

CONTROVERSY: More On Archists, Anarchists And Egoists

Sidney E. Parker

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Comments From An Anarchist (Fritz R. Ward)

I was not overly impressed with your article “Archists, Anarchists and Egoists” in the last issue of *The Egoist*. In using Clark’s definition of anarchism, which I think applies only to those communists who also profess to be anarchists, I believe you have confused the issue. Anarchists do not assert (the somewhat confused quote by Mackay aside) that one must renounce domination and serve the god of non-invasion without question. They do, however, assert that in a social environment where liberty prevails, aggression will rarely be of any benefit. They also prefer anarchy because, to quote Tucker, “as a choice of blessings, liberty is the greater; as a choice of evils, liberty is the smaller.” (*Individual Liberty*, p85. His essay *Why I Am An Anarchist* expresses a similar egoistical basis for anarchism).

In short, the opposition of individualist anarchism to “domination” is definitional, not religious (1). For example, Tucker believed that interest existed because of invasive laws which prohibited free contract. But, in an anarchist society (2) he wouldn’t forbid anyone from taking interest above and beyond cost if he could get it. Tucker just didn’t think the person would be able to get such returns if conditions of liberty prevailed. Also, consider along these lines, the more recent comments by anarcho-capitalist David Friedman. Friedman believes laws will be, with few possible exceptions, libertarian in an anarcho-capitalist society because the costs of aggression would outweigh the benefits. In blunt terms, your criteria for egoistical “domination”, i.e., when one could “*gain greater satisfaction from dominating than from not dominating*” would simply not arise often enough to be statistically significant.

Although Tucker and others postulated such a society for the future, they certainly didn’t feel that they should refrain from taking what few advantages the state offered. You already cited Robinson in this regard and you could have added that Tucker, for all his supposed “clerico-libertarianism”, had no “moral” problem investing the money left to him by his mother in interest-bearing annuity shares. The same was true of Mackay. Obviously, none of the above anarchists considered such an “archistic” act “forbidden”. Nor did such benefits which they attributed to archism prevent them from advocating anarchism (while remaining consistent egoists) since they believed that it would give greater benefits than they enjoyed under the State.

In the final analysis, anarchism as advocated by the individualists *is not incompatible with egoism*. While it might be possible to construct some sort of non-anarchistic framework for a social organization which may be compatible with egoism under some limited circumstances, I don’t believe your essay does this (3). Instead you place undue emphasis on certain phrases and neglect the fundamental ideas of individualist anarchism. Until you can suggest a *realistic* alternative to anarchism in which liberty is not the greater of benefits or the lesser of evils, I will remain an anarchist.

Along these lines, I think Marsden’s comments that the anarchist acts like an archist in defending his freedom, avoids coming to grips with the definition of the State as institutionalized aggression. The defensive and aggressive use of force are not the

same thing. And, again, this is a question of definition, not morality. To accuse the post revolution(?) anarchist of acting like an archist is a misleading use of terms....

(1) I am excepting, of course, such natural rights anarchists as Spooner and Rothbard.

(2) When I use the term “society” here I am not speaking of some entity above the individual. I merely use it as a convenient term meant to imply all the individuals living in a given region.

(3) I suspect that de Sade, in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, tried to do so but the result was an inadequate egoism as well as a non-anarchist, if somewhat libertine, form of social organization.

In Reply To Ward (S.E. Parker)

Mr Ward claims that Clark’s definition of anarchism as “non-domination” is only applicable to “those communists who also profess to be anarchists”. This is not the case. KHZ Solneman, a disciple of John Henry Mackay and hence well within the Tuckerian tradition, writes in his book *The Manifesto of Peace and Freedom* (Mackay-Gesellschaft 1933) that “the standard of whether someone is really an anarchist or not lies in whether he *renounces domination* over others or not” (p180) and defines anarchy as “a state of non-domination” (p ix). I have not, therefore, confused the issue. Indeed, since Mr Ward himself goes on to argue that the opposition of “individualist anarchism” to domination is “definitional”, this can only mean that any attempt to dominate others is, by definition, an anti-anarchist act. When Tucker and Mackay invested their money in interest-bearing annuities they certainly showed good sense – but at the expense of their anarchist consistency since they were looking to the domination of the State to maintain the system which provided them with their incomes. Such behaviour is quite in accord with pursuing one’s own interests, but it is hardly something that will help to “starve” the State out of existence in order to make way for the anarchist society.

Mr Ward believes that when the Tuckerian version of anarchy is established acts of “egoistical” domination “would simply not arise often enough to be statistically significant.” How does he know they would not? Since no has ever seen such a system in operation what he affirms about is merely a *statement of faith*. The theories of Tucker regarding what anarchism would be like in practice, like those of the anarchist communists, are not based on any empirical evidence. This is shown in Tucker’s essay *Why I Am An Anarchist* to which Mr Ward refers. Here the reader is regaled with such claims as “no prospect can be positively alluring that does not promise both requisites of happiness – liberty and wealth. Now, Anarchism does promise both. In fact, it promises the second as the result of the first, and happiness as the result of both... Abolish the tarriffs, issue no patents, take down the bars from unoccupied land, and labour will straightway rush in and take possession of its own. Then mankind will live in freedom and in comfort.” Have made these rosy promises, however, Tucker has to admit that he cannot prove his case, yet he seeks to wriggle out of the problems this poses by claiming that it “cannot be dismissed by plain denial” in plain disregard of the fact that it is up to him to prove his affirmations not for the denier to “disprove” them.

At the bottom of Tucker’s doctrine lies the democratic delusion that each and every individual (the insane excepted) can and should take an equal part in determining human affairs. He

believed that everyone was potentially capable of exercising “the sovereignty of the individual” and that, furthermore, their self-interest would lead them to accept his particular brand of social salvation. Despite his admiration for Max Stirner he was a possessed man – possessed by the fixed idea that he had the answer to the “social question”.¹ His egoism was pressed into the service of an ideal which neutered it.

Mr Ward’s distinction, derived from Tucker, between the “aggressive and defensive use of force”, does not impress me. What is defensive and what is aggressive is more a matter of position than anything else. If I judge that I can benefit myself by “invading” the “equal liberty” of another then it does not matter how many copies of *Instead Of A Book* are held up before my sacreligious eyes. If I am competent enough to “invade” I do so – and enjoy the prize! Tucker’s ideological blinkers prevented him from seeing that the logic of conscious ego(ism) bursts the strait jacket of anarchism.

As for Ward’s challenge to me to “construct” a non-anarchist “social framework” based on egoism, I long ago gave up indulging in hypothetical social engineering. I am not about to begin again.

¹ It is interesting to note, however, that, according to his daughter Oriole, at the end of his life Tucker no longer believed that anarchism would work. (See *Benjamin R. Tucker And The Champions Of Liberty*. 1986. Page 26)

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