Individualist-Anarchism

An Outline

Sidney E. Parker

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Pseudo-individualism

"Individualism" is one of those words like "anarchism" and egoism" that have been abused out of both ignorance and intent. For many radicals it is a synonym for the "free-for-all" of the "capitalist" jungle, and some defenders of capitalism have tried to use it to justify economic exploitation and monopoly. A little intelligent thinking about the nature of capitalist society, however, with its ever-present boss-men and mass-men, is enough to upset this idea. What is individual about the armies of city gentlemen marching into and out of their offices at the same time five days a week and vegetating in the cage of their suburban conventions in between? And how individual are the herds of industrial workers standing before the machine god and repeating the same servile rituals throughout their lives? To as these questions is to answer them.

Individualism

Individualism is something quite different to the caricatures common to both "Left" and "Right". In the words of John Beverly Robinson:

> "It is the recognition by the individual that he is above all institutions and formulas; that these exist only so far as he choose to make his own by accepting them." ("Egoism").

Because he regards no institution or formula as having authority over him the individualist is logically an anarchist. And because he denies the validity of any authority outside of the individual the anarchist is logically an individualist. From this awareness is born an anarchism freed from the last vestiges of that altruistic idealism which cast out service to God and the State only to replace it with service to the Cause and Humanity. Individualist anarchism drives authority out of its last hiding place in "moral obligations" or "duty". Individualist anarchists are philosophically egoists.

Government

But if the individualist lives for himself then what is to stop him from trying to rule over others?

Two things, at least.

Firstly, if these others are as "self-willed" as he is, then they will oppose their wills to his and so frustrate his efforts. Secondly, and most importantly, individualists know that authority is a relationship between ruler and ruled that binds both and destroys the independence of each. As Max Stirner well put it:

> "He who, to hold his own, must count on the absence of will in others, is a thing made by these others, as the master is a thing made by the servant. If submissiveness ceased it would be all over with lordship."

If you do not want others to have power over you, do not try to get power over them. Agree to keep off each other's toes.

Individualist anarchists do not regard government as simply the product of a conspiracy on the part of a wicked few to oppress the innocent many. The many would not be governed if they did not want to be governed, if they were capable of self-government. Rulers and ruled are two sides of the same coin of a currency which individualists rejects. There way lies outside of both.

Co-operation

Does the individualist reject all co-operation between man and man?

The individualist agrees with Ibsen that "he is strongest who stands most alone", but he sees the value of co-operation to satisfy some of he needs. There is nothing contradictory in this, for only he who is strong enough to stand alone is capable of forming a genuinely free association with others. But such an association is not an end in itself it last only as long as those who form it find it useful to them. It is not a sacred thing towards which its members have duties. It is their creation and their servant, nothing more.

Economics

In economics the individualist does not believe in collectivism, whether socialist, syndicalist or communist. For him, individual ownership of the means of production is the way to guarantee the product, or its equivalent, are first of all pluralists and regard any system, no matter what its name, that would bind them to any one economic relationship and deny them a choice of alternatives, as authoritarian. The difference between the individualist and the collectivist approach to economics lies in the fact that the first would leave each individual free to provide for himself what he needs, whereas the second wants to make society the manager and provider of the means of life. Any system which makes the individual dependent upon the good or bad will of others is repugnant to individualists. It matters little to them whether the means of production are under the control of a handful of private monopolists, the State, a federation of syndicates or a Commune, if they have no independence or freedom of choice.

Revolution

But speculations about a future economy have only an academic interest. Individualist anarchists do not want to wait until the "morrow of the revolution" before they get any benefit from their ideas. It is today that concerns them, not a hypothetical future. Since the individualist starts from himself, he does not need others before, he begins his "revolution". He welcomes anyone travelling a similar road to his own„ but he does not need them in order to start his journey. The christian looks to the will of his god, the democrat looks to the will of the people, the marxist and the syndicalist look to the will of the revolutionary proletariat, but the individualist looks to his own will and relies on nothing outside of himself. Consequently he does not believe in a "dialectic of history", "the inevitable outcome of the class struggle", "the due process of law", or any other collective, group or supernatural force as the means of his liberation. Self-liberation is the only form of liberation that has any meaning for him. He has no time for millenial narcotics as a sop for present miseries and oppressions.

Violence

The question of the use of violence or no-violence in self-defence is one of expediency. Individualists will use one or the other according to the situation they are in. Any approach which tries to confine the individualist struggle to either violence or non-violence denies the diversity of individual temperaments and capacities and constitutes a moral strait-jacket. However, face with the overwhelming means of violence possessed by the modern State, most individualists would favour passive resistance as the most expedient method of struggle.

End

Individualist anarchists do not want to be plus ones in the "statistical millions" of obedient citizens. They have counted themselves out from the herd and their anarchy exists in their strength to affirm themselves. They have severed their anarchism from all democratic and socialist myths. To hell with the "people want this", the "workers want that"! Let us live our own lives, follow our own interests, and be ourselves. The individualist will go his own way, even if he must go alone. He would not be much of an individual if he did not.

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