Anarchism, Individualism and "Society" - continued:

the anarchist individualist assails the idea of principles as such, since he realizes that a principle is, by definition, something impersonal, something which will endeavour to become omnipotent, unopposed, in its particular sphere of existence and operation. That is why the anarchist individualist can never become part of the mainstream of the anarchist movement. Once he has experienced what Stirner means by the uniqueness of the individual, he concerns himself with his interests, rather than becoming obsessed with the interests of "society" or "Mankind".

not only by his reason, but also by his passions and his instincts. He wants, at any price, to enjoy, exclusively and jealously, the object that he loves and which he wants to possess, or which he desires to an extreme degree. If, then, in a given situation violence gives me more advantages than mutual aid, for what motive should I not make it serve me? Because the method of extermination deprives me of a companion? But he who is an obstacle to my desires, who bars my route, is not my comrade, but an enemy. Against him I will use any means: ruse, violence, force.....

Violence is not only the effect of causes determined by special situations, it is also the expression of particular temperaments in which the heritage of Cain is congenital and indestructible. It is an illusion to believe that warring individualities will abandon their struggle and sacrifice their belligerent spirits which are endowed with the love of great risks and an ardor for living experience. It is as if one believed that a voluptuary, used to the delights of the most erotic embraces, could satisfy his lasciviousness by the practice of masturbation.

Like the struggle of the brute, the intellectual struggle will never disappear. Hobbes' "man is a wolf unto man" is the supreme truth in many a case. It is a commandment of nature and to speak today of social harmony when a most ferocious war has developed in man savage and brutal instincts is to attract the same kind of ridicule that attaches to that pacifism which periodically consecrates its impotence in international congresses where, at the altar of incomprehension, verbosity allies itself to poltroonery.

Armand thinks that in an anarchist world the individual, in order to enjoy his proper life in complete liberty, will be guaranteed that no-one will impose upon his being and his having. It seems to me that the individualist who, to realise himself, has need of guarantees, displays the same impotence that characterizes the right-thinking citizen who need legal and governmental protection because, alone, he cannot defend himself against the attacks of others. My anarchist individualist disdainfully rejects guarantees as much as protections, because he knows that Society will not offer him these things except in exchange for part of his independence. My anarchist individualist is convinced that his freedom is a function of his personal power, seeing that in life he will have no more than he can conquer and conserve. Consequently, he will try continually to augment his power and to perfect his energies, certain that they alone will permit to conduct his life the best. He associates with others and respects them as it pleases him. He quits and combats them when struggle is more to his tastes and in his interests.

Polymorphism, variety of experiences, research for novelty, flow, in an anarchist milieu, from freedom conquered by force. It is this that, without repeating the Stirnerian distinction between individuality and freedom, make it possible for me to affirm that anarchy will represent the triumph of arbitrariness, that is to say pure freedom that ends only where individual power finishes - not the abstract and unreal concept of freedom that democrats and moralists perch in the seventh heaven.

Armand, to justify his solidarism, affirms again that the presence of warlike individualities in an anarchist world would give rise to the necessity of other individuals arming themselves in order to properly defend themselves. As it is impossible to always remain on the alert these individuals would end by conferring on others the task of protection so that the police and judiciary mechanism would

be inevitably revived. Armand forgets that the generalisation of a free life presupposes a state of superior self-consciousness in individuals. Arriving at an anarchist stage, because they are avid for freedom and expansion, they will prefer to manage their own defence sooner than replace themselves under the humiliating tutelage of the law and the State. Out of what motive could a man who is not a cowardly beggar ask others for a bit of protection, when in an anarchist milieu he will be able to carry means to defend himself or to attack, even associating with others and using all the arms which morality and regulations stop him from using?

Perhaps anarchy will never be realized as a form of general life, because the crowd and the people will remain eternally unaware and will never comprehend the unlimited desire for independence that is the patrimony of the elites. Perhaps ~~it~~ will only exist throughout the centuries as the a-normal attitude of some a-normal aristocrats who will oppose their "No" of despair and revolt against all the constituted social regulations!

But if anarchy triumphs as the norm of universal life it will only be in the wild, chaotic and arbitrary form as I conceive it. The libertarian communism of Malatesta, the individualising associationism of Armand, the solidarist mutualism of Proudhon, are all social conceptions too orderly and too rigid for the anarchist individualist wanting to unfold his uncurbed instincts and powers. It is in chaos that supreme anarchy exists. It is towards chaos that we tend with all the energies of our perverse and sacrilegious spirit.

Finally, Armand recognises for us, sinners and profligates, the right to associate freely and to accomplish without obstacles our work of propaganda and persuasion.

But when, ~~tomorrow~~, we found "schools of voluptuousness", when we raise "Temples of Venus" where we will teach that coition is one of the most beautiful things of life, that polygamy is the natural state of love, that sexual depravities are refinements of pleasure, that incest is normal because there is nothing to prohibit in the erotic relations between individuals, then will we hear no more of the right to resist by force the tartuffes who, in the name of morality, of hygiene and of similar lies, would forbid that which spreads our dissolution? Just as it has not created geniuses and heroes, Christian civilization has not given rise to great sinners. Phryne, Cleopatra and Messalina are figures of the past. We who, like a Madam de Longueville, do not love "innocent pleasures", like an Oscar Wilde, think that "he who invents a splendid sin is greater than he who discovers a new religion"- we believe that in an anarchist world, ²side by side with free association and free war, free art and dynamic life, will prosper free love and sexual autonomy.

And in the multiformity of its aspects, our depravation will accomplish, in a renewed surroundings, a work of beauty.

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Beware of those who profess a "love for humanity", who want to "lift up mankind," who have a hurry-call to "save the race." They are all sentimental butchers.

Benjamin de Casseres

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Continued from page 2:

from his reading of certain psychiatrists which, he claims, show Stirner to have been "schizoid". An example:

"Stirner's whole way of seeking autonomy can be understood in the light of Laing's analysis of the schizoid predicament. He operates and creates his philosophy by 'false role doing', and intellectual hate: his real name was Johann Casper Schmidt and his identity seems an assemblance of fragments."

Has Holbrook studied Mackay's life of Stirner and checked his sources? Well, no. Has he examined "The Ego and His Own" to see if it fits his "phenomenological diagnostic comment"? Well, no. In fact all this great successor to Dr. Freud has done is to take some dubious and unsupported speculations from a critical account of Stirner and turn them into "certainties". A prime case of "upon this theory I base my facts"!

The late Chapman Cohen once remarked on the prevalence of "educated ignorance". As far as Max Stirner is concerned, David Holbrook is well qualified to compete for the first prize in this field. His puerile attempts to bracket Stirner with the assorted targets for his "moralic acid" is wrecked by his intellectual incompetence. His reasons for making Stirner one of his main bogeymen are understandable. Holbrook is one of those humanists who continue the traditions of the religion they profess to reject, and prate soulfully about finding "causes to serve beyond ourselves" and "creative, unselfish love for humanity at large". Even when he expresses concern about "denying individual uniqueness" this is because it "can thus threaten a nullification of man". In other words, the particular individual is only of value in the light of that general spook "Man".

Holbrook concludes his miserable chapter on Stirner by trying to link "nihilism" (conscious egoism) with a woman having sex with a bear, a man having sex with a pig, and the allegedly artistic value of Ian Brady's murder of children. These he claims are examples of Stirner's "creative Nothing" and he comments "Insofar as there is only a craven silence in response to such atrocities, we hear the mocking laughter of Max Stirner." Come, come, Mr. Holbrook, it could be that Stirner's laughter is not at the lack of response to child murder, but at the idiotic intellectual atrocities perpetrated by you!

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MEETING: S.E.Parker will speak on "Max Stirner and the Case Against Humanism" at the Lewisham Humanist Group, Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London S.E.6. Thursday, February 23rd, 1978. (Near Catford Stations. Buses 1, 36b, 47, 54, 141, & 180 pass door) 7.45pm.

NOTICE: Je cherche a contacter insoumis, objecteurs de conscience de passage en Amerique pour m'aider a creer une section de l'I.R.G. (WRI). Ecrire a - R.Y.B., C.P. 95, Stn. Place d'Armes, Montreal, P.Q. H2Y 3E9, Canada.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED: 1. new book by James J. Martin and a work from Kropotkin's Lighthouse Publications. Reviewed in next issue.