

Max & I

(I)An-ok Ta Chai

Unknown

I've had an interesting proposition set forth before me, something that I've been avoiding clearly looking at for a while. How would I delineate a connection between the philosophy of Max Stirner and the general "green" or anti-civilization approach to anarchy? I've been daunted by this question, for one, because Stirner is *so old* – a dead European intellectual of days gone by – and anti-civilization anarchy in its current expression, in my opinion, is quite cutting-edge. For another, Stirner is quite individual-oriented, some may even say "narcissistic", while green anarchist analyses address all of world history, the global ecosphere, and all aspects of life. And finally, I've seen a lot of different people name-drop Max Stirner, from Platformists to Libertarians to green anarchists – and all of them strike me as intense and weird individuals, and I'm not quite sure I would want to attract their attention.

Nonetheless, I must confess – I love Max Stirner. I always have, as long as I have known of the guy. Then I realize – I don't really like Stirner as a person, or even as a writer. He was a German girls school teacher who hung out with snotty intellectuals like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and he was married to a wife who admitted to never loving or respecting him. His writing often went off on unnecessary rants about European history, or some other philosopher guy, and he frequently informed his readers about how badass he was, because of how free and uncompromising he supposedly was. This is not why I love Max Stirner.

I love Max Stirner because of what I personally *get out* of his writings, or ideas attributed to him. I would sum this up as – you experience your life as *you*, not as anyone or anything else. As far as you know, this is the only life that you've got. Therefore, you should make sure that all of the relationships and ideas that you come across actively help you to live your life in a way that is free, fulfilling and enjoyable to you in the here-and-now. And *fuck* anyone or anything that gets in your way.

A lot of modern-day commercialized self-help shit vaguely has the same message, so aside from being the original quotable self-help guru, Stirner had some integral, unique iconoclastic components of his philosophy on life. Stirner took an anarchist approach by saying that all forms of government, capitalism, and authority destroy people, thereby eliminating the possibility of achieving this self-supporting aim in life. Stirner also had an amoralist angle, by holding that concepts of good/bad, right/wrong, duty and obligation cloud one's vision away from this self-chosen focus. He came from an individualistic direction by believing that conceptually placing society, the collective and/or the group *first* deters from valuing one's own life as primary. He

took an existentialist stance by saying that concepts, belief systems, and ideas have no inherent meaning in and of themselves – *that you* put the meaning into them yourself, and then act accordingly. When you put this all together, you then have a direct line of sight straight into yourself – what are you doing *here*, and *why* are you doing it? Stirner pointed out how chances are that in any given situation, you're not even *trying* to take care of yourself – you've in effect *lost yourself* in the process.

Stirner helped me to take my anarchist beliefs and outlooks *personally*. He helped me to clearly situate *myself* in the midst of all this bullshit society that surrounds me. Government and capitalism directly screws me over, right here and now, so if I want to personally live a free, fulfilling, and enjoyable life, then it's all got to go.

More striking for me was how Stirner helped to expose the ghost-like nature of all these different ideas of morality, obligation, family, property, government, and society itself – how so often I view these things as being tangible entities, in and of themselves (as opposed to just being concepts in my head), and as a result, I see them as making demands and threats upon me. Stirner reminded me that it is people and the physical world that hurts or obstructs me, that all thoughts and relations to that are based on ideas inside my head, so why not choose to think and act differently, in a way that helps *me*?

One concern that comes up around Stirner's approach, particularly when considering it in conjunction with green anarchy, is that it can be used as an excuse for consumption, gluttony, and overindulgence. To this, I can only say that I believe that there is a certain joy and fulfillment that occurs in human experience that is more profound and far-reaching when health and balance is reached, as opposed as to when consumption and overindulgence is engaged in. I believe that because one's body is a natural organism, we can trust an inner-felt sense (as opposed to whim and habit) to guide us in finding our own personal health and balance, and that we can trust to make our decisions based on that.

This is all great so far, but the tricky part comes when trying to apply Stirner's ideas to establishing mutually-supportive relationships with other people, and non-human life. Stirner had a suspicion that relationships of mutual support and respect with other people were indeed possible, but he really didn't know how to do it¹. His relationship with his wife is an example of that, and as far as non-human life goes, Stirner was more of a “dominate nature, make it serve you” kind of guy – not exactly eco-conscious.

This is where I think that it is important to take Stirner's ideas and “run wild,” so to speak. I see this as best being done by first keeping in mind some basic principles of human social dynamics – if you disregard or screw over other people, then they'll be less likely to keep *your* interests in mind. Therefore, if you want social relationships that help *you*, you need to keep in mind to help out others, too. Mutual respect and support, voluntary cooperation: AKA, anarchy.

Next, if you want people to help you out in a thorough and personal way, then you need to really know each other, and trust each other. After a certain number of people, the personally-knowing quality begins to diminish, and hence the ease and depth of mutual trust goes as well. This puts a cap on the number of people that a group can have, while still maintaining this kind of

¹ Stirner called his vague notions of anarchistic social relationships “unions of egoists”, and his ideas on this became a foundation for what was later fleshed out in insurrectionary and post-left anarchist models for decentralized self-organizing groups.

integrity. Therefore, it becomes desirable to personally choose to organize in small-scale groups, based on trust and affinity – “tribes”.

If you want to live for yourself, to respect your own enjoyment, satisfaction, and freedom in life, and if you want to include the often-overlooked realms of the sensual and the spiritual, *all* aspects of life as you experience it – chances are that you wouldn’t be choosing to work in factories, till the fields, sit in traffic, go to war, wait in lines, numb yourself to the incessant grating background noise of industrial society, wade through continually-growing piles of trash, or other trademark features of Civilized life. When living your life in this different way, work itself clearly becomes seen as an undesirable choice.

Domestication, an essential pillar of civilization, is clearly at odds with Stirner’s philosophical approach to living. Domestication unmistakably requires displacement from yourself, and that which naturally supports you. Stirner’s approach is that of finding yourself, and consciously putting yourself in alignment with that which effectively supports you. How can you tacitly accept programming and training from outside of yourself, when your whole chosen basis for living is to clearly find and carry out your *own* standards, assumptions, and actions to best support *yourself*?

Living with others who also choose to live their lives in this way, and respecting and supporting each other in this, then, establishes a social norm which is inherently antithetical to the driving force of agriculture and industrial society: ergo, civilization itself. This social norm could spread as a generalized mode of interaction among people, or it could serve as a foundation from which to attack civilization or defend against its encroachments. Either way, this mode of relating socially and living your life is inherently fulfilling, and supportive of **yourself**, therefore it is of value. Stirner’s philosophy then becomes antagonistic to civilization.

Living an uncivilized and undomesticated life, consciously-chosen and meaningful *for* myself, within a small group of known and trusted people engaged in mutually-supportive and respectful relationships towards this end – this is Stirnerite green anarchy. The thought of this as an applied practice in my life sends chills up my spine. The thought of this generalized to the rest of humanity – no civilization at all – is simply exhilarating. That crazy dead German loner didn’t know what he was getting into.

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