

Max Stirner, Individualist Anarchy, and A Critical Look at Egoist Communism

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“Every time we take a step we’re surrounded by the ideological birds of prey who feed on our possibilities, fill themselves with concepts of our desires and re-enslave us with beautiful combinations of words which seem to depict the world we failed to realize.” – Fredy Perlman

The contradictions of Egoist Communism

“Communism even if it is not authoritarian and Marxist, but libertarian and Kropotkinist, would be a society in which the legislative and executive power would be exercised either by acephalous mass assemblies (Populism) or by delegates elected by the masses (democracy). Both would mean that the individual would always be governed by the many. And this would be a government worse than any other, whether by one or a few, because the mass is stupid, ferocious, tyrannical, and worse than the lowest individual.” – Enzo Martucci

The texts and quotes that I selected to use for this critique share similarities that run through various other egoist communist texts. For me these themes are egoist communism’s main shortcomings. I agree with egoist communists on various points, but overall I find the critiques, which I outline in the following piece, outweigh the more agreeable aspects of their ideas, which ultimately is an attempt by red prophets to re-brand and turn Stirner into a system similar to Marx.

For me, egoist communism is a contradiction. By implying “egoist-communism” is implying a system, a spook, something sacred to chase after.

Egoism is a philosophy for individuation. A weapon for self-liberation. Communism, on the other hand, is a herd philosophy which consumes the individual as an autonomous being, domesticating her for the role of worker, producer, and consumer not that different from capitalism. Although communism may offer some better privileges for her subordination to the system, ultimately the individual will still be a captive prisoner to the collective system

D. Z. Rowan, in their writing “A Brief Description of Egoist Communism”, explains:

“Even the idea of a set system itself is opposed by egoism, because a set system requires a set identity for those enacting the system, the individuals, only through conforming to the constructs of the system can they still call it that system.”

The author recognises and describes egoism as being anti-systematic. They then go on to contradict themselves in the same paragraph:

“We practice egoist communism not out of the idea that it is the right system, it is not even that, it is the system that benefits us, the system that we want to practice in order to improve our lives and destroy that which attempts to oppress us.”

And there it is, the egoist communist system. Rowan continues on:

“Egoist communism is not some sort of ideal for society to achieve, it is a practice” and doesn’t “seek to draw out the blueprint for an ideal society”.

Egoism is not and cannot be a system or a society. Rowan recognises this themselves in their writing but continues contradicting themselves advocating and explaining how this “egoist communist” system will work. Rowan explains:

“... abolish private property in favour of common ownership, only through common ownership can I have power and autonomy in every product I want or need. If everything is owned by everyone, and I am a part of that everyone, I own and have access to everything held in that common.”

“... the main distinguishment from other forms of communism is that though all resources are owned by everyone, they are not distributed by everyone. To avoid an authority alien to the individual; goods are not distributed by a single organization, goods are distributed by voluntary groups on the basis of use and labour. Imagine an economy of gangs, all who join a gang join it out of self-interest; though they may agree to work to get and maintain the good or service, they nevertheless join because they know they will get something out of it.”

“... This does not rule out the existence of a central distributor, but that distributor must be voluntary; nothing should force you to rely on and work for that distributor or any.”

Rowan explains that on a micro-level in the egoist communist society, production and distribution will be done completely voluntarily using the form of union of egoists as the organizational method to achieve this. For such an impressive project and array of production and distribution to exist on a macro-level, would require a centralized system.

Rowan unwittingly advocates for just that, but the name is changed to communes or “communes of egoists”.

For when a union of egoists is not adequate to cover the masses needs and wants “... a commune deals with a wider range of demands.”

These communes would be the managers of the egoist-communist “collectively owned economy”.

A commune in this sense would have to be a formal and permanent organisation which would need specialist roles and positions. It could not be otherwise. It would be a state in all sense of the word. The individual becomes the property of the commune (i. e. the majority). An individual would be at the mercy of the majority and would have to go along with whatever the majority agreed even if the individual did not agree. If the individual struck up too much of a fuss they could be scorned and ostracized from the commune and likewise from the “egoist (or anarcho) communist” society. This is the essence of the contradiction of egoist communism.

If this system is not ruled by the tyranny of the majority it will be ruled by the tyranny of specialists, the managers, the experts, the politicians, the most knowledgeable, the bureaucrats, the best workers who contribute and put in the most work. These will form a new ruling class of the egoist communist system.

The egoist communists want to destroy all of capitalism’s institutions and replace them with communist ones. It will be these communes where the big decisions of society will be made, whether you agree with them or not. This is where the tyranny of the majority or the specialists will come into effect. This is where you will be alienated by the spook of your own creation. These communes will be the making of a new state apparatus. These will be the instruments used to decide what’s what, what’s good for me, what’s good for my interests.

But the egoist communists shriek that their society will be completely “voluntary”. But it will be of voluntary obedience. Obedience to the commune, obedience to the majority, to the specialists and managers. If there is no obedience there could always be a purge. I’m sure there would be an egoist communist police force to deal with the threat of non-obedient counter revolutionaries.

A communist society (even one as egoist or anarchist at the start) would be no better than any of the other attempts at creating such in history, a totalitarian nightmare. Think about leftist spaces, the call-outs, the group-think, the witch hunts, show trials, the purges, and hierarchies. The future egoist communist society, if such a thing was ever to happen, would resemble one because they (the leftists) would be the managers of this society.

No societies are voluntary. All have always been based on the domestication and enslavement of the individual. And for that I am at war with society (whether capitalist or communist) because all its institutions and systems of domination and domestication are at war with me as a unique individual, wanting to control and force me into socially constructed roles, such as wage slavery and to be a good and obedient citizen.

Communism and Its Religious Principle:

“Today it seems to do everyone good when they hear that society is on the way to adapting the individual to general requirements, and that the happiness and at the same time the sacrifice of the individual lies in feeling himself to be a useful member and instrument of the whole: except that one is at present very uncertain as to where this whole is to be sought, whether in an existing state or one still to be created, or in the nation, or in a brotherhood of peoples, or in new little economic communalities.” — Friedrich Nietzsche

In the text “The Relevance of Max Stirner to Anarcho-Communists” by Matty Thomas, the author states:

“Anarchists who wish to demolish the authority of the state and of capital but want to leave the authority of fixed ideas like morality, humanity, rights, or altruism intact only go halfway. For the egoist, these spooks can be even more vicious than the more visible forms of authority. Altruism, living to serve others, is one of the most pernicious superstitions extant in our civilization today. Workers engage in a terrible altruistic action every day when they labor to enrich the capitalist, who receives much simply by virtue of the fact that he has so much already. Women are victims of altruism when they waste away ‘living to serve’ a man who is nothing but a tiny tyrant over the home. The other crimes that come from altruism are endless, and it’s clear to conscious egoists that altruistic socialism is a farce, capable only of transforming authority but not abolishing it. Egoism encourages individuals to no longer give presents to those who give nothing in return, and from this idea flows the egoist communist desire for insurrection and expropriation.”

I totally agree with this quote. The author of this piece doesn’t say if they identify as an egoist but the title suggests the author is an anarcho-communist. Within the context of the overall piece the quote is a contradiction because the author is advocating for an anarcho-communist society.

Communism is a fixed idea the same as rights, humanity, and altruism described and mentioned in the above quote. Communism and leftism are the supreme altruistic philosophies, which turns self-sacrifice into a morality to be emulated and carried out for “humanity”, “the people”, “the community”, or for “the greater good”, which in turn builds levels of hierarchy and authority in the process.

“Real revolutionaries serve the people” is one well known communist slogan. Its meaning is for the individual to totally self-sacrifice for the spook of “the people”, which is really in the hope of winning followers and building their collectivist vision by winning over “the people” to their ideas.

Self-sacrifice is a virtue in leftist spaces. Individuals can be judged on their merits on how much self-sacrifice (activism) they put themselves through. The hierarchy is of who has self-sacrifice and “served the people” the most. There is a type of celebrity like culture built around it. The winners win the admiration and respect of the rest of the circles and cliques.

In this sense the communist isn’t all that different from the Catholic true believer in that they believe in an altruistic self-sacrificing morality which they hope will eventually bring them to salvation.

Of course there is nothing wrong with an individual being altruistic for a loved one or even for a random stranger she has just met if she wants to and feels she gets something from it. But for me it’s a different matter when it turns into a never ending merry go round of self-sacrifice for a system that will never happen, unless brought in by the barrel of the gun (to paraphrase the red prophet Mao), along with the continued subjugation of the individual.

For me, the relevance of Max Stirner to anarcho-communism was to drop the communism part.

My Own Egoism

“I understand that since Individualism is neither a school nor a party, it cannot be ‘unique’, but it is truer still that Unique ones are individualists. And I leap as a unique one onto the battlefield, draw my sword and defend my personal ideas as an extreme individualist, as an indisputable Unique one, since we can be as skeptical and indifferent, ironic and sardonic as we desire and are able to be. But when we are condemned to hear socialists more or less theorizing in order to impudently and ignorantly attempting to make a titanic poet of heroic strength, a dominator of human, moral and divine phantoms, who quivers and throbs, rejoices and expands himself beyond the good and evil of Church and State, Peoples and Humanity, in the strange flickering of a new blaze of unacknowledged love, like Zarathustra’s lyrical creator, pass as a poor and vulgar prophet of socialism, when we hear someone try to make an invincible and unsurpassable iconoclast like Max Stirner out to be some tool for the use of frantic proponents of communism, then we may certainly have an ironic smirk on our lips. But then it is necessary to resolutely rise up to defend ourselves and to attack, since anyone who feels that he is truly individualist in principle, means and ends cannot tolerate being at all confused with the unconscious mobs of a morbid, bleating flock.” — Renzo Novatore

To name 3 elements of my own egoism:

Anarchic - because I want unbridled freedom for a self-creating life against all constraints and idols.

Insurrectionary - permanent active revolt against society and its institution of domination and domestication and all the restraints forced on my individual freedom.

Nihilistic - to be lived immediately with no hope and no waiting for a future utopian revolution.

I see these as being inherent and inseparable from individualist anarchy and what Stirner refers to as “conscious egoism”; consciously living the life one wants to live and smashing any imposed spooks and idols that infringe on my individual autonomy.

I have no need for the herd philosophy of the self-deceiving and self-sacrificing fantasy of communization and its inner leftism. I am opposed to its collectivist conformist cult of the worker, which dissolves the individual into the permanent roles of producer and consumer. When I work, I do so because I am forced and blackmailed to. So I refuse the slave role of “worker”. I want to see work abolished as a concept. I want to see the means of production and distribution reduced to ashes, blown up, turned down, destroyed and replaced with vast food forests and lush colorful gardens grown on top of the rubble.

The Creative Nothing

“Individualism, as I feel, understand and mean it, has neither socialism, nor communism, nor humanity for an end. Individualism is its own end.” -Renzo Novatore

“If God, if humanity, as you affirm, have enough content in themselves to be all in all to themselves, then I feel that I would lack it even less, and that I would have no complaint to make about my ‘emptiness.’ I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself create everything as creator.”

“I am owner of my power, and I am so when I know myself as Unique. In the Unique the owner himself returns into his creative nothing, from which he is born. Every higher essence over me, be it God, be it the human being, weakens the feeling of my uniqueness, and only pales before the sun of this awareness. If I base my affair on myself, the Unique, then it stands on the transient, the mortal creator, who consumes himself, and I may say: I have based my affair on nothing.” — Max Stirner

Stirner’s nihilistic “creative nothing” is a pipe bomb for the existentialist used to blow apart all idols and spooks, to open space for the conscious self-owning and self-creating individual to live how she wants, free from any social constructs, conformity, political dogmas, or religious moralities.

It is not holding on to hope of a sacred promised land or heaven. It is not a religious or political belief. It is a praxis to be lived immediately. The possibilities are endless.

I find the idea of “creative nothing” far more liberating than any limited communist dogma.

The communist myth of the proletarian revolution is likely never to happen. The working class holds seeds of authoritarianism as much as any other class. The workers like their prisons and if they were ever to take them over they’d likely keep them intact swapping new managers for the old ones. It’s time to pull off the veil and drop the last remnants of leftism. But this doesn’t mean

just to give up. We may be in a minority but the authoritarian institutions, culture, and social norms of society are still here and affect us. Just because the majority are happy with conforming to society doesn't mean we have to be. There are still plenty of opportunities to create projects of self-enjoyment and revolt. Onward to an unmitigated, chaotic, individual insurrection against the captivity of civilization.

“We reject all the idealized principles that revolutionary theories talking about the future liberation and social harmony promise. Life offers no guarantees. The time is now and the place is here.

“Let's be honest; we don't know how a liberated tomorrow will be 'functional'. That's exactly why it's liberated. Because it'll be full of possibilities, questions and doubts.

Whoever seeks for certain answers and Marxist certainties will soon seek the guarantee of authority and priesthoods of red power.” — Conspiracy of Cells of Fire

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