

Comment to Ken Knudson

Sidney E. Parker

1993

K.K. prefers a “consumer’s dictatorship” to a “producers’ dictatorship” on the grounds that “consumers are finicky people — they want the best possible product at the lowest price. To achieve this end they will use ruthless means.”

I do not know what consumers he is writing about, but they are certainly not the ones I know. A few, certainly, will use “ruthless means” to obtain the cheapest and best product. The majority, however, seem to be quite content not only to buy expensive trash, but even unwilling to look for shops where they can get identical products at cheaper prices. For example, we have two supermarkets where I live. One, on average, charges higher prices than the other. They are about three minutes walking time apart. Yet the higher priced one continues to prosper because most of its customers are not prepared to go round the corner to what the cheaper priced one is like. Not only this, but a smaller shop in the neighbourhood, run by a company that are rip-off merchants of the first order, not only flourishes, but has extended opening times! So much for the “ruthless customer”!

It is clear to me that K.K. has merely exchanged the idealized “producer” for the idealized “customer”, he has replaced the myth of the socialist with the myth of the “free marketeer” — and is therefore just as utopian as the anarcho-communist he criticizes so well.

“The only way to realize anarchy is for a sufficient number of people to be convinced that their own interests demand it.”

This statement does not show *why* people will find anarchy in their interests, it only shows that Ken Knudson *thinks* they should find it in their interests. (I am reminded of an observation about Ayn Rand made by an American conservative to the effect that “Miss Rand believes in people acting according to their self-interest so long as she can define what that interest is.”)

KK claims that people are pragmatists and that until they can be made to realize that “anarchy actually works for their benefit, it will remain ... an idle pipe-dream.” As I understand it, pragmatism is concerned with what *works*. If anarchy is still a “pipe-dream” it is plainly *not* working. So how does one show that it will work? By convincing people that it will! But, if people are pragmatists, and will only be convinced by something that “works”, then one is in the invidious position of trying to convince them that what is not working now will work at some indefinite time in the future if only they will be convinced that it will, despite the fact that, as pragmatists, they are only to be convinced by seeing something that actually works!

Methinks that here he has fallen right into the trap that Stirner pointed out; the belief that because something is conceivable it is therefore possible.

KK looks to the founding of the mutual banks as a way to achieve his ideal society, but how many of these have been established and worked successfully since Proudhon advocated them over a hundred years ago? If they were in the interest of a “sufficient number of people” who have grasped their value as a means to realize anarchy why hasn’t that “sufficient number” been forthcoming? Could it be that most of those who have had them explained to them did *not* find them in their interests? What basis does he have for assuming that even if a large number of people became consciously self-interested they will find their interests coincide with those of anarchism? His faith I do not doubt, but where is the evidence?

The power of the tyrant, KK writes, “comes from the abdicated power of his subjects”. The supposition that at some time or another these subjects decided to “abdicate” their power to a tyrant smacks suspiciously of the myth of the “social contract”. In any case, he is assuming that if these subjects had the power to grant to a tyrant and that they were to repossess it they would then be as powerful as those whom they granted it. Again, an act of faith. It is plain to me that since individuals are genetically unequal, so their power – their competence as Stirner called it – is also unequal. Even were they tyrant – or democratic governments – thus rendered “powerless” this inequality of power would soon be expressed in a new hierarchy – of *function* if not *formal status* – and the division between ruler and ruled re-established. The “dominant five-percent”, like the poor, we always have with us.

What Stirner wrote about idols is true. I know that, Ken Knudson knows that, and so do a few others, but why does he believe that everyone will come to know that? This is the sort of belief called the “Everest fallacy” – i.e. because *some* people have climbed Everest, *all* people can climb it.

“We egoists raise the banner of free competition.” “We” egoists do nothing of the kind. If I benefit from “unfree” competition why should I renounce my egoistic satisfaction in that fact in favour of a system from which I benefit less? Implicit in this kind of assertion is the assumption that everyone’s interest can be served by one way of going on. If one accepts the Stirnerian concept of “the unique one” this is manifest nonsense.

KK rejects “frontiers” as absurd. No doubt from a global *anarchist* perspective they are. But why suppose that an *egoist* will reject frontiers out of hand? Making one’s “fatherland”, “motherland” or “homeland” *holy* is, of course, so much spookery. Nonetheless, an egoist might find the existence of frontiers something of use to him. I, for example, live on an overcrowded island called Britain. Do I want this country swamped by hordes of immigrants as the result of doing away with frontiers? I do not. And if my support, pragmatic support, of a barrier against such a horde steps on the intellectual/moral toes of some liberal, libertarian or anarchist dreamers, that is their lookout. It is *my* egoism that concerns *me*, not some abstract “egoism” pressed in the service of some universalistic fantasy. There are more ways of viewing one’s egoistic interests than are dreamed of by anarchists...

There is more I could write on these topics, but I think I have put the cat among enough pigeons for the moment.

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